

# The Role of the Catholic University in a Pluralistic Milieu: Some Reflections on the Asian Situation

## 1. *University and Culture*

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* gives a most beautiful description of how evangelization is concerned not only with the question of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also with the question of affecting mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life. What matters is to evangelize man's culture. And the mission of providing for the presence of the Christian message in the field of culture is the specific role of the Catholic university. Catholic universities should be open to the world and to the problems of today; they should promote dialogue with all cultures, with atheists, with non-Christians, with Christians of various confessions.

Since man's culture varies according to the different peoples and countries, so also the Catholic university will have to establish its dialogue and perform its mission in different ways. The Gospel and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with any culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. *Gaudium et Spes* and other statements of Vatican Council II, and various documents of Paul VI recognize the legitimate differences, and diversity and variety of customs and observances are consi-

dered elements of enrichment for the Church itself, because of a continuous giving and taking and because the variety rather than being an obstacle to unity helps to see more easily what is fundamental in our faith.

The Church from the beginning has stood for pluralism: the different gifts of the Spirit given to the Church, the different callings to individuals and communities, and the great variety of peoples who belong to the Church with different languages, customs, traditions, forms of devotion and arts. All these variations and differences did not destroy the unity in one God, one baptism and one Eucharist. It was not necessary to become Jew and to accept Jewish customs in order to become a Christian.

Yet due to historical vicissitudes during the past few centuries the Christian message has been often identified with and become dependent on a particular culture. It is true, great missionaries, like Alessandro Valignano, Roberto De Nobili, Matteo Ricci and many others, realized the anomaly and the practical difficulty of imposing on men of a different culture a manner of living their faith that could not be fully meaningful to them, that cut them off from their fellow men.

## *2. Colonial Background*

During a few centuries, from the last decades of the 15th century when the age of discovery began through the ages of colonialism and imperialism, European civilization exercised a dominant role throughout the world by technical, military, political or economic factors.

Although the United States of America and later the countries of Latin America had reached independence at an early stage, they continued to be part of the European or so-called Western culture. Europe had produced throughout its dramatic history universalistic cultures, firstly the Judeo-Christian-Greco-Roman culture, which still underlies the Western enduring shared values; then came the Renaissance, which perpetuated the belief in the natural dignity of man and the primacy of his rights; and lastly rational enlightenment together with the great advances in science and technology that have revolutionized the world.

From the end of the 15th century on to the beginning of this century there was in Europe some kind of accepted axiom that civilization and progress just meant *Western* civilization and progress. This was expressed by such words as "la mission civilisatrice", "the white man's burden", "noblesse oblige" and similar expressions.

Then came the two world wars, the Russian and the Chinese revolutions, and the dismantling of the European empires in the last three decades. Entire continents became free of Western domination, and newly emerging countries were making efforts to recover their identity and their ability to create and express themselves. It is in this background that we have to judge the role of the Catholic universities in different local and cultural situations. I want to limit my remarks to the situation of Asia which I know best, but many of the things I am going to say might have relevance also for other countries of the Third World.

Not only the Catholic universities but also the other confessional universities and secular universities were based on Western patterns. Even some of the learned societies and centers of local culture, libraries, archives, fine arts schools were founded by the colonial powers and structured according to Western tradition. One the means of instruction in these centers of higher education was not the local language but a European language. Not only the means of instruction but also the content was mainly Western content. The textbooks were the same the European students were using in Europe. Even in Japan where the cultural and educational policies were freely decided by the Japanese themselves, the German and in the post-war period the American model of education have had widespread and deep influence. Although the content sometimes might change and involve Oriental problems the methodology was fundamentally Western.

In the colonial past there was also another serious drawback both in the Catholic and other universities. A great many Asian countries found themselves not only dominated by the colonial powers, but also cut off from their Asian neighbors. This movement away from their neighbors was accompanied by a diminished sense of spiritual and cultural community, and opened the way to a regional particularism which prevented regional cooperation. It

was, and even now is, easier to communicate with the far-away European or American institutions than with the institutions of the neighboring countries. Lastly, the colonial educational structures, by enforcing conformity with Western patterns, little by little severed the local elites from their deepest roots and brought about their alienation from the majority of the people who still clung to the traditional cultures.

After gaining independence several countries, including Indonesia, Laos, Sri Lanka, and to some extent also India and the Philippines, have adhered to a policy of promoting a national language so as to give greater depth to the cultural values of these countries. Moreover some states in order to strengthen their political unity are actively pursuing a cultural policy guided by the principle of cultural unification, while respecting and safeguarding the multiplicity of regional or local differences.

### 3. *Technological Progress*

In our study of the role of the Catholic university in the non-Christian countries of Asia besides the colonial past we have also to take into account the ambivalence of the scientific and technological progress which has come largely from the West.

Many countries of Asia are intensely aware of the need to establish and assert a national identity, in their own eyes and in the eyes of the world and they generally express this need by looking to their traditional cultures for guidance and inspiration. On the other hand these same countries are well aware that it would be absurd and in any event impossible to turn the clock back to some presumed Golden Age in past centuries of their history. They know that they have to develop and make progress. As the result of economic pressures and the introduction of patterns and techniques which are ill-adapted to circumstances or are only partially assimilated, there is also the danger of losing the cultural identity through the adoption of the Western model of development: modernization, industrialization, urbanization, concentration of technological and human resources, massive bureaucracies and information networks, economic affluence through "rational" control of men and materials.

The growth of the Gross National Product, urbanization and city culture, rational management and up-to-date technology

become the norm of progress and development, but at the same time operate to dissolve traditional groupings and promote a modern social mobilization. Most cultures of Asian countries seem opposed to such a world view of human progress, though it is true that such a world view of human progress, though it is true that such a view has an appeal to elements in the local elites. If this might be called the appeal of Western capitalism, there is also the appeal of Marxism. The examples of China and Vietnam, the rebellion against clear injustices and the strength of Marxist ideology present a strong challenge. Many developing countries find themselves in a context of ambivalence: on one hand, urgent need for rapid development which often leads to disruption and even rejection of the cultural traditions; on the other, assertion of national identity with stress on local culture which can slow down economic progress.

#### *4. Theological Reflection*

So far we have examined the background in which the Catholic universities are called to perform their role, it is a background of colonial history, culture and economic domination, and of enormous pressure to deliver economic and technological progress.

The need to create both material and spiritual values is fundamental to man, to all men, since it is a demand for the full development of the human personality in all its contingency and uniqueness. The Catholic universities should be in the forefront of this creative effort both to fulfill their mission of evangelization and to contribute to the spiritual and material development of their respective countries. As a university, the Catholic university has to be involved first in a speculative process of theological reflection to make the Christian message acceptable to the different cultures.

The Christian faith must be a living and acting reality in the hearts and lives of men in the context of their own background and experience. It means that the Church must strive to make men of different mentalities and manners in different parts of the world live the faith in their own most meaningful way. The Catholic universities' role is not to translate what has been written in other countries with different cultural backgrounds, different

problems and different needs, but find out and prepare the apt local soil where the seed of the Christian message can grow and flourish. The Church is a tree that grows from seed, it is not a tree which is transplanted. The task of the Catholic university in a culture as yet untouched by the Christian spirit is to prepare through research and contacts in the various cultural spheres the favorable ground where to sow the good seed of the word of God. The seed will grow into a Church, keeping its life and identity but wholly transformed in appearance according to all the concrete circumstances of its development. There will be basic oneness, the one Father, the one Christ, the one Baptism, the one Eucharist, the one community in the one Spirit; there will be broad lines of convergence with regard to detail in each nation or culture or age; and finally there will be something that is unique to each culture, and each believer if the Christian message is to be really universal, independent of any fixed culture. All these differences must be respected and even cultivated if the faith is to be a reality that is alive, meaningful and effective.

Sometimes it is said that the demand for *inculturation* and *incarnation* means the preservation of 'exotic' or 'colorful' traditions which the modern people of the non-Christian countries themselves do not want to preserve. I am not talking here of exotic or colorful traditions. I am talking of an institutional effort to be made at each Catholic university fostering a spirit of dialogue between Christianity and the local cultures, especially the non-Christian religions. In order to carry on this dialogue, we must study the documents of Vatican II and Paul VI and educate both Christians and non-Christians on this point. The new attitude of the Church is not yet widely known even among Christians. Then we must have a dialogue in the field of theology, literature, liturgy and art.

In the Middle Ages in Europe the religious orders and the universities preserved the Greek and Latin classics, and later the Catholic schools stressed the study of the classics. Today the Catholic universities in Asia should make an effort to preserve and transmit the literary treasures of the Oriental literary tradition.

The performing arts in Asia with their harmonious blending of drama, music and dance might give some inspiration to Chris-

tian liturgy. Festivals with their strong feeling of participation and communication are also an important feature in the religious traditions and while the modern Europeans might like a very short Mass every Sunday, other peoples with different cultural background might prefer some more solemn festivals at longer intervals in which the whole community takes part to express the bond of unity among themselves and with God. The West has created separate and distinct forms of art: the spoken drama (without dancing or singing), concert music (without spoken drama or dancing), ballet (without singing or spoken drama) and opera (as a rule without spoken dialogue, and often without dancing). Asian experience is varied and there is a great wealth of different forms to be found in it all fused into harmonious compositions. In this sense, the Catholic universities should feel their responsibility in fostering the artistic education of their students. While the performing arts might give new inspiration to liturgy, oriental mysticism might be an invaluable means to new ways of spirituality and prayer much needed in the present-day world.

I have spoken of dialogue between Christianity and other religions. Dialogue means that we both give and take. For instance, at Sophia University, Tokyo, this kind of dialogue is taking place to some extent mainly through the Faculty of Theology, the Institute of Christian Studies and the Institute of Oriental Religions. Professors have already written about the Catholic attitude towards non-Christian religions. Various symposia and discussions have been held with leaders and scholars of other religions. It might be said that while we are making a real effort to understand Buddhism, the Buddhist understanding of Christianity is rather poor. One reason for this is that the Buddhists are inclined to get their ideas from books and writings which do not reflect the present situation of the Church vis-a-vis the non-Christian religions. In the dialogues which we have had Buddhists have shown great confidence that they can teach us a lot about spirituality. But they admit that Christianity has many things to give in the social area. Christianity can teach the social dimension of contemplation. That is to say, contemplation leads to action and action is supported by contemplation. Until now the dialogue has been most successful in the area of spirituality. This is the area in which we have most to learn. What can we give?

The best thing to give is the Gospel. We can cooperate with other religions to give spiritual values to the modern world. This is one outcome of the dialogue, and in this Christianity takes the lead because of our clear commitments: values about nuclear war, abortion, honesty in business, questions of poverty and social justice.

##### 5. *Development and Justice*

Theological, literary, liturgical, and artistic inculturation is necessary, but it is not enough for the mission of evangelization. "But evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development — a message especially energetic today about liberation." (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 29)

The inculturation and incarnation of the Christian message would be incomplete unless the Catholic universities take part also in the struggle to liberate the people who have been kept marginalized by famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in the distribution of wealth, oppression in international relations through situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism. As Pope Paul VI says, this struggle toward liberation "is not foreign to evangelization." (*ibid.* No. 30)

Evangelization is proclamation of the faith, made operative in the love of our neighbor: for that reason it cannot be realized without the promotion of justice. The Christian message finds its fulfillment, in effect, in love of neighbor, which implies the commitment to justice. There can be no separation of evangelization from the promotion of justice nor vice versa.

The Christian salvation of man is not exclusively reserved to the next life but it has already its place in this world as an anticipation of its fullness to come. Without the commitment to a more just and humane world, the symbol of things to come, Christian hope would be an alienation of man.

These are some of the reasons why the promotion of justice and development is an unquestionable exigency of evangelization — an integral part, intimately united with it. Also the Catholic universities in the fulfillment of their mission of evangelization are asked to become instruments of social justice and development.

As institutions of higher learning the Catholic universities are first of all asked to play a very important role by providing the Church and the local leaders some of the intellectual infrastructure which should give norms for the priority of various programs of more directly social action, as well as in the work of fomenting social awareness and in the selection of means, including mass media, for these ends. This presupposes channels of communication and dialogue between the universities and people who are engaged in other fields. Often we see a lot of good will, but lack of serious intellectual preparation and depth. In social work there is often the temptation of instant activism or excessively simplistic solutions. The universities should provide first of all this solid intellectual orientation for the social work of the Church.

But the Catholic universities in developing countries must serve not only as cultural intellectual centers, but also as forceful organs in promoting material development. The International Council for Educational Development, in its report of December 1975 on *Higher Education in the Nation's Service* examines some of the problems faced by developing countries, in the solution of which the university can play a leading role. They are public health, rural development, food, population, housing, employment, and education and training at all levels. How can the development needs (health services, agricultural technology etc.) of rural areas be met? How can poor urban families secure better health care, education, housing, recreation and jobs? How can formal and informal school systems better educate more people of all ages in what they want and need to know? How can jobs and training be matched to meet society's need for economic growth and prevent widespread unemployment?

These are some very concrete problems which the university can help solve. New kinds of educational programs and organizational structures are often necessary.

Teaching, research and service for justice and development should flow into another. Service activities should be based on research and not only good will and should provide new opportunities to see theory in action in the field, and teaching should benefit from staff field experience. Programs of development should bring together separate disciplines and specialities in team efforts to solve social problems. Programs that seek community change should make efforts to achieve understanding, participation and support from community members.

Students and faculty should be convinced of the value of the university for development programs. It is true, the universities alone cannot solve the problems of development, but they are uniquely qualified to mobilize talents and knowledge from many fields. By educating people who have a social awareness, can recognize and solve the problems of society, by training its professionals, administrators, teachers, and doers, by advising government and designing social programs, Catholic universities can be a great means for promoting justice and development.

#### *6. International Commitment*

In this paper I have stressed the role of the Catholic university in the Asian context as one of preparing the soil where the seed of the Christian message can be sown and of working for the promotion of development and justice. I want finally to stress another very important role of the Catholic university: the international commitment. The Church must preserve its unity in diversity, in other words it must preserve its international aspect. Complete identification of the Church with any culture, whether western or eastern, means a loss of this internationalism. What we want is to avoid the imposition of an alien culture: one does not have to become a Westerner, a European or an American in order to become a Christian. But at the same time Christianity cannot be simply identified with local cultural forms. Christian faith always remains to some extent in tension with culture. If it becomes completely identified it loses its prophetic force, its capacity to challenge, correct and change the local scene. While cultural imperialism from the West might prevent the growing of the tree, proudful particularism and inward nationalism might also destroy the Catholic brotherhood and unity which are

characteristic of the Christian faith. The Catholic universities have the responsibility to foment this balanced view of acculturation and internationalism. Although the role of the missionaries from other cultural backgrounds might have changed and their number might have diminished, their presence is important as a symbol and as a reminder of the universality of the Church.

Especially in the universities, where the problems to deal with are often not only local but global, administrators, professors and students need to work and study with people of other cultures in team efforts and project. In this way they will not only learn in a concrete manner tolerance and appreciation of the gifts of others, but the complementarity and solidarity which are possible in an intellectual undertaking. This complementarity and solidarity should be stressed not only at the East-West level, namely between the various countries of Asia and West, but especially between Asian countries themselves.

### *7. Concrete Projects*

I would like to suggest here some concrete proposals which can foment at the same time the Asian and Catholic aspect of our universities.

a. The setting of research centers for the study and teaching of the national languages and cultures of each of the countries where Catholic universities are established. Such centers could then also serve as a basis of mutual cooperation, for the exchange of teachers and students and for the study of what Asian countries have in common. Sophia University has already an Institute of Oriental Religions for the study of Buddhism and other Oriental religions. European, Japanese, Philippine and Indian scholars are working together in this Institute.

b. The setting of research centers for applied and theoretical ethics in various Asian Catholic universities, which while aiming at close contacts with each other would also have close relations with institutions such as the Kennedy Institute of Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. Such problems as bioethics, international business, international cooperation could be studied in these institutes.

c. "Low-cost housing in Asia" is the title of a project being prepared now by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference. Various Catholic universities in Asia will be involved in this work. The project aims at the improvement of housing, which can be realized even under conditions of low economic standards. Together with the improvement of housing, it aims also at the organization of self-help communities able to analyze and articulate their own problems, and to undertake projects for concrete improvements in their community life. This project covers India, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and Korea. Japan too takes part in the realization of this project.

These projects, I am sure, will help to strengthen the unity-in-diversity which is the characteristic of our faith we profess when we say that the Church is *one* and Catholic.

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