

The Priority of a Catholic University in Developing Countries

It is clear from the various papers that there is a new realization that a Catholic University exists within a very specified and concrete context both of Church and culture. This realization means that the priorities of the Catholic University must reflect the priorities of both the Church and the culture, and at the same time challenge them. Both the priorities and the challenge take on an added complexity when both Church and culture are in a period of rapid development, as they are in many countries of Asia and other parts of the world.

Perhaps it is best to begin looking at the special place a Catholic University holds in developing countries from the point of view of the concept of man. Especially in some countries of Asia what brings both professors and students together in some kind of unity on a Catholic campus is some kind of a common vision of man. Whether this vision includes specific awareness by all of man as God's created and redeemed child or not, it does include the notion of man's immense dignity and possibilities. Of course, any kind of university has to have some awareness of this and adjust its goals to meet the needs of man. But a Catholic University has a special mission to declare its belief in man, and all the more so when the dignity of man is made equivalent to his progress in economic development, in the material possessions he has. The reality of this one-sided view of man in some developing countries underlines the need that there be a place and an

atmosphere where man's total value is emphasized and visible to society. In a developing country modernization affects almost every area of man's life, his value, his social behavior, his thought patterns even those concerning time.

The priority for a Catholic University comes precisely from a need which can be met nowhere else. Government is preoccupied with a stability which enhances investment and material progress, and a defense capability, especially where Communism is an active threat. This preoccupation can blind government to other human and social needs. Business is taken up with further expansion in trade and profits. The Church is aware of the problem, but it has a pastoral concern which has its limits. It is really only in a university that there is an atmosphere in which the values and dignity of man can be safeguarded, developed and challenged. A university atmosphere in which Christian beliefs are alive and active is the one place where young people can be shown their cultural roots, philosophy, and literature. It is the only place where the human implications of scientific or economic developments can be discussed and integrated. It is the only place where local values and philosophies can face the challenge of concepts belonging to man in other cultures and other worlds.

This is one reason why a Catholic University has priority in developing countries. Sensitive to the new pride of belonging to a country which has achieved a new place in international commerce and foreign affairs, the Catholic University remains the one place where man discovers who he is, what he can be, and not just what he can acquire.

A second reason for the priority of a Catholic University in a developing country is that it is the unique place for what may be called a broader ecumenism. In some countries like Korea the Christian population is very small, the Church a gram of leaven in a huge mass. The preaching of God's Word, the visibility of the continuing salvific work of Christ, both have to struggle to be heard or seen above the roar of the crowd. A broader ecumenism is one in which the voice of the Church acquires a respect and a visibility which allows it to confront and challenge the world around it, the world of religion included. A Catholic University is a place where religion and theology become opera-

tive in an education process, and at the same time as something in themselves which are a force and a reality which must be considered by society as a whole.

Again, the priority comes from the need, and a need which can be adequately filled only in a Catholic University. Dialogue with other Christians goes on, and seminaries continue their specialized training, but only in a Catholic University do religion and theology truly find a place of sufficient visibility and strength by which society as a whole can be confronted and challenged.

A third reason why a Catholic University is a priority in a developing country is that the unique place where a balance can be discovered among the conflicting and often confusing elements which make up a society in process of rapid change. Problems facing such a society are often staggering in their complexity. Who can give a simple answer to the problem of population in some countries of Asia? Who can balance industrial expansion and economic growth in a formerly agricultural society with the human values that must not be lost in the process? Who can furnish for society, as well as for Church leadership, opportunities for research and study in areas where the interests of individual factions are often in conflict? Who can put philosophical and theological concepts into a context where the Church seems truly a part of society and the real world around us? The possibility of truly inter-disciplinary approaches to the questions and problems of Church and society can really be found only in Catholic University.

Surely there are other reasons why a Catholic University has a special priority in the developing countries of the world. But these three give some indication of how important this work remains for the Church. Of course, they also show something of the direction in which development of the university itself must take place. A Catholic University which is unresponsive to the realities of a people and culture in process of rapid development becomes either a mission school which is an enigma to the nation as a whole, or it becomes an agent which fosters the very crisis a developing country finds itself in. Just another way in which man's development remains one-sided with the consequent loss or diminution of all that man can be. Not just any Catholic

University has a priority. But one which answers the needs of a developing country in ways which it alone is capable of doing now more than ever before has a priority and importance for the Church and for God's people in their search for the fullness of life and meaning.

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