

The Catholic University as an Instrument of Cultural Pluralism

1. *The Concept of Culture*

When we speak of culture, we are, in essence speaking about the phenomenon of man. Culture is, by definition, the whole of the process by which man realizes himself in the world and in history.

This history of the world has become a cultural history ever since man appeared on earth; perhaps more precisely, we can say that world history became cultural history because of the presence of man.

World history, as we knew, is divided into three major phases:

- (a) the *geospheric phase*, that is, the period of the creation of the earth;
- (b) the *biospheric phase*, during which life appeared;
- (c) the *nouspheric phase*, in which man appeared.

With the beginning of the nouspheric phase, world history became cultural history. The process of 'hominization' is also the process of 'humanization', which is the culturization of the world. Mankind is not merely a demographic potential in the quantitative sense, but he is also, and primarily, a demographic potential in the cultural sense. It is mankind that must carry out the process of enculturating world and universe. Our conception of humanity is, therefore, fundamental to our attempt to understand culture.

This concept of humanity appears not as something abstract and static, but as concrete and dynamic process, because mankind itself is a concrete and dynamic reality. When we speak of humanity, we speak of man with all his dynamic strength and limitations, of man within the context of his many and diverse relationship — with his fellowmen, with nature and with God. Within this constitutive structure of humanity, there may be discovered what have been referred to as the seven cultural universals: the system of knowledge, the economic system, the technological system, social system, the linguistic system, the artistic system and the religious system. Given the scope of these cultural universals we can appreciate the fundamental and comprehensive nature of the concept of culture.

As we are all aware, we live in the third phase, the nouspheric phase, of history. We are an integral part of the total process of hominization and humanization. We have roles to play within the process of making world history cultural history. We all share in the common task of mankind: to bring culture to the world and the universe.

Let us now look upon the cultural situation of the present world. Here are three primary aspects of the contemporary state of culture: (1) the past aspect, that is, the accumulation of crises due to the over-saturated process of modern history; (2) the present aspect, the period of transition that is characterized by great and all encompassing crises; (3) the future aspect, that is the search of mankind for a new historical format, a new pattern for the world, a new harmony. In relation to this aspect, there are signs that human history is tending towards a global system in which humanism will be the ideology of the future.

As the ideology of the future, humanism may be seen as the rediscovery of man. As it is now becoming manifest, humanism tends to place man at the centre of things, to perceive man as dynamic, open and integral, to appreciate the dialectic between the dynamic of man and his limitations, and to accept the fundamental relational dimensions of man.

In order to understand the state of accumulated and perhaps unresolvable crises that characterize modern history, we need to study the history of Europe since the Middle Ages, and perhaps

especially the historic reaction to that period. Modern history began with Renaissance, with the Reformation, with the flowering of intellectual freedom that finally gave birth to nationalism, empiricism, idealism, positivism, the development of which influenced great changes in the systems of knowledge, technology, economy, politics, linguistics, society, arts and religions. Great progress has been achieved during modern history. But modern history has, however, also given rise to serious imbalances, indeed, to a process of social diffraction. Modern history is a great and rich history, but one that is without synthesis and that is continually generating cleavages.

As a reaction to this crises-laden state of contemporary history, there appeared in Europe a variety of movements or efforts in search of new values and aspirations. These became manifest in such forms as attempts to devise new philosophies of life, philosophy of action, in phenomenology, personalism, existentialism and, finally perhaps, anthropology. Futurology appeared, and the tendency towards multidisciplinary approach. Because the crises and pressures of modern history are universally experienced, they affected the whole cultural system, with the consequence that mankind yearns for a new world order.

The need to understand that, by virtue of the fact that humanity is fundamentally a concrete and dynamic reality with time and space, the pluriformity of the process of cultural history is quite natural and unavoidable. Cultural pluriformity is the natural operative manifestation of the nature of mankind itself. But this pluralism continues to be part of, and to derive from, the one source, that is, man. The cultural process of the world therefore will always be characterized by unity in diversity — *bhienkatunggalika* as the Indonesian says — to be derived from the common nature of mankind, although its diverse manifestations will be dependent upon the influences of geography and history in all the variety, which we may call environment or ecosystem. Despite the variety of patterns within the world cultural process, that process itself will always be based on the common characteristics of mankind; this makes communication and acculturation always possible. The history of the world as cultural history will always revolve around the dialectic between complexification and interdependence.

The primary cultural problem of today may be posed in the form of questions: is mankind capable of creating a new world order? Can what is called 'humanism' be realized in practice? How can the pluriform development of cultural history be adapted and directed so as to facilitate the emergence of the new world order based on humanity? It is within this context that catholic universities must strive to discover their purpose and role.

An important point to make at this stage is that the development towards a new, healthy global system necessarily has implications for the development of various types and forms of culture. A relevant distinction to be made in this connection is that between the developed societies (including the so-called 'post industrial societies') and the developing societies (most of which are pre-industrial). The development of cultural history has different implications for each of the categories. But the future of a world based on humanism depends for its realization upon whether or not both of these types of society can succeed in developing openly, can succeed in making the adjustments, in forging the communications and in achieving the degree of cooperation, that are essential for the development of this new order.

The great document *Gaudium et Spes* describes and analyses these three main aspects of the present world's cultural situation.

Of the present aspect of the world that is the product of the accumulated crises of the past, *Gaudium et Spes* contains, among others, the following comment:

Today, the human race is passing through a new stage of its history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and people. Hence we can already speak of a true social and cultural transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well.

As happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake...

Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources, and economic power. Yet a huge proportion

of the world's citizens is still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before today has man been so keenly aware of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance.

Although the world of today has a very vivid sense of its unity and of how one man depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces. For political, social, economic, racial, and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of war which would reduce everything to ashes... Finally, man painstakingly searches for a better world...

Today's spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution...

History itself speeds along on so rapid a course that an individual person can scarcely keep abreast of it...

In consequence, there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as important as can be, calling for new efforts of analysis and synthesis...

Discussing the future aspect of world history, *Gaudium et Spes* presents the following essential concept:

The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance rooted in the heart of man. For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another....

What does the Church think of man? What recommendations seem needful for the upbuilding of contemporary society? What is the ultimate significance of human activity throughout the world?

...According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown...

From these excerpts we may readily appreciate that the discussion of our involvement in the development of the world culture is essentially in close accord with the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*.

2. *A Theology of the Catholic University*

In order to begin to determine what is, or should be, the role of the catholic universities within this pluriform pattern of world culture, it is perhaps advisable to commence by seeking to define what it is that distinguished the catholic universities from ordinary universities. The concept of university as academic centre is, of course, well known and need not detain us here. But what are the special characteristics or nature of the catholic university within the development of the cultural history? Our emphasis should be focussed on the catholicity.

I believe that we must find the essence of the catholic universities within the context of the mission of the church in the world. Ecclesiology is, therefore, a foundation for the development of a catholic university. Ecclesiology is the basis for the formation of a basic policy for catholic universities. And at the present time, we can derive that Ecclesiology from *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

There are at least three important elements in the present theology of the church that we should consider here: the church as the sacrament of salvation of world history; the church within its particular local environment and the universal church; the involvement of the church in the history of mankind.

If ecclesiology provides the basis for the development of the catholic university, then, at the present moment, these three elements must provide the inspiration for that development. It is on the basis of them that the role of the catholic university within the pluriformity of contemporary world culture may be determined.

3. *Church and Culture*

It is of importance therefore to study the relationship between the church and culture, because the nature of that relationship will determine the cultural role of the catholic university.

In fact, the relationship between church and culture is sufficiently clear and fundamental. The mystery of the incarnation itself represents the most fundamental basis for that relationship. God himself assumed human form in order to save mankind with the result that world history and human history could become the history of salvation.

This mystery must be perpetuated throughout the ages by the church — as the sacrament of the world salvation history — until such time as God himself ends it or render it to fulfillment (eschatology).

The church is, accordingly, the continuation of the incarnation throughout history. Cultural history (in terms of both hominization and humanization) therefore contains within it the historical process of salvation. In this sense, the church is the sacrament of salvation, the sacrament of the plan of God's love working in history. The church is a spiritual dynamic, a dynamic of faith and of hope, of optimism, that must work productively within cultural history: world history and human history.

The incarnation has been a concrete event. The presence of the church as this spiritual dynamic must also, therefore, assume concrete manifestation in time and space. That is why we speak of the local church or the particular church — as concrete manifestation of the incarnation. Thus the local church is not merely the manifestation of part of the sacrament of salvation. Rather, the local church is permanent part of God's great plan for the salvation of all mankind through the cultural history. Thus, the mystery of incarnation is perpetuated along within the pluriform pattern of world cultural history.

Given this basic character of the church, it is no longer difficult to understand the relationship between the church and the national cultures, or even the position of the church within the process of the great world culture, the culture of mankind. The church must play her role as a spiritual dynamic within the pluriform pattern of world culture in such a way as to facilitate the development of that pluriform culture towards a pattern of cultural history and history of salvation. As humanism is the dynamic and the point of contact of cultural history, so the plan of God's love is the dynamic and the point of contact of the history of salvation. At both the national and the international (global) level, the church must be a force for the development of human culture.

4. The Role of the Catholic University

In view of the above, the role of the catholic university is clear. The catholic university must function as a centre for cul-

tural enrichment and as a centre for the forces of salvation; it must play this role at both the national and the global levels, in the context of the local church and of the universal church.

It is increasingly clear, therefore, that catholic universities must form themselves into forces of cultural history now, and particularly for the future.

Against the background of the above discussion it is clear that catholic universities must participate in the search for a new, worldwide cultural format. Catholic universities must represent a source for the dynamic needed in order to achieve the new world order desired by mankind. The catholic university will thereby become a cultural force both for the advancement of national culture and for the intercultural communication on a world scale.

5. *Some Final Comments*

- (a) The church is quite clearly involved in the process of world history, and thus world cultural history, at both the national and the international (global) levels.
- (b) The contemporary state of the world culture characterized by the multiple and accumulating crises of a period of transition, necessitates the serious search for a new and more humane world order. Humanism therefore becomes a factor in determining the future of the world culture.
- (c) It is increasingly apparent that national cultures must also develop in order to participate fully in the future of world culture. In this respect, regional cooperation shows signs of functioning as a bridge between national and global developments.
- (d) The church must participate in the process of cultural history as a force based on the mystery of incarnation and that of eschatology.
- (e) Because catholic universities must be developed in accordance with ecclesiological context, it can not be separated from the church's mission within the developing world culture. Catholic universities must represent creative forces within the process of world cultural pro-

gress at both the national, regional and international levels. Catholic universities must strive to ensure that local (particular) cultural developments take place and enrich the process of the cultural process at the global level, while also guarding against the possibility that global changes do not prevent the development of particular societies. This mission is to be fulfilled both within the developing societies and the developed ones.

- (f) A common strategy for the realization of these aims will be facilitated by local, regional and international cooperation among catholic universities.
- (g) Attention should perhaps be given to the possibility of introducing humanism (its philosophy, theology and even its strategic implications) as a *studium generale* in all catholic universities in order that they may give rise and give birth to a cultural movement that would provide valuable support to the historical development of a new and more humane order, in the national, regional as well as in the global environments.

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