

Comments on "The Catholic University as an Instrument of Cultural Pluralism"

DOCUMENT NO. 1

The document might as well be renamed "The Catholic University as an Instrument of Cultural Exchange or Cultural Encounter or Cultural Dialogue". Firstly, because cultural pluralism may exist in a Catholic university in which the Catholic university is no instrument at all; secondly, because even after a cultural dialogue of which the Catholic university might be an instrument, the dialogue might end up in a rejection of a specific culture, rather than in an acceptance through cultural pluralism; further, the dialogue might come up to a cultural integration instead of a cultural pluralism.

1. *The Present Day Idea of Culture*

To speak of the "present day culture" would be more fitting than to conceive of "the idea of culture," since the text devolves consequently about different cultures in which the university as instrumentality should serve in the cultural exchange, cultural encounter or cultural dialogue.

Though there are many cultural elements, the paper seems to consider only among cultural elements those values that "enable society to be responsible for and to promote the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race." The author should have

better specified from the start what values fall within the sphere of his terminology.

The demand for cultural dialogue should clearly point out from what perspective it is to be taken — between social classes, urban-rural population, ethnic groups, among religious or among ideological groups?

The document also states about the effect of technological and scientific developments on the culture of society. While this is true, it is not accurate since the process is not a one-way traffic. Culture and technology interact and affect each other. Further, we disagree with the statement that "culture which was formerly speculative and contemplative has become operative," for it seems to imply the negation of material culture. *Gaudium et Spes* implies the existence of material culture in the same way that it recognizes cultural pluralism to be arising from historical, sociological and technological diversities. In this sense, it is not correct to say that culture was "formerly speculative and contemplative".

The enormous growth of natural, human and social sciences brings about technological progress and advances in developing and organizing means with which men can communicate with one another. At the same time, this enhanced cultural pluralism is causing at times the breakdown of monolithic traditions, bringing about problems at the personal and social levels and the rise of cultural conflicts. This condition makes for some difficulties in the position of the non-Western countries in the post-colonial era.

More important to point out here is that in both Western and non-Western countries, the earthly good brought about by scientific and technological advances has produced a new type of humanism. In the non-Western world, this humanism may consequently lead to a rejection of historied traditions as it has led in the West to a changed attitude toward religion in general.

Finally on this aspect, we agree that culture is relative. While, economically, countries in the West are better developed, those in the East bear more developed qualities of hospitality, grace, patience, tolerance, etc.

2. *The Catholic Universities Faced With Cultural Pluralism*

The author explains that practical culture due to technology tends to deviate culture from the university sphere and from the speculative characteristic of a university. This observation, however, calls for a distinction between universities in the West and the East.

In the West, universities have begun as centers of speculative thinking and, thus, have experienced the gap between themselves, on the hand, and the rapid changes in the wider society, on the other.

In underdeveloped countries, however, universities have been the centers of change: from them flowed the scientific knowledge, often carried over from the West, which in turn, brought about changes in the culture of the people.

In a university world where inter-disciplinary approach is stressed, a strict dichotomy between speculative thinking and the practical professions could hardly be advocated. It must be clearly seen that Catholic universities must not only serve as cultural centers ("foyer cultural") involved in speculative thinking, but also, as one of the forceful organs of the society in promoting material development. As an educational institution the Catholic university has to be involved in the earthly preoccupation of man, infusing in them the basic tenets of Christianity — i.e., technology and the sciences must be treated with an ethical dimension.

As far as Catholic universities in underdeveloped countries are concerned, the following considerations are important:

a. that they become potent forces, first, in the spread of materially beneficent advances in scientific knowledge, and secondly, in the education of the people on their appropriate use;

b. that they seek to form within their fold, persons who would, at once, be active leaders and contributors toward the material growth of their nation, as well as, true Christians who are able to show the importance of the Christian orientation in development; and,

c. that they undertake institutional moves, in terms of dialogue, research, publication, and exchange, to meet with the

indigenous cultures in these countries, in an effort to arrive at basic communalities and basic areas of contradiction.

In citing a second reason which renders culture quite often foreign to the university — i.e., cultural confrontation being often influenced by ideology and politics, — the author alludes to proletarian and anti-capitalist ideologies. Seen in the context of Southeast Asia, however, marxist tendencies in most of the nations are only the symptoms of a deeper cause — poverty. Thus, it would be more congruent to have the culture of the poor and the down-trodden diagnosed and remedied rather than to study marxist culture in terms of its ideology. The culture of the poor should be diagnosed as it is not so much through speculative arguments by which communism is scientifically refuted as it is through actual application of practical learning towards the alleviation of the misery of the many.

In the Philippines, we do not lack such efforts at determining the Christian values of Filipino cultural elements. Some points may be brought out: one, that Christianity has to meet with the indigenously animistic religions of certain subcultures in the country; two, that the historical introduction of Christianity in the country has produced folk catholicism and syncretism, which call for Catholic educational institutions to evaluate Filipino value orientations, for possible Christian renewal; and, third, that while among the urban Catholic, young and educated population, a greater internal appreciation of true Christianity is present, they are exposed however to an intense materialistic value orientation. For Catholic educational institutions in the urban areas, the task is to emphasize the Christian message as being congruent to developmental efforts. These remarks and many other insights have selves, in their attempt to research, reflect, and continually relate to the society in general. And they themselves are carrying out follow-up projects, such as the training of catechists and religious educators.

A true university should be aware of the changes in the environment it is situated in. It should continually evaluate its position vis-a-vis the conditions surrounding its existence, and in the process, separate the relevant from the irrelevant. The cultural universe may be diverse but it does not mean that it is

beyond the perspective of university education. If the perspective is properly defined, there is no reason why the university cannot be successfully selective in viewing the rapid changes occurring outside its halls.

Certainly there should be a call for awareness on the part of Catholic universities in the face of rapidly changing conditions. However, awareness could only be relative, depending on the socio-cultural and political constraints that confront each university in its own milieu.

3. The Catholic University, A Focal Point for Cultural Encounter and Dialogue

The author mentions, with reference to collective psychology, that in a dialogue, it is essential to overcome the two-fold complex of: (a) a depressive inferiority complex; and (b) a stubborn sufficiency complex. They could best be described as the fear of losing one's identity and the feeling of superiority which are main obstacles to an authentic dialogue. Fear and distrust easily ruin the conditions of a true dialogue.

In the cultural encounter of which the Catholic university is the instrument, not everything seems to be unknown. The document considers only, among cultural elements, those values that "enable society to be responsible for and to promote the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race." Hence, other cultural elements which do not promote the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race are disregarded. It appears therefore that there is a need, for purposes of clarity and completeness, to specify which elements of culture bear a relation to the promotion of spiritual and moral values.

Lastly, the author mentions the modalities of the dialogue. But modalities after the dialogue, especially if there is rejection of cultural elements incompatible with the promotion of spiritual and moral maturity of the human race, should be amplified in the document.

DOCUMENT NO. 2

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE UNIVERSITY

1. *The Framework of the Position Paper*

The model "Local Church" is a very valuable tool in bringing new life into the "church" institution. However, it is quite difficult to get a clear grasp of what we are dealing with. As the author suggests, the subject did not receive a full treatise at the Second Vatican Council. In addition, the concept "Local Church" has many connotations.

The author does not explicitly give us his idea of "university". We can only guess from his deliberations on the contributions of the University to the local church that the type of university he has in mind is American which certainly differs in many aspects from a similar institution in a developing country.

The conceptual framework of the paper does not offer us much of a new theology of the local Church, nor a clear understanding of the role of the University. This has to caution us into fully accepting the suggestions of the author. The fact that the local church has certain needs does not necessarily mean that these needs are the task of the university.

On the other hand, the strong emphasis on orientations towards the community in the latest developments in the country and the region certainly support many of the author's suggestions.

2. *Our Response*

2.1. *Local Church.* The basic attitude of the church is to identify herself with problems of her concrete community. The problems of society are the problems of the Church, be they population explosion, social justice, national identity or regional poverty.

The Asian Bishops' Conference emphasized the same points at their meeting in 1970. The research of the Catholic Universities should concentrate on the main problems of the region on the economic, social and cultural levels. The bishops of the Philippines developed the same ideas in their Pastoral letter of January 25, 1973. The Bishops' Conference of 1974 presents more concrete demands:

- a. Catholic schools have to be more oriented towards the community and the Christian social life.
- b. There should be more contact between school and parish priest in the parish.
- c. Catholic Colleges and Universities and their administrative personnel should participate in the pastoral planning of the diocese and should be members of the diocesan Board of Education.

In the Philippines, a Catholic University would have to face up to its locality. One situated in the Central Visayas, for instance, would have to realize that that area itself is its "local Church."

The area has a basically and traditionally religious membership. The clergy is more or less indigenous and the hierarchy is Filipino. The Church is still in the Pre-Vatican II phase and there are only very few attempts by individual priests to break out from this framework. The shortage of priests is not so strongly felt and the lay people are hardly involved in the work of the Church. Pastoral planning is only in its initial stages, while the outlook of the pastoral work is basically sacramental-ritualistic. The question of social justice and personal rights is played cool. The financial situation is a great obstacle.

Since the structure of the Church is basically authoritarian, the University depends totally on the friendly relations with the hierarchy in its attempts to perform its function in the local Church. The "coordination between academic and the believing community" is essentially a friendly relationship between the administrators of the University and the hierarchy of the Diocese. All other specific problems will fall in line if this basic problem is settled.

2.2. *Concrete Steps.* Under the above-mentioned framework, the University can enter various avenues which might result in a fruitful cooperation.

2.2.1. *Pastoral Planning.* Planning is not only neglected in the field of education, but certainly also in the pastoral work. We feel that the University would be able to render substantial contri-

butions to the local church by providing the necessary expertise of the various departments — Sociology, Economics, Theology, Guidance and Anthropology.

2.2.2. *Education of Lay People for the Catholic Church.* The population explosion has worsened the already alarming priest-Catholic ratio (1:7500). According to the Catholic Directory, the number of priests involved in parish work has increased by 33%; the entire population, however, increased by 37.4%. The involvement of priests in other fields increased by 94%. As a consequence, the percentage of priests involved in parishes has decreased from 67% to 58%. (Caroll, p. 67.)

These numbers make it quite clear that the Philippine Church will have to rely on substantial contributions from educated and trained lay people. The education of leaders for the local Church will be a key task of the University. This includes:

- Training catechists, teachers for Religion, Religious Education and Theology
- Training leaders for the immediate pastoral work and community work.
- Training Catholic teachers and leaders in other fields.

2.2.3. *Theology of Liberation.* A Catholic University must clearly take a stand in the fight for social and individual justice. However, it must also be borne in mind that the institution itself is a victim of the oppressive structure of our system. The benevolence of the established people in the socio-economic and political life is a necessity for the further development of the University. The University as an institution cannot speak out on its own without endangering her future.

Through its individual members and the expertise it could contribute, the University could cooperate with the local Church in developing programs and projects in the cause of social and individual justice.

2.2.4. *The Critical Function of the University.* The critical function of the university means that it can constantly subject values, ideals and traditions to critical examination. In a prag-

matic way the Church has laid down what she understands man to be and can become in the light of man's ultimate destiny which is Christ.

Looking at the local scene, the University has to be part of the governmental projects in family planning in order to assure the sacredness of human life. The University has to be part of the planning of the economic development to make sure that we do not achieve progress at the cost of the human person and his dignity. The University's critical function is to become a prophetic voice in the region for the concern of man.

DOCUMENT NO. 3

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY AT THE SERVICE OF THE LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The paper rightly mentions that the Catholic university must 'keep up with the times.' True, it mentions that Catholic university must 'keep up with the advances of science' and to 'mediate the society in which it inserts itself.' Subsequently, the paper becomes sensitive to the problems of today in underdeveloped nations.

Our interest is centered on the role of Catholic universities in less developed countries. Here, the hierarchy of the different spheres of knowledge proposed by the paper is on shaky footing. The assertion that pure and applied sciences are of a lower order may contribute to a situation where Catholic universities in some less-developed countries have lagged behind public and non-sectarian schools in advances in those fields more directly affecting the material development of the people. This would contribute to the weakness of Catholic universities in the eyes of the people and to the seeming non-relevance of Catholic universities in the perception of the mass of the people. Every scientific advance must be accompanied by philosophical and theological reflection but is this not rather suggestive of the importance of the mutual interaction among the disciplines than of a hierarchy?

Situated in this framework, it is still correct to assert, as the paper does, that the Catholic university must act by virtue of its being a university and of its Catholicity.

In less-developed countries, there is the possibility that Catholic universities have failed to address the current problems of society because of the insistence on non-worldly preoccupations without any worldly reference. People outside of Catholic universities who are more worldly oriented may pose their question and solutions devoid of any consideration of Catholic principles, or even, in some cases, in opposition to the same, especially with reference to problems of nationalism, poverty, sub-development, rapid population growth, etc. What is needed is to make Christian social consciousness more operational and less contemplative in nature. The paper's constant reference to the importance of what it is to be university becomes, in this regard, very relevant. It is the home not only of scientific advances but of human and social dialogue as well.

Discussion on the Catholic university at the service of the international community must also discuss Catholicism in the light of history. This is especially important in the case of the colonized countries. Catholicism might have been brought simultaneously with the colonization process that the drive of the indigenous people for a more effective national consciousness may result in the rejection of Catholicism itself. It is here that Catholic universities can effectively educate the people on a correct interpretation of history. The Catholic universities must bring out the compatibility of true Christian life with legitimate nationalism and a better sense of internationalism.

The problem of cultural conflict becomes more complicated in a cultural setting in which the individual, on the one hand, works in an urban setting the supra-structure of which is of Western origin, and at the same time, lives in a rural setting where traditions and social customs still remain basically indigenous. This, actually, is sometimes the situation in the Philippines.

In quite a number of developing countries, universities are rather new institutions without long standing traditions. Consequently, except as a status symbol, these universities turn out rather confused as to their role. To a certain degree, then,

universities imitate the pattern of the universities in the technically developed countries, which gives rise to a number of problems, including the problem of interaction between cultures. (Comments by the Catholic University of Parahyangan, Bandung, Indonesia)

The different possible tasks of the Catholic university at the service of the local and international community should leave a choice according to the possibilities the institution has at hand. The Catholic university should continue giving its own share of contribution. Should a research department be available in the university, it must conduct researches on how Christian interpretation can be given to changing cultural values of different people. (ibid.)

In order to maximize the services of the Catholic universities with respect to the local and international community, it is important for the Catholic universities in a region, a nation, or among nations to compare their experiences in their rendition of various services to the local and international community. In this respect, we are happy to note that several Philippine universities and educational institutes are already active.

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