

Reflections on The Catholic University as an Instrument of Cultural Pluralism

When Pope Paul VI addressed the Jesuit presidents and rectors of the universities in August 1975 and spoke of "the speed with which culture, in all its aspects, is evolving" he seemed to be using the word culture in the wide sense of civilization. *Gaudium, et Spes* uses culture in two senses, in the wide sense of civilization, and in the narrower social anthropological sense of cultures peculiar to one ethnic group. Perhaps all of us use this word "culture" in several senses so that it is sometimes confusing.

Educators, when the word culture is mentioned, often think of Matthew Arnold's celebrated definition that the aim is "to know ourselves and the world" and as the means to this end, "to know the best which has been thought and said in the world." His insistence on classical education as a vehicle of such culture seemed to fit the practice of our Jesuit schools in the part with their programs of classical studies. Yet even at the time he formulated his definition, prominent scholars were challenging his conclusions and offering science and technology as the modern goal of culture and the first social anthropologists were beginning their studies of ethnic cultures. As our universities developed in the twentieth century, science and technology developed alongside the traditional classical and literary curricula. Only in more recent years has attention been given to cultures in the socio-economic or anthropological sense.

The present day confusion surrounding culture is all too evident in our universities in Asia, and I speak especially in regard to Sogang University, our Jesuit university in Seoul, Korea. As Catholic educators we came bearing "the best which has been thought and said in the world" in literature, philosophy, and theology; we saw the need and responded with quality programs in science, engineering, and economics to contribute to the technological development of the country, and we also encountered the desire of our Korean students and faculty to study, preserve and investigate the elements of their own 4000 year-old culture.

Again, as educators, we feel the responsibility to offer a program to the students for their total development that will not only include all three elements but will assist them in the difficulties of integrating these often conflicting goals. Do they find the human values they are seeking in the works of Plato and Shakespeare or in the traditions handed down for centuries from Buddhism and Confucianism? In the ever-expanding area of science and technology, is there time left in the four year university course even to treat adequately human and spiritual values? And, most serious of all, how can the Korean student maintain his traditional ethnic culture and equip himself to live in the modern world? In speaking to the Jesuit presidents, the Pope agreed that "the difficulties which a Catholic University faces are grave. But they should not cause discouragement nor lead us to the temptation, either open or covert, of abandoning this field of work and leaving it for others to take up. He went on to suggest a unifying and integrating point for the universities:

The Catholic University is today more than ever called to promote within itself a truly Catholic environment in which Catholicity may be alive, operative and visible. . . . In the very center of the university the young should acquire, or, if they have already acquired it, develop a style of life that is authentically Christian, a feel for the seriousness of its profession, an enthusiasm for being tomorrow's qualified "leaders", witnesses of Christ in those places in which they will have to carry on their professional work. Youth, if wisely helped, will not fail to respond with all seriousness to their commitment. But they must be given the total vision, the Catholic one, of all human realities in the light of Christ, who is the uni-

que, supreme response because he is the Word of God that challenges man and gives him the word of eternal life, while placing him in front of his true greatness, of his tasks and responsibilities. The Catholic University is evidently the privileged place where the young person can be helped to find a way to work out a global synthesis, which will be for him and for others a bountiful source of light for a whole lifetime. To this end he must commit himself."

To the same meeting of Jesuit university presidents in Rome in August 1975 Fr. General Pedro Arrupe spoke of the same problems confronting the modern Catholic university and indicated a similar solution:

Our Lord's teaching is to be the salt that penetrates and sustains the vitality of human cultures. Now human cultures, specially in the modern, technological world, are shaped in institutions of higher education. In these institutions, then, we are offered an unrivaled opportunity, where the graces of civilization flourish, for the grace of God to abound the more... It was not always so. But today, man's growing awareness of his own cultural identity, the rise of "new" nations with their own cultural values, the econological and population problems and the crisis of values triggered by the technological revolution of the last few decades have enhanced the need for universities, where such huge questions can be systematically studied in interdisciplinary fashion. From the viewpoint of rural-urban relations, we can say that the movement of peoples and the shift of power bases from rural dispersion to urban centers leads almost inevitably to strengthening the position of the university. It becomes the point where men in quest for knowledge and understanding give that quest a local habitation and a name.

Such convulsive changes bring us face to face with the question of inculturation in the true sense of the word; namely, the Christification of cultures. Clearly, this touches not only the "new" nations, with their sub-cultures based on different tribal and ethnic origins, but also the industrialized nations of the technologically advanced world with their sub-cultures and social strata. To understand what it means to be a person, precisely in any particular culture or sub-culture demands experience,

reflection fed by the contributions of many disciplines, and the light of faith illuminating all reflection.

These guidelines of Pope Paul and Fr. Arrupe suggests ultimate solutions and unifying principles: implementation remains difficult, particular in a non-Christian yet ancient civilization such as Korea in an institution in which the vast majority of students and faculty are non-Christians. To a great extent modernization brings not only technological and economic development but western cultural values based on the Graeco-Roman-Christian civilization. There is the constant danger of over-simplification by drawing lines sharply between the older Korean non-Christian culture and the newer modernization of which Christianity seems a part. This is due partly to the carry-over of colonialism in which European powers taught western cultural values along with the Gospel for centuries in Asia and in the New World. The university is identified with the older colonializing process, and a Christian university has the added pejorative image of being a proselytizing agency for a western religion.

The phenomenal eagerness for education in Asian countries seems to be primarily motivated by social-economic factors students seek merely the degree and competence to enable them to find more profitable employment than their contemporaries. The enormous popularity of the engineering departments and the colleges of commerce attest clearly to this driving force, even the widespread interest in learning English is primarily practical as an entree for positions in international situations. The modern Asian student busy with his professional training almost unconsciously assumes the superficial modes of contemporary students in western countries in regard to tastes in fashion, food, activities, and patterns of relationships. He or she is frequently frustrated by any thoughtful effort to relate these newly acquired modes with traditional behavior patterns of his ethnic culture. How can the university cope with the present divergent trends in modern university education?

Educators particularly in a conservative culture tend to continue patterns of education despite obvious deficiencies; traditional areas of instruction in philosophy, literature, history and religion continued to be offered both as requirements in a general educa-

tion package as well as electives in an enrichment program. Yet experience continues to show that students are not able to develop the necessary spirit of reflectiveness that can create a synthesis. Forms of interdisciplinary studies are an attempt to do this for the students but are difficult for faculty to establish because of their own traditional training.

As the author of the paper states: "One question must be dealt with first and foremost if our reflection is to be lucid; are the 'new solidarities which are binding men together' and of which the contact between cultures is said to be the sign and the means, sufficiently 'probable' to provide a firm starting-point?" Is a new, modern, worldwide culture developing linking all men with new patterns of cultural thought, expression and behavior? Should the traditional wisdom of the ethnic culture be relegated to historical and philosophical research?

This seems to be the questions, the task, that the modern university, particularly the modern Catholic university must address itself to with all of the resources of its faculty and administration not only within its own campus or own country but in joint efforts with universities in other countries both in the East and in the West. The university remains the only center of thought and reflection where such questions not only can be solved but even enunciated. The disciplines and areas of study which have the deepest resources for such questions seem to be philosophy, history, literature and religion. It must be their awesome task to initiate a dialogue with the technological areas within the university to fuse humanistic and Christian values to modern industrial development as well as to relate ethnic cultural values with the "best that which has been thought and said in the world" — whether it be in the East or in the West. The greatest danger will be the simple solution that only this or that area of human development is important and that other areas can be de-emphasized or suppressed. The total development of the person must be constantly maintained as the ultimate goal of modern education. The unifying power of Christian values remains the ultimate answer though the practical steps remain unclear. This is only to say that the Catholic universities have extremely

important roles in modern education particularly in developing countries, in non-Christian ethnic cultures.

It seems appropriate to quote the final paragraph of Pope Paul's message:

We are certain... you will know how to accomplish your daily task with these goals before your eyes. Do not fear! Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, will always be with you to give warmth and force and the strength of conviction to your words and to your methods; the Spirit, the Paraclete, will suggest to you everything you need to know to bring youth to listen to the teaching, the eternal teaching, of Christ, and to apply it to their own needs and to demands of a genuine culture.

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