

THE UNIVERSITY'S CHRISTIAN INSPIRATION

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The subject of a university's Christian inspiration, considered from the vantage point of the third world and more particularly El Salvador, implies some obvious limitations. Both Christianity and the university are historical realities, the relationship between which cannot be established conceptually in a way that will everywhere have the same validity. This focus may, on the other hand, prove useful because in the global village where we live there is a relationship and a co-responsibility between the different specific local worlds; and because the third world is today a privileged place in which historical reality is strikingly concentrated both as life and death and, on the Christian level, as grace and sin. The third world is today a universal in the concrete which can illumine reality. From a faith perspective, it offers a kind of light unavailable anywhere else.

To clarify the future of the university from the perspective of theology and its requirements, it is worthwhile turning to something that precedes both theology and the university: the fundamental principles of Christian faith. These principles, respecting the particular nature of theology and the university, are the ones that can provide guidance, empowerment, and a critique for both, shedding light at the same time on their interrelation. To state it clearly from the outset. I think that a Christian university is one that places itself at the service of the kingdom of God from the standpoint of an option for the poor. This service must be done not only as a university but by dint of a university's special nature.

I. The Problem of the Christian Inspiration of a University

For myself, I believe in the possibility and efficacy of a university whose inspiration is Christian, but I must also say that recent university history does not make this obvious. In order, therefore, not to fall into mere conceptualism or idealism, I must analyze the problems universities face in living out their Christian inspiration. Such an analysis is necessary so that, in thinking of the future, the shadow-side of universities may be effectively overcome.

As regards method of inquiry, the possibility must be admitted at the outset that a university can vitiate the Christian inspiration. The concupiscence and sin inherent in everything human is active in a university as everywhere else. This fact must always be kept in mind in analyzing individuals and social groups including the Church, which is both "saint and sinner." There is nothing in a university that removes it

from this condition. A university can be, in other words, either Christian, a-Christian, or anti-Christian; it will be this, not only in some of its members or in some of its sectors but in the university as such. It would be an illusion to think that the university cannot be an instrument of the anti-kingdom and of sin (although it can and ought to be an instrument of the kingdom and of grace), or that it does not need to ask pardon of society. With modesty, however, it can also declare itself open to society's gratitude.

The darker methodological consideration above is not made purely *a priori*. Without falling into anachronisms that smack of injustice, we cannot overlook the fact that Christian universities have left much to be desired in their response to the world and have even contributed to strengthening the anti-kingdom. Today's world as a whole, the third world certainly but also by analogy other worlds, is a world of sin. In it falsehood prevails over truth, oppression over justice, repression over freedom and—in words that are, unfortunately, by no means rhetorical—death over life. In this real world, the university has been invited, even required, to incarnate itself in the one reality or the other, placing its social weight on behalf of the one or the other. This, in my judgment, provides the fundamental criterion for verifying whether or not, and to what extent, a Christian inspiration has been operative in a university.

Far too frequently Christian universities have not questioned a society's unjust structures, nor used their social weight to denounce them, nor made central to their work the research and planning of new, just models for society. As a matter of fact, by producing professional people who, in most cases, have served to shore up unjust systems, Christian universities have effectively supported the evils of today's world.

In the political realm, universities have, by their silence or their explicit support, not hindered, much less stood in opposition to, inhumane practices that are grave violations of freedom and the most fundamental human rights. In Latin America, Christian universities have not distinguished themselves by their opposition to the dictatorships and national security régimes so roundly condemned by everyone once they have fallen. It cannot be said that universities have dared to run institutional risks in order to face up as universities to repressive régimes.

In the religious-ecclesial realm the evaluation can be more nuanced, but not infrequently universities have lined up with ecclesial forces that are conservative or even reactionary, distancing themselves from the church's more open and Gospel-oriented forces. Their contribution to the religious-ecclesial realm, and through this to life in society, has left much to be desired.

This is not all that Christian universities have done, but it is a very important part of what they have done. To overlook it too easily, not to

confront this shadow-side of the university, would in no way help clarify its Christian inspiration.

These facts seem to be undeniable. But it is more important to ask ourselves why, or what there is in the university situation that makes them possible and even tends to justify them. In my opinion, there are two reasons for this. The first is the tendency toward a selective incarnation in society; the second is an unreflective appeal to the autonomy of university learning.

Whether by design or not, the university is incarnated in social reality; but because it represents in itself a power—intellectual power—and because it needs abundant resources for its subsistence and growth, it has the tendency to situate itself in the world of power: economic, political, or ecclesial power, depending on the case. That world, insofar as it is a locus of power, is always a temptation; it conditions the university's existence and the determination and direction of what it should be doing. It imbues university decisions with extreme prudence when they in any way threaten those powers, thus endangering the university itself. But the most important thing is that this incarnation amid power tends to distance the university from social reality as it is lived by the poorest and most marginalized. Incarnation in a world of power leads to a disincarnation from the social world of the majority; in a Christian sense, from the social world most demanded by faith and most apt for the living out of Christian inspiration. This incarnation in the midst of power may result in the university's working and presenting itself to the world in a way that is out of harmony with Gospel ideals. Above all, it may result in a distancing from the world on the underside of history, whence the demands of the kingdom of God are best understood.

An unreflective appeal to the autonomy of university learning is dangerous. It is a necessary appeal in the face of any kind of unwarranted pressure, but a dangerous appeal if by it university learning should feign ignorance of social reality, or if university knowledge should cease to critique itself. The human person seeks truth through reason, but not through reason alone. The sociology of knowledge teaches us that there is always interest prior to knowledge.

Epistemology demonstrates that to intelligence belongs not only the weight of establishing and giving meaning to reality, but also its ethical and practical dimensions. In the words of Ignacio Ellacuria, "to study a situation" is indissolubly linked with "accepting the burden of that situation" and "becoming responsible for the situation." Reason is not immune from the ethical and the practical; and from the point of view of revelation, it is not immune from concupiscence and sinfulness. Truth may be manipulated, not merely attained, with wickedness and injustice (Rom 1:18).

This is to say that knowledge can respond to different interests, consciously or unconsciously, and that the inevitable need to verify which interests are served by knowledge does not disappear by an appeal to its autonomy; that knowledge can be reduced to the noetic moment itself, thereby intentionally evading ethical and practical responsibility; that knowledge can discover and demonstrate reality but also cover it over and suppress it. A university, like any other institution, can serve one group of interests or another, can serve reality or abandon it to its misery, can denounce it or justify it. This ambiguity is typical of the university in the name of its specific instrumentality: knowledge.

The Christian character of a university is not, therefore, evident from the mere fact that it claims to be Christian. In view of recent history—and certainly that of the third world—the university's Christian character is questionable. If a Christian university can and should exist, those conditions need to be demonstrated that permit the fostering of what is Christian and overcoming (or minimizing) negative by-products.

Before speaking of the Christian principles that can guide a university and be operative in a university situation, it is important to analyze some university activities that can seem to justify a Christian university. These activities are or can be good in themselves, but we see them as insufficient, for both theoretical and historical reasons, in light of the negative by-products they generate.

In the first place, the educational dimension of a university is not a sufficient justification for its existence. The horizon and finality of a university, as we shall see, is social reality as such. The formation of individuals from the educational horizon and to that end is important in itself; but if there is a concentration on that and it serves to hide the primary horizon and finality, it is dangerous. It is good to promote education, even of just a few, but it is dangerous if that leads to a concern for the education of those few and only of them. The problem is not one of numbers, but rather of horizon; of whether, consciously or unconsciously, the educational values to be promoted are determined from the few rather than from the many, or even against the many. Education, as professional education, is a still weaker justification since, with rare exceptions, university graduates reinforce the social systems that do not benefit the poor majorities and that, in the third world, are against the majorities, with resources which, in the final analysis, come from the majorities.

In the second place, the Christian formation of university members, particularly the students, is also not sufficient justification. Besides the intrinsic difficulty of managing to respond to them in any major way and of making the student body an important social force of Christian inspiration, the university is only accidentally a place of pastoral activity. The

Christian character of a university is not measured by religious practices, but rather by service to a more human configuration of society—through what is Christian—and by service to the configuration of a people of God as leaven for the kingdom of God in society. No less is it sufficient justification in secularized societies that a specific university may offer a secure place where faith can be maintained. Although this may be a noble task, it too is not what the university is specifically about; and it is dangerous if these religious/pastoral activities—often converted into islands within the university—should offer an excuse for not carrying out other more specifically university-related Christian tasks.

In the third place, it is also not sufficient justification that the university be a place of theological productivity. It is such, undoubtedly, and it does offer great advantages for this: the rigorous exercise of theological reasoning, interdisciplinary studies—if they are really carried out—and an empowering mutual criticism with other fields of knowledge. From this point of view, the university offers the possibility of a scientific theology more open to truth and less subject to ecclesial vested interests: it offers the possibility of “declericalizing” theology. But it also offers the temptation of disconnecting theology from its real roots in history and in the people of God, of “depolarizing” theology. This is dangerous, not because theology, its rigor and its methods, may be different from the living out and self-reflection of faith among the poor—which is evident and necessary—but rather because it may distance theology from the real substance of faith and the real hopes of the poor. It may lead theology to believe that it does not need the poor. That a university be productive theologically is important; but this does not automatically transform it into a Christian university until we see what kind of theology is produced, and whether the fact that it is done at a university helps it to be a more Christian theology.

Finally, it is not a sufficient justification that a university, through its school of theology, become a defender of ecclesial orthodoxy. It is important that once a Christian university exists it relate to orthodoxy, clarifying and bringing out the potential of the real truth in orthodoxy and defending it, even though it is a complex matter to determine precisely in what this defense consists and what will be the best way to defend it. But the finality of a Christian university does not lie formally in the defense of a truth accepted *a priori*; rather, in making society grow in the direction of the kingdom of God through whatever is true in the tradition and through the continuing clarification of that truth to make it fruitful.

II. Christian Principles that Inspire a University

Proceeding from this historical consideration, I want to mention some Christian principles which, of their nature, offer a better hope of

overcoming the limitations and negative tendencies of a university and inspiring its Christian task in a positive way. These are principles drawn from faith although interpreted by a theology, and this may make them a matter for discussion. They are principles that should be applied in history according to times and situations, according to which there can be discussion as to how and whether they can be applied. But they are suggested because they have given birth to important university and Christian realities.

The first principle is that the kingdom of God should be the horizon and finality of a Christian university. As horizon, the kingdom of God points to a new world which, in turn, makes reference to the reality of an old world. What this old world, the reality of the world in which we live, may be, is the first question posed by the kingdom of God. In general, it is not difficult to acknowledge that the world as such is in crisis: a crisis of nuclear and ecological threats but also a crisis of meaning, of human meaning and the meaning of faith. But the major crisis is that of life itself. For those of us who live in the third world, this crisis is a fact of daily experience. Any scientific analysis of society verifies it. At the close of this century, one-third of Latin America's population, about 170 million human beings, will be almost unable to reach a subsistence level. They will be subject to biological poverty, which is to say the inability to satisfy their basic vital needs. The more universal and blatant reality is that of poverty, defined in the third world as a real nearness to death, to the slow death imposed by unjust and oppressive economic structures, which the Medellín Conference called "institutionalized violence." It is also a proximity to sudden and violent death, when repression or the wars spawned by poverty produce numerous victims. For this vantage point, other crises and other poverties will need to be understood analogically, but here is the prime analogate. In Christian terms, the world has not managed to become the creation God wanted, but rather, on the contrary, a world of death, a world of sin.

This is no novelty in the history of humanity. The Hebrew scriptures and Jesus of Nazareth saw the world in this way, and amid this reality proclaimed the kingdom of God as God's responses to the sin of the world. With this proclamation it is affirmed that, despite all appearances, there can be hope. There is good news and a meaning to history, but understood not primarily as the meaning of individuals who already have their lives guaranteed; rather as the meaning of history felt by whole peoples and the majorities of humanity. In the second place, the proclamation of the kingdom of God is a practical demand to make it happen, to create history according to the good news proclaimed, to transform history. From the original compassion that the real world should produce, we must posit signs that the kingdom is possible. Above all, we must transform oppressive structures so that new ones

may guarantee life and not death. Finally, the kingdom of God is utopia: it moves toward developments that are ever broader and fuller, toward greater freedom and improved culture, toward more humanization and a more complete openness to God. But this utopia should develop from the necessary minimum: from a just life for the poor majorities that can make community possible. Without a just life, history itself is deprived of meaning; and without community, people's lives lack meaning.

The kingdom of God is the horizon and finality of all Christian activity, both personal and institutional. It is also that of a Christian university. The kingdom demands certain conditions of the university and offers it some possibilities. The kingdom demands above all that the university understand itself explicitly as one of the social forces through which the kingdom is or is not built up. The university may not appeal subtly or grossly to the autonomy of learning in order to feign ignorance of its intrinsic social dimension in shaping the kingdom. The kingdom demands that the university seek its center outside itself—de-centering is a Christian demand not only on individuals but also on institutions—in order that the university place itself at the service of the kingdom and not of itself. The kingdom demands that a university as a whole reach out to society in order to lead it toward the kingdom, in such a way that the specific university activities, *viz.* research and teaching, be transformed into a social project. It demands that the university project signs and structures of the kingdom and that this projection be not merely something drawn from the facts of research and teaching—whether for or against the kingdom—but something explicitly sought, cultivated, and verified.

The kingdom also demands that the university take on the sin of the anti-kingdom, since kingdom and anti-kingdom are not symmetrical historical possibilities. On the contrary, the former should be proclaimed and carried out within and against the latter. We must be clear that the university does not operate in a neutral world, but rather in a world fraught with anti-kingdom which is seeking actively to place the university at its service. This anti-kingdom reacts against the university when the latter denounces and unmasks it and seeks to replace it with the kingdom. It would be an illusion to think that the university cannot or should not be subject to attacks and persecutions. Persecution by the powerful becomes an important principle of verification as to whether a university has had or has lacked Christian inspiration.

But the kingdom of God offers possibilities to the university. It orients the basic hypotheses of the university as a whole: what is the fundamental sin to be denounced and eradicated, what is the direction which should determine all of the university's functions and activities? The kingdom facilitates for the university a unified understanding of its diverse functions—research, teaching and social projects—in such a

way that these do not turn into conflicting dimensions but rather converge toward a single goal. The kingdom encourages the investigation of reality according to its resemblance to the kingdom or lack thereof. It encourages communication through teaching what has been researched and discovered. It requires projecting these discoveries in society and changing society according to what has been researched.

The kingdom of God can generate a mystique in the university as a whole and in its members. It offers above all a sense of reality, that the university is part of this world with its joys and sorrows, that it is coresponsible with and not separate from the rest of humanity. It offers dignity, not in the worldly sense of praise and prestige, but in the sense of serving the life of the people. It offers reconciliation, not distancing from other human beings. In a Christian sense, the kingdom of God offers the meaning and joy of following Jesus in a university.

In this way, the university can also unify two problems which in some places appear quite distinct: that of the practical transformation of society, and the problem of contextual meaning. Because of historical conditioning in some place, one or the other problem may be the more emphasized. But it can be asked whether one cause of contextual meaninglessness—not the only one—may not be a double disconnectedness: of the individual with respect to humanity, and of the meaning of one's life with respect to the reality of life itself. To orient oneself by the kingdom of God may be one form, certainly not a mechanical one, of reconciling the individual with humanity and thus, the meaning of life with life itself. In this way the university can be not only a transforming social force but also a locus of meaning.

If the first principle is that the kingdom of God is the horizon and finality of a Christian university, the second is the option for the poor. Theoretically, the kingdom of God can be promoted in diverse ways, but from a faith perspective it should be carried out from an option for the poor. This option, in fact, is not a specifically Christian thing, but Christian faith elevates it to something of a right. In one sense, it has a more specifically Christian logic than the kingdom of God. The reality and even the terminology of the option for the poor is not often reflected upon theoretically in the first world—even though the extraordinary synod in Rome of 1971 has universalized it. It may baffle some people as a guiding principle for a university. The reason may be that it is considered as, and reduced to, a purely pastoral ecclesial topic foreign to the university. The substantial partiality of the option for the poor seems to be a threat to the universality of the university.

But the option for the poor is not reduced to the former nor, even though it is specific, does it deny the latter. The option for the poor, before becoming concretized in pastoral forms of ecclesial activity, is a hermeneutical principle, a preunderstanding which is consciously

adopted, a hypothesis, if you will (Juan Luis Segundo), in order to observe and analyze reality and to act accordingly. It is a conviction—present in Christian faith and confirmed historically by many—that from this perspective one can observe reality better and more thoroughly and act more effectively to improve reality. The option for the poor, then, is something that has to do theologically and anthropologically with every human being at every level of their reality—whether they know it or not. It is no mere regional and pastoral thing. Nor is it, on the other hand, a threat to the university, empirically because humanity in general is quantitatively poor but, more important still, because the option for the poor does not mean to focus on a part of the whole in order to ignore the rest, but rather to reach out to the whole from one part.

What the option for the poor demands and makes possible at a university is that it be a place of incarnation, insofar as the university is a social force, and a specific light for the university's own learning. Incarnation or, better, adequate incarnation, is something essential to Christianity. It is not a problem to be resolved in some theoretical way at the intentional level, since incarnation supposes a certain materiality which conditions and makes possible any activity. From a faith perspective, the required place for incarnation is the world of the poor. This does not mean an obligation which, for a university, would be a practical impossibility of physical and geographical incarnation among the poor. Nor in principle is it implemented by a change of membership in the student body (although something of both could signify an adequate incarnation). Neither does it imply an abandoning of specifically university methods or of the required resources. What it does mean is that the world of the poor has entered the university, that its real problems are being taken into account as something central, that social reality is being dealt with by the university—and that the legitimate interests of the poor are being defended because they are those of the poor. How the world of the poor enters the university materially is something to be analyzed in each case; but it is important that university members be seriously interested in bringing it in, perhaps in the form of problems, of aspirations, and of questions posed to the university. It is important that the university be a physical space in which the poor and the landless peasants, the grassroots people and Indian leaders, can raise their voices in challenging whatever needs to be answered.

Further indicators of whether the world of the poor has entered the university are its own mode of procedure outside itself. How does it allocate human and material resources to this or that project? How does it see to a more equitable distribution of financial resources among members of the university by exercising austerity on the one hand and, on the other, by avoiding flagrant inequities? Does the university exercise a measure of self-discipline in its external affairs?

It is unreal to think that a university can be physically in the world of the poor, but it is necessary that it see the world from the point of view of the poor. This world must enter the university's mind and heart. Such concern helps the university overcome the temptation to worldliness. Being required to use intellectual power and the necessary economic resources, being in the world together with other economic, political, and ecclesial powers that try to place it at their service, the university needs a counterweight if it is to be relevant to the world without being worldly. The option for the poor makes possible the overcoming of that danger. Without that option the balance is difficult to attain. If the university, like any other Christian institution, should be unable to fulfill the law of incarnation, it would have no viability as Christian. The option for the poor makes a Christian university possible. Moreover, it grants it a credibility that enables it to be of influence in society. Because of its academic excellence, the university should have prestige. But in order to fulfill its social mission adequately, this prestige has to be accompanied by a university's credibility.

The option for the poor is useful, further, for the exercise of the university's intellectual resources. The poor offer a light to these resources, specifically to theological knowledge. Although it may not be a conclusion of natural reason, revelation affirms that in the Suffering Servant of YHWH there is light, that in Christ crucified there is wisdom. These biblical texts demand of the believer a faith reading, but they can also be read historically. The world of the poor offers a kind of light for awareness that is obtained nowhere else. Not that the world of the poor offers the university an awareness already developed. It does not provide scientific methods of research but it does offer light. This light comes from the underside of history, enabling us to see reality not only from the perspective of being but also the perspective of non-being, from oppression and death, and from the pain and protest these provoke. All this forces knowledge, objectively received, to be liberating and not merely descriptive. But the world of the poor is also a positive light, most surely for theological knowledge. The poor become a *locus theologicus*, a place of discernment of God's actual presence in the world, and a place of generating a faith response to that presence, "the evangelizing potential of the poor" affirms Puebla; they become the locus of theology. From the poor, formal aspects highly important for revelation and faith are rediscovered: that the truth of revelation is above all good news, that God's revelation is partial, that the proclamation of the good news is carried out in an anti-kingdom which is contrary to it and which acts against it. And from the poor, important contents of revelation are reformulated: the God of life, the good news to the poor, Christ the liberator, the Church of the poor, the also-political dimension of love, and many more.

It may be discussed theoretically whether the poor offer a strictly theological subject matter (something that is discussed within the theology of liberation; see the exchange between Segundo and Leonardo Boff); but it is a matter beyond discussion that the poor offer light for the reformulation of these contents and their rediscovery in the same revelation. It is a striking fact that realities of faith which are today declared essential to the Gospel have been ignored by theology for centuries. The Vatican instructions on liberation theology now recognize that it is essential to the Gospel message; nevertheless, liberation has been absent from theology. The same might be said of the subject of the poor itself, of the option for them, of prophetic denunciation, of martyrdom as a Christian death, and of the effective revaluing of central Bible passages such as Luke 4:18ff.; Matthew 25; Exodus 3 and 5; the Servant of the Lord, etc. These rediscoveries have been made by theology, but not only by doing theology. They have been made possible by a light that comes from the poor of the world. For theological knowledge—and analogously for the other fields of knowledge cultivated at the university—academic excellence is an obvious necessity that cannot be replaced by an option for the poor; but without taking account of the poor, a university can degenerate into pure, sterile, and even alienating, academicism. By taking account of the poor, theology can realize its potential and become truly relevant.

The option for the poor, finally, can illumine the sense in which university must be a place of pluralism. Pluralism as a social and ideological phenomenon is a fact in the first world; pluralism as a university phenomenon is inherent in a university, at least insofar as it consciously cultivates various fields of knowledge and, through academic freedom, takes on and even values disparities and differences. A university as a place of pluralism is important and beneficial, first of all because in this way it expresses that truth must be sought out and maintained without dogmatism but also because the university can offer a sign of respect and tolerance which, above all in situations of social conflict, humanizes and permits forums for rational dialogue.

An option for the poor does not negate pluralism and its positive values, but it does place limits on it. In the face of injustice, oppression, and repression, there can be no institutional neutrality. The entire university should be in accord, at least morally, on a minimum standard of living for the poor. At a Christian university there may be religious, and even ideological, pluralisms; but the option for the poor should not on that account disappear. Rather the institution has the capacity to bring together objectively the diversity of academic fields and religious stances. The minimum that the option for the poor imposes on the university is that, in the name of pluralism, notorious aberrations will not be tolerated. The maximum is that the university as a whole, while respecting legitimate pluralisms shall make this option.

III. *University Application of Christian Principles in History*

The principles explained above seem necessary and empowering for any Christian activity or institution whatever. What must be asked is whether and how a university can adopt these principles as a university. This analysis will have to be done in detail for each case; but here we limit ourselves to enunciating the possibility as a principle.

The kingdom of God, as utopian proclamation of a new human person in a new land, can and in a Christian sense ought to be the horizon and finality of a university. Of its nature, a university is more akin to the kingdom's social and structural dimension without this signifying an abandonment in principle of the personal, but taking into account that there are other places more proper to the latter. In fact, merely by its existence as a social force the university shapes society, by action and omission, along a particular kingdom or anti-kingdom line. But the university can promote the kingdom actively and positively, not simply by existing in a certain stance. Its scientific research can analyze rationally what constitutes, at any particular time, anti-kingdom, the greatest sin: what are its structural causes, what alternative models must be proposed, and what steps must be taken. In addition, a method of instruction that would teach before all else the national reality (albeit with the grave difficulties mentioned above), that would orient the training of professionals to respond to the problems of the national reality, would be a form of promoting the kingdom.

An effective, utopian, and credible word is the basic way to promote the kingdom. The same is true of the university. If on a Christian level this is the word of faith, at the university level it is the true, rational, and scientific word. That university word can be effective, based above all on its own rationality; it is a powerful word which can shake unjust structures when it denounces them, can offer methods and techniques for implementing the signs of the kingdom, and can influence the collective conscience in the direction of the kingdom. It is also a utopian word insofar as it proposes solutions and the best solutions, goals which are ever new and ever more fulfilling, even though it adds to utopia the realism of means more rationally suited to its attainment. It should also be a credible word so it can be accepted and have influence. The primary source of its credibility arises from the theoretical objectivity of its analysis, its denunciations and proposals. To this must be added what in general promotes social credibility: independence from the powers of this world, university accompaniment of the poor, the running of risks for them. This effective utopian and credible word is what can make the university reach out to society, and when this word is communicated, the university accomplishes its function of social involvement.

The option for the poor, finally, can also be a strictly university option, although as option its roots go beyond the realm of the univer-

sity. Any scientific analysis of poverty establishes its immensity and cruelty. It establishes its fundamentally historical nature, that is to say, its basis on structures created by human beings. And analysis establishes the dialectical nature of poverty, which is to say that there are poor because there are rich and there are rich at the expense of the poor. This latter might be a subject for discussion here, although it is not so in the third world. It is also recognized as such by the magisterium of the church. Scientific knowledge of reality leads to at least a serious possibility of the option, and in the third world it leads to the necessity of the option. Therefore the university can also make an option for the poor as a university. It can and in the third world must "be knowledge for those who have no voice, intellectual support for those who as part of their reality have truth and reason although they have been deprived of all else, but who do not have at their disposal the academic reasons to justify and legitimize their truth and their reason" (Ellacuria). The option for the poor is not then something merely affective, although the poor may move hearts; it is not something purely ethical, although the poor may shake consciences and demand commitment; it is something rational, and therefore can and should be an option for a university as such.

The convergence of Christian principles and the nature of the university, in the application of both in history as we have presented them from a third world perspective, demonstrates that a Christian university is possible. What is Christian has no reason to do violence to a university, but can rather offer it direction and mystique. It can help it to heal the particular concupiscence and sinfulness of a university. The university has no reason to be distant from what is Christian; rather it can convert itself into an instrument of what is Christian, specifically with respect to what is structural.

The historical and religious reality of Latin America demands and makes possible the following type of Christian university: a university reoriented in favor of the majority of people (to use historical terms); a university reoriented in favor of the poor, of God's preferred ones (to use Christian terms). I should want to add, nonetheless, although briefly, another traditional goal of the university, which in Latin America is being revalued for historical reasons. I refer to the idea that the university is a place for cultivating the spirit.

From this perspective we must recognize that in Latin America a double rediscovery has been made in recent years. On the one hand, the most fundamental, irrevocable, and—for the foreseeable future—irreversible conviction is that the Christian necessity is to build up the kingdom, to struggle for justice, to liberate the poor majorities. On the other hand, the need has also been felt to imbue the practice of the kingdom with spirit so that it may reach its potential and heal the

inevitable negative by-products it generates. But it has been established that spirit does not arise mechanically from praxis, although the latter may promote it; rather spirit must be explicitly cultivated. Thus religious and social grassroots movements value more and more the cultural, the artistic, the celebrative, while the theology of liberation increasingly develops the theme of spirituality to promote a liberation with spirit. The dimensions of spirit in particular which the university can cultivate are the true and the aesthetic.

Although the university should place truth on the side of building up the kingdom, the cultivating of truth is not exhausted by it. To seek truth, to be open to it as both inspiration and critique, to let it be and contemplate it is something deeply humanizing and necessary. This, done without the *hubris* that cripples the whole venture, is a way of being open to the mystery of reality and the mystery of God. The activity of the search and the gratuity of the attraction must be harmonized. We have to produce results based on the mystery of reality and of God, but we must also contemplate the true, let it be, receive from it. The true then continues to be something useful but more than merely useful. It becomes that which humanizes human beings insofar as it is sought out and contemplated. It prevents a praxis that is both urgent and necessary from degenerating into pragmatism.

The cultivating of the aesthetic and, more generally, the sacramental and celebrative dimension of human reality is a humanizing process. Through it people express themselves, their meaning, their ideal sentiments. With the aesthetic and the sacramental, the mystery of reality and the mystery of God show that they are capable of evoking response, provoking to action, and calling people together. The necessary rationale for praxis does not degenerate into rationalism, but becomes humanism.

The university can and should be a place for cultivating the true and the beautiful, a place for contemplation and artistic expression. In this sense it can also be a place where cultures are encountered with their human and Christian values.

None of this, either of itself or from the point of view of the university's primary goal, is to be scorned, but rather desired. The only thing to be added is that the contemplative, the aesthetic, and the cultural are not to be understood in an elitist or classist way. They may not be used as justification for evading the university's principal goal. If the university were to act without this goal, the spirit would have no flesh; and if the university were to act against this goal, there would be a spirit not of life but of death. But if the university acts together with the building up of the kingdom of God, it promotes life, and life in greater abundance.

IV. *Two Minimum Requisites for a Christian University*

Everything expressed so far has been from the perspective of the third world, with the hope that it may inspire a Christian university. Whatever of this can be put into practice must be discerned in each case.

I should like to mention two concrete points in closing which seem important to me for any Christian university. They concern me more directly because of the theological work we develop in a third world country. These are some minimal requirements offered which can be of maximum importance. I refer to the relationship between the university and theology and between the university and universality.

University and Theology

A Christian university should be a place of encounter between faith and science, between faith and culture. This is necessary from the perspective of theology because the faith that underlies theology affirms that what is Christian has the capacity to inspire and bring to fullness any cultural expression, any branch of learning; and what is Christian needs to find in these expressions ways to incarnate itself. From the perspective of culture and science encounter is necessary because they offer theology not only challenges, but also possible purifications, that is, contributions to content and scientific rigor in method, both of which should be welcomed by theology.

This should not mean that theology becomes disconnected from the original reality in which faith is lived, where needs arise and motivations for theology as well. Theology is done in the university as a physical place and as a scientific place; but it should not be done with the university as its ultimate place of inspiration. Theology should be done rather from and for the original locus of faith; the people of God. This, as theology itself recognizes, is the place where the signs of the times and the newness of the Spirit are verified, the place where the sources of theological knowledge are concretized. But the people of God is the place of theological truth before it is the place of theology. Theology, then, must be turned toward this people; it should be inserted effectively among them, draw its agenda from them and accompany them. In this sense, university theology should be a moment of "theo-praxis" for the whole people of God. It should be considered as a theoculture, a Christoculture, an ecclesioculture, that is, an instrument that cultivates and nurtures the faith, hope, and love of God's people.

This does not mean, we repeat, that theology as a university and scientific study is rendered unnecessary; quite to the contrary. The cultivation of theological truth and the transmitting of God's mystery continue to be of primary importance. Theological-scientific knowledge that illumines the whence and whither of the people of God continues to

be necessary, a theological-scientific knowledge that relates this people's faith moment with the social and cultural reality of their lives. Such theological-scientific knowledge can overcome the spontaneity and shortsightedness of this people of God in the course of history. Theology, as a university discipline, can remove certain limitations that arise from doing theology from other perspectives: clericalism, when theology is oriented unilaterally toward purely ministerial formation, and precipitous activity when there is an effort to respond only to immediate situations. University theology has a specific function and responsibility, but within the people of God. Disconnected from this people, theology's necessary responsibility before science can degenerate into sterile academics. From within the people of God and focused on them, theology can help them grow and receive from them real impulses of faith, hope, and love in order to grow itself as theology.

University and Universality

University and universality have always been interrelated. The university has always considered itself a locus of the universality of learning. It has sought to be a mirror for the academic and scientific universe. This universalizing perspective is natural to the university. To conclude, I should like to propose from the depths of our Christian faith still another conception of the universality of the university.

Following St. Ignatius of Loyola in his meditation on the incarnation, we must keep before our eyes the whole of humanity in its great variety of situations, as he viewed it, traveling toward perdition. Today, too, humanity finds itself on the road to perdition more than to salvation. In these days, according to United Nations' reports, the five thousand millionth human being is on the point of being born. What lies ahead for this person is malnutrition and unemployment.

I would ask all universities, and specifically those of the first world, to be universal, to see the whole world and not merely their own world, to look at the world from the perspective of the third world majorities and not only from the exceptional islands of the first world. I would ask that, in this looking, their hearts be moved to compassion and that they decide, as St. Ignatius says, to *do* salvation. I ask them to ask themselves, as Ignatius did before Christ crucified, "What have we done and what are we going to do for the Crucified and for the crucified peoples?"

I propose to you, therefore, that the universality of the university take the third world very much into account; that the university know it, analyze it, and understand it; that the university make the third world a fundamental perspective of its work; that it place itself at the service of the third world; that it work, struggle, and outdo itself for the third world's salvation, in such a way that all the sub-worlds may find salvation in the salvation of us all.

How the universities should do this concretely is not up to me to determine, but rather to the universities. The only thing I should like to add is that the third world is offering not only urgent ethical and practical demands to the universities, but light, hope, mystique, and meaning, too. To serve the third world is to become incarnate in the true humanity of today. It is to recover the dignity of simply being a human person. It is to make reparation for the centuries-long sin of oppression and to experience pardon. It is to receive encouragement, hope, and grace.

To serve the third world is to give, but it is also to receive. What is received is of a different order from what is given and normally much superior to what it given. It is to receive humanity and, for believers, to receive faith. In this giving and receiving, the university is more than addition and more than complementarity; it is mutual support and solidarity.

Every human being and every Christian is called to this solidarity in a world battling between life and death. Universities are called, too. If in Latin America and in Europe, in San Salvador and in Deusto, Bilbao, the universities listen to and gather up the sufferings and hopes of a crucified humanity, then a solidarity among the universities and through them can be established. More important still is a solidarity among peoples and among the human beings of this world. Then it will be a little easier for the whole of humanity to go about being transformed into a single people of God, to set out toward the kingdom of God. If and when any of this occurs, it will be because the university has inspired our world, and because what is Christian has inspired the university.

—Translated by Simon E. Smith, S.J.



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