

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY TO THE  
LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH**  
*By Francis Cardinal Arinze*

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1- A Day of joy

It is a joy to participate at the Commencement events of a young and dynamic Catholic liberal arts college such as Thomas More College. From what I have learned, this dear institution is dedicated to forming students intellectually and spiritually within the Catholic intellectual tradition and with unapologetic fidelity to the Magisterium, or the Teaching Authority of the Church.

May I, therefore, propose to you some reflections on "The Contribution of a Catholic University to the Life and Mission of the Church".

A serious and authentic Catholic College or University has to strive to provide its students rigorous education on relations between faith and reason, on Specialization and Orientation, and on Science and Ethics. Students need a realistic and dynamic philosophy of life that shows them how to make a synthesis between religion and daily life. There will thus result an acceptable integral development of the human person. And the Catholic College or University will have succeeded in forming and turning out model Christians who are good citizens.

These will now be the elements for our reflection.

2. Faith and Reason

There is no doubt that human reason is capable of arriving at objective truth. The natural sciences and the field of sound philosophy are examples of what the Human mind has been able to achieve. Reason, however, cannot arrive at the depth and height of everything, especially as regards the deeper truths concerning God and religion.

Faith is knowledge of divine and spiritual realities made available to us by God who freely reveals himself without any merit on our own. By faith, God brings us to knowledge which we would never have attained by natural reason.

Reason and faith are related. "Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents" (John Paul II; *Fides et Ratio*, 42).

Both reason and faith come from God, the first in the natural order, and the second in the supernatural. God is truth. Truth does not contradict itself (cf *Fides et Ratio*, 43; *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 7). It was Thomas Aquinas who said: "whatever its source, truth is of the Holy Spirit" (I-II, 109, 1 ad 1). Faith needs reason in order to be articulated in a sound theological synthesis. Reason needs faith in order not to deprive people of the riches of God's revelation.

A Catholic College or University is expected to make a dynamic presentation of this basic truth. Sound philosophy and healthy theology go hand in hand. Reflections on Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the Church are thus presented, under the guiding interpretation of the Church's Magisterium, in a way that does honour to a university.

As Pope John Paul II says in the Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Catholic Universities "are called to explore courageously the riches of Revelation and of nature so that the united endeavour of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, renewed even more marvelously, after sin, in Christ, and called to shine forth in the light of the Spirit" (*Ex Corde Ecd*, 5).

If a Catholic College or University adopts this attitude of "courageous creativity and rigorous fidelity" (*op. cit.*, 8), it will be able to contribute much to promote a healthy synthesis between faith and culture in society. We all recall the famous statement of Pope John Paul II: "The synthesis between culture and faith is a necessity not only for culture, but also of faith... A faith that does not become culture is a faith that is not fully received, not entirely thought through and not faithfully lived" (John Paul II: *Autograph Letter instituting the Pont. Council for Culture*, 20 May 1982, in AAS 74 (1983)683-688).

### 3. Specialization and Basic Orientation

We need specialists in the various fields of human endeavour: law, medicine, surgery, physics, biotechnology, psychological sciences, computer science, aviation, space exploration and various industrial technologies.

But the growing citizen, the student, and indeed every adult needs an important basic orientation in life. Before being a neurosurgeon or a legal luminary, a person is first of all brother, sister, spouse, parent, citizen or colleague. A basic orientation of the human being to human love and life, to family, to citizenship, to work, to solidarity and interdependence, and indeed to life on earth in general, is necessary. It is not an optional.

It would be risky to produce citizens who specialize in one little area of life but have no viable vision of the whole of life. While no one pretends to know something about everything, it would be even more dangerous to have to deal with a person who parades himself as knowing everything about a tiny aspect of life, and who is therefore lost in discussing or understanding anything except his own area of specialization.

A Catholic College or University has an important role in providing this basic orientation in life. Inspired by the Catholic faith, it strives in the light of the Gospel to bring students to appreciate the beautiful, the good and the true. The meeting with Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, in the Church and through the Church, provides a viable Church community in which life endeavours can be seen in a healthy synthesis. A young and lively liberal arts Catholic College is well positioned to provide this orientation.

### 4. Science and Ethics

The human being who explores the frontiers of science and technology is the same human being who is spouse, father, mother, son, daughter, citizen, ruler, company director, bank official, medical doctor, merchant, or otherwise. Relationship with one's neighbour is an important dimension to be considered in human action.

Even more important are man's relations with God. He is our Creator. We are his creatures. "It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps 100:3). Divine Providence keeps everything in existence and in the divinely established order. A human being who dares to deny God theoretical and practical recognition should be considered ridiculous. "Without the Creator", testifies the Second Vatican Council, "the creature would disappear... When God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36). Secularism stands condemned because it is an effort to conduct life as if God did not exist, as if God were interfering. Pope Benedict XVI condemns this ideology because it "presents itself in culture as planning of the world and of humanity without reference to Transcendence, invades every aspect of daily life and develops a mentality in which God is in reality absent, totally or in part, from human existence or consciousness" (Address to Plenary Assembly of the Pont. Council for Culture, on 8 March, 2008).

The scientist, therefore, should not regard whatever is physically possible as also morally lawful. Human action has to take into account the natural law, the eternal law of God written into human nature. Pope John Paul II, when he visited Mount Sinai in 2000, said that before God wrote and gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, he already wrote them into the human heart. That is why people of all religions and cultures, when they are not weighed down by ideology or human weakness, can recognize most of the dictates of the Ten Commandments.

A Catholic College or University educates students to appreciate that moral rules of right and wrong apply also to science, technology, politics, trade and commerce, and indeed to all human endeavours.

##### 5. Philosophy of Life. Map for Life Journey

Nostra Aetate notes that people seek in the various religions answers to the profound and fundamental questions which accompany and torment human existence on earth: what is man? Where do we come from? What is the purpose of life? What is goodness and what is sin? How do we explain sorrows, sickness, death? What is the path to true happiness? What happens after death? What can we know about God?

A Catholic College or University has the hard and important task of orienting its students to face these fundamental questions. Providentially, God has not left us only at the level of philosophy and reason alone. The Eternal Father has in the fullness of time sent his Only-begotten Son to be our Saviour (cf Heb 1:1; Roman Missal: Euch. Prayer IV). Jesus Christ, God from God, Light from Light, has shown us the way to the Father. He himself tells us that he is "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). Those who follow him will not be walking in the darkness but will have the light of life (cf Jn 8:12). "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of him who was to come, namely, Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

Jesus Christ is the key to our understanding ourselves, of the purpose of our life on earth, and of what we should do or not do in order to make a success of our earthly pilgrimage. A Catholic College or University helps its citizens to get oriented by this philosophy of life, by this essential road map. Jesus is the light that has come into the world (cf Jn 3:19), the true light that enlightens everyone (cf Jn 1:9), "the light of the world" *Qn* 8:12) who says to us: "Walk while you have the light" *Qn* 12:35).

## 6. Religion and Daily Life

The person who goes to Mass on Sunday is the same person who goes to work on Monday. The same person is Christian and citizen. The believer is the same person who is a family member, a work colleague, a medical practitioner and a member of Congress, an official of the United Nations.

The Christian must learn to make a synthesis between his duties as a citizen and his religious practices. There must be no divorce between these two dimensions of his life. The Second Vatican Council is rather clear: "The split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age... Therefore, let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties towards his neighbour and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 43). These are strong words coming from a General Council of the Church.

Apply this to Mr Paddy Smyth of whom it has been said: "Taddy Smyth always went to Mass; he never missed a Sunday. But Paddy Smyth went to hell, for what he did on Monday". The reason is that for Paddy Smyth, religion was an affair of one hour in church on Sunday. But on Monday where he was in parliament or Congress, or in the trade union meeting, or in the medical unit, he did not allow his religion to influence his action. He had not learned to make a vital synthesis between religion and life.

We can also in this light see the mistake of politicians who regard the Church as interfering in politics when the Pope or the Bishops speak on contraception, abortion, strange new definitions of family, the rights of workers, the education of children or what moral standards should guide the mass media. While the Church has no mandate from Christ to produce recipes for the solution of political or economic questions, the Church has the duty to invoke the light of the Gospel on various areas of human endeavour, on matters of right and wrong and on the morality of human acts in general (cf Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 28).

In the complicated world of today, where all kinds of ideas are struggling for the right of citizenship<sup>^</sup>, a university student needs a clear and viable orientation on the relationship between religion and life. The Catholic College or University is ideally positioned to help him see the light and equip himself for a significant contribution in society.

Here may I recommend to every Catholic student or graduate the "*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*". This excellent 525-page document produced by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace contains the best presentation of Catholic doctrine on such social matters as creation, the human person and his rights, the common good, social life, family, marriage, work, economy, the political community, the international community justice, peace, war and ecology.

#### 7. Integral Development of the Human Person

The Catholic College or University can do much to provide an education for the human person which is not partial or incomplete, but integral and all-embracing. Such education should help the human being to develop in all dimensions: physical, mental, spiritual and religious. The Christian thus becomes and behaves as a "new man in Christ" (cf Eph 2:15).

Too often people equate education with certificates, or with what can be tested in written or oral examinations. No doubt, we absolutely need intellectual development. But what does it profit us if a student is an intellectual giant but a moral baby; if he or she knows the year of the Battle of Waterloo and the amount of rainfall in Brazil; if he or she can shoot out mathematical or historical facts like a computer but is unfortunately a problem for the parents, corrosive acid among companions in the College, a drug addict and sexual pervert, a disgrace to the school, a waste-pipe in the place of work and Case number 23 for the Criminal Police? It is clear that intellectual development is not enough.

Deserving of special mention is education in the use of freedom. Pope Benedict stressed it when he spoke to Catholic educators in the United States on 17 April 2008 in the Catholic University of America. "While we have sought diligently to engage the intellect of our young, perhaps we have neglected the will. Subsequently we observe, with distress, the notion of freedom being distorted. Freedom is not an opting out. It is an opting in — a participation in Being itself. Hence authentic freedom can never be attained by turning away from God. Such a choice would ultimately disregard the very truth we need in order to understand ourselves".

The Holy Father continues and says that educators owe it in all "intellectual charity" to lead their students to the truth so that they exercise freedom in relation to truth. We can add that this is very necessary in the intellectual world of today where many people deny the objectivity of moral truth and where moral relativism is regarded as the accepted thing. A person who holds that certain actions, like direct abortion, are always objectively wrong, is regarded as "judgmental", or as imposing his views on others. The exercise of freedom in pursuit of the truth is very much a part of integral education. If a Catholic College or University does not help in this way, should we not say that it has failed in one of its important roles?

#### 8. Catholic University to form model Christian Citizens

If a Catholic College or University answers to its vocation in the ways outlined above, then it will be educating, forming and releasing into society model citizens who will be a credit to their families, their College, the Church and the State. It will prepare for us members of Congress or the Senate who will not say "I am a Catholic, but..."; but rather those who will say "I am a Catholic, and therefore..." They will be coherent both as Catholics and as citizens.

Their religion will not be just a matter of an hour or two on Sunday, but will also provide a vital synthesis for their activities on Monday through Saturday, and from January to December.

A Catholic College or University is also expected to inspire a generation of model Christian parents and to motive some students to opt for the priestly life or for the consecrated state.

This is our prayer. This is our hope for Thomas More College and for all Catholic Colleges or Universities. By the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Thomas More, may God pour his abundant blessings on the new graduates, all the students, their parents and the President, Faculty, Friends and Supporters of Thomas More College. May your contribution to the mission of the Church be dynamic, constant and to the point.

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