Fribourg: A Catholic University

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The University of Fribourg is a characteristically Swiss institution. It is not merely that it is situated in the capital of a proudly independent canton where two traditions in Switzerland, represented by the French and German languages, meet. The very notion of a University where nearly half of both students and professional staff are foreigners is true to the national tradition of world service. Although the world service consisted for many centuries in supplying mercenaries for the armies of Europe, it is now best represented by the Red Cross and the various organizations concerned with world co-operation. To understand the spirit of the University and appreciate its worth one must understand something of its setting.

Clarity is one of the most striking features of the country: perhaps it is the clarity of the air which produces clarity in other respects. The cleanliness of the trains and the hygiene of the hospitals are well-known. One might ascribe this merely to a passion for neatness, an impatience with lack of order. But I think this would be unjust, in spite of some features which suggest this interpretation. The steely fingers of bureaucracy extend over the land, cutting across even the treasured individualism of the cantons, to an extent which even the obedient Englishman would find difficult to stomach.

Mere tidy-mindedness might be invoked to explain all this, but there is more to be found than a niggling concentration on neatness: mere neatness is incompatible with tolerance, particularly with tolerance of diversity. Yet such tolerance is only less striking in Switzerland because it lies deeper below the surface, and therefore nearer to the heart of things. Tolerance has been inculcated into Switzerland from the beginning: it might almost be called her *raison d'être*. From the first formation of the Confederation by the union of the three cantons of Schwyz, Uri and Niederwalden in 1291 diversity and independence have held the balance, not without some jolts, against centralization. The great national saint, Bruder Klaus, as St Nicholas of Flüe is affectionately called, earns the place of devotion which he everywhere holds as much by his pacification of intercantonal strife in the fifteenth century as by the twenty years he spent in his rocky hermitage. With the

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advent of Luther and Calvin, tolerance was driven yet deeper, until now proselytizing is forbidden by federal law to Catholics and Protestants alike. The great theologian of Basel, Karl Barth, is regarded with veneration by Catholic professors, and in the striving towards unity and understanding the Protestant Professor Cullmann can suggest and achieve a collection among Catholics—and, while all Swiss carry their money very close to the heart, the Catholics are definitely poorer—for a Protestant charitable institution, and among Protestants for a similar Catholic institution.

But religious diversity is only one aspect of the differences in every respect which give the country its characteristic unity. There are Catholic cantons and Protestant cantons, so that one may cross from Catholic Fribourg in five minutes to Payerne in Protestant Vaud, where the tenth century Romanesque Abbey Church is being restored to form a concert hall. There are cantons so small that they can still hold a full democratic assembly of all men (a petition against any proposed new federal legislation needs only 30,000 signatures to secure the right to a popular vote in each canton), and cantons many times larger. There are mountain cantons and lowland cantons, industrial cantons and rural cantons barely touched by industry.

It must be the tact and respect for individual liberty which has trained Switzerland for the rôle she plays in world affairs. Everyone knows that the Red Cross stems from Switzerland, but it comes as a surprise that both International Postal and international Telegraph Unions also do so. Nor does this rôle belong to a past epoch, commemorated to-day only by the plethora of international meetings held at Geneva. In the Catholic sphere alone *Pax Romana* was founded in Switzerland, and only last year the Prefect of Propaganda presided in the Cathedral of St Gall at a solemn *Aussendung* of two hundred missionaries, from all parts of Switzerland, held to close the national World Missionary Year. That the lively awareness of the needs of other countries is not confined to the secular sphere is confirmed by the number of missionary congregations in the country. And one feels that in England the rector of a diocesan seminary would hardly secure the approval of his bishops for a public declaration that his dearest wish was fulfilled when one of his seminarians went to the foreign missions.

In such an atmosphere it is hardly surprising that in 1889 Georges Python founded a Catholic University. Fribourg has many claims: it is the capital of a canton which has always been a stronghold of the faith throughout the religious wars: the Catholic spirit is so strong that the

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inhabitants are willing to make the considerable monetary sacrifices necessary to maintain a university almost completely on the slender resources of an agricultural canton: for all the industry in Fribourg is tucked away in one small quarter of the town, and neither affects the atmosphere of the town nor provides employment to feed the families (of a truly Catholic size), in the medieval Basse Ville. But the Swiss character of the project is again in evidence, for on one Sunday in each year there is a sermon and collection for the University in every parish church throughout the country: the whole Catholic body is proud to have some part in the maintenance of this almost unique institution.

It would be wholly mistaken to suppose that Fribourg is an entirely theological university. The faculty of law is well thought of; there is a vigorous and growing faculty of science. Particularly important, perhaps, is the department of medicine, which produces Catholic doctors who have learnt not only the art of medicine, but the Catholic principles which must govern its application. Nor are the humanities neglected. Although the balance between the faculties is carefully maintained—the Rector being chosen from each in turn—it is not only, I think, in foreign eyes that the unique character of the university seems to come from its philosophical or theological faculties. It is from these that most of the internationalism comes apart from a highly-honoured group of students from the Congo, and they certainly provide the overwhelming majority of students. More convincing than numbers is the sight of seminarians and religious of every order and colour who fill the town. Here not only does a clerical habit cause no surprise—this is the case in Rome too; but it also entitles the wearer, not to the slight contempt of cosmopolitan Rome for clerical riff-raff, but to the courteous reception due to an honoured guest from his hosts the townsfolk, who are making such sacrifices for him.

Whether the spirit which pervades this international body of students is the result of infection from Swiss internationalism or the product of the awareness that 'we are all of one household in the Faith' might be disputed. Whatever the cause, the result comes as a striking revelation to one brought up in the persistent English tradition of an insular suspicion of foreigners. This is not to say that there is no trace of that nationalism which used periodically to shake the medieval university of Paris. No regular battles are likely to occur: but, when Church Unity Week included the invitation to a Protestant to give a lecture, the clearly and publicly expressed intolerance of the Spaniards aroused warmth in many quarters. But the retention of national characteristics,

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fostered by national clubs and societies, only serves to emphasize the essential unity between nations.

Such is the shell of the University. But important as is the work of promoting ecumenicism, of generating a real sense of the Catholicism of the Church and her union of purpose across the boundaries of geography and language, nevertheless this work is not the primary aim of the theological or philosophical faculties of the University. The *raison d'être* is to provide priests and religious who will return to their own country or canton with a firm grounding in theology such that they may diffuse further the light of the Christian revelation, in the various spheres of seminary, monastery, mission or parish. The method of providing this grounding is what I shall call the lecture system: this method has remained almost unaltered since medieval times when pupils gathered round a master to listen to the exposition of a text, of Aristotle perhaps, of Peter Lombard: indeed a distinguished English Dominican observed recently that the chief cause of the persistence of the system was the failure of the Church to wake up to the invention of printing. A comparison with the tutorial system, as practised in the faculties of Arts at Oxford University, might be of interest.

The student of theology will attend, each weekday except Thursday, three or (more usually) four lectures in the morning, and one or two in the evening. On Thursdays he may attend a 'seminar' group, lasting two hours and held on alternate weeks, at which one member of a group of fifteen or so under a professor will read a paper which is to form the subject of discussion, and is normally connected with the lectures which the professor is giving in his formal and compulsory course. The compulsory courses are perforce given in Latin, but subsidiary courses and seminars are given in the native language of the professor.

By contrast an Oxford arts undergraduate will consider himself hardly used if advised by his tutors to attend a dozen lectures in the week, and is unlikely to end the term still attending more than half that number. For lectures are only an adjunct to his private work under the direction of a tutor. This direction takes the form of a weekly hour with each of two tutors, when one of the two undergraduates (rarely three) who are appointed for that hour will read an essay lasting some fifteen or twenty minutes on a subject which they have both (theoretically) prepared through reading set the previous week by the tutor: this is followed by a discussion.

The lecture system is not without advantages. There are many pre-

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liminaries to any subject where a student can waste many hours gathering from various books the elements which can be given by a lecturer in a few minutes. Not only does this waste a few hours of the student's time: it may also waste his whole week and the tutor's time, when an entire essay is grounded on a simple and uninteresting misapprehension of fact (which will at least teach the pupil to verify his facts more carefully). Similarly, particularly when the starting point is a text, a lecturer may save the student heartbreaking hours of poring over an unintelligible but key passage by a historical introduction, citation of a parallel text, deft division of the text, or merely by explanation of an unfamiliar technical use of a word.

Another advantage is that an inspired teacher may in this way influence a whole generation, witness the devotion with which so many ex-students of Fribourg will speak of Professors Ramirez or Horvath. A tutor, on the other hand is unlikely to have more than thirty, or at most forty pupils at any one time. Among the many hundred tutors at Oxford, an undergraduate may be considered lucky if at some time he does not come under a tutor who is either too brilliant to teach, too bored by repetition of the same syllabus, or simply overburdened with college business. But the argument from bad teachers is patently two-edged: while a bad tutor's influence is restricted, a bad lecturer may contaminate a whole generation.

From the standard of lecturing at Fribourg it is clear that there is far more incentive to prepare a good clear exposition when the lecture is the chief means of instruction. When this is not the case it too often happens that the lecture-hall develops into a show-room where the lecturer displays in disorder the often original and interesting results of his researches, or into an amphitheatre where he fights his favourite enemies. But this again is two-edged, for while under the tutorial system the undergraduate may desert a bad lecturer, under the lecture system he would have no escape. Not only is it illegal, but he knows that the lecturer will be his examiner, so that he must become acquainted with the ideas on which he will be examined, however confused in content or presentation.

A final argument in favour of the lecture system is often considered to be the superiority of learning by oral methods than from books. Even were the reading not carefully guided I should doubt this. At Fribourg it is rare that a student is compelled to follow a course without the text of last year's course on his desk at the lecture: there are exceptions, and it would be most unjust to suppose that all the lectures are

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mere repetitions from previous years. But it is inevitable that much of the important matter should be repeated: since the student is not expected to read up for himself the basic material, he cannot subsist on a diet of the professor's latest interests. Besides, professors themselves distrust their pupils' powers of note-taking, and often circulate copies of the more difficult or intricate matters they have dealt with. At an international university this is even more natural, for it is on the whole easier to read than to understand an unfamiliar foreign tongue.

There is one inescapable advantage of the oral method of teaching. Facts and explanations could be gained from duplicated notes, but over and above these from an inspired teacher his audience will gain his enthusiasm and interest, an insight into his whole approach to a subject. It is not for his laborious expositions that a teacher is remembered, but for the *jeux d'esprit* which accompanied them. It is for these witty 'asides' that a master is remembered with affection: more—it is through these that his peculiar talent is communicated to his students: not only do they gain enthusiasm for the subject, they also acquire unnoticed the method of pursuing it, the 'feel' of it. Here again may be applied the phrase taken from Virgil by both St Augustine and St Thomas: *Trahit sua quemque voluptas*. This is the way of the true teacher, which cannot be communicated in books.

But it is not necessary to sit under such an inspired lecturer for three or five lectures a week throughout the course of four years in order to acquire what can be acquired of his method and enthusiasm. Apart from this the lecture system is best adapted to the presentation of facts: it is a good system for the transference of knowledge on a elementary level. But is this the purpose of a University? Newman gave it as his opinion in *The Idea of a University* that he would rather have a group of intellectually lively undergraduates living together, and discussing subjects of mutual interest without tuition, than living without discussion and assembling for lectures. The work must be done by the pupil; the master is only a midwife of knowledge.

Yet the lecture system is adapted to the presentation of conclusions, not to inducing the pupil to work out problems for himself. This gives the system a widely differing value according to the different subjects to which it is applied. In the systematic work of philosophy, and of dogmatic and moral theology which consist so largely in the application of philosophy to the field of theology, it might be possible to work out a cumbrous use of the lecture system to guide the pupil in his own work of solving the problems. For instance the lecturer might

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carefully end his lecture with a conundrum which the pupil must solve before the next lecture. But the knowledge that a ready-made solution would be waiting the next day would form a crushing discouragement to so doing: with a tutor, on the other hand, there is the stimulus of praise at presenting a good, and even perhaps new, solution, worked out by oneself. Nor is it only the lack of anything to tickle his vanity that will discourage the listener to a lecture: unless he is wholly consumed by vanity he will feel the lack of a guide to correct his mistakes, warn him off blind alleys, and indicate fruitful fields of further study. Consequently he may well be compelled to rest content with what seems to him an unsatisfactory or shallow solution for lack of the security of a qualified mentor to whom to present his own solution, or even what he believes to be a development of the lecturer's own thought. Nor is it by any means necessarily only a bad lecturer who leaves problems unsolved, or in a state which the pupil thinks unsatisfactorily solved. For even the best lecturer cannot deal with all the problems which may arise for individuals in connection with his own teaching. Even could he foresee them he would not have time.

Time is indeed an element of which the lecture system fails to make the best use, from the point of view both of lecturer and of audience. The lecturer must explain each point till all have understood, whereas different listeners will have seized different points long before. Besides, most university students can surely read far faster than it is possible to speak. Consequently the lecturer has not time to present fully St Thomas' doctrine in its context so that precisely what the doctrine is intended to contradict may be seen. It is not merely a matter of historical justice to St Bonaventure or the Victorines that they should be presented in their original colours rather than in the terminology of St Thomas himself, which makes their views so often seem lucidly clear and childishly false. It is by seeing St Thomas at work that the student will himself learn how to work out new problems which may arise, how to apply St Thomas' own method in matters from which it seems utterly remote and to which it seems quite inapplicable. Not only may he fail to learn this: he may also fail to understand the real meaning of the scholastic terminology, manipulated with the facility of counters in a child's game which fall into the places ready prepared for them. This road leads to the travesty of scholasticism which set Descartes and Locke to work. Similarly the lecturer may be hard put to it to fit into his syllabus, filled as it is by such a mass of Questions and Articles, all of which must seemingly be at least cursorily dealt with, the develop-

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ments and modern problems since St Thomas. The students also are as overloaded by five or six courses a day as the lecturer is by the plethora of subjects he must cover.

All these difficulties are, however, at least alleviated by the tutorial system. The tutor can, by a judiciously chosen reading list, arouse the pupils' curiosity in a subject, puzzle him by the problem as it arose, show him the various attempts at solution which have been made, leave him to work out their merits and defects; finally in the tutorial hour he can correct the pupil's misunderstandings and inadequacies, or rather bring the pupil to do so himself. Inside the lecture system this can only be done to a very limited extent.

It has already been suggested that the lecture system has a widely differing value according to the subjects to which it is applied. Although it does not seem to be suited to philosophy and systematic theology, it can be applied to far greater effect in some other subjects, for instance in Scripture. In this field again lectures cannot satisfactorily settle problems over disputed minutiae, but here they are less important. Theological disputes may be left to the systematic theologian: the controversies with the literary critics are rapidly receding into the background. After a capable introduction the main work of exegesis can be presented wholly satisfactorily in lectures, where the informal and living approach has so many advantages over bookwork. Far more important here is the task of presenting the mentality and approach of the various books and themes of scripture: it is not so much analysis that is required as synthesis, by which a general picture of a particular point of revelation, a particular idea of an author, may be presented. In tracing the connections of thought, giving a guide in matter of interpretation, the spoken word has the advantage: it matters less if such or such a point seems unconvincing, for the interpretation of a single passage will not form the corner stone of a vast metaphysical edifice. The lecturer can present his vision in a form which is most attractive, his enthusiasm through a medium where it is most contagious.

The method is, then, well adapted to the teaching of Scripture, which must play such a large part both in a priest's spiritual life and in his work of preaching, for the majority of priests and religious who leave the University of Fribourg after a course of theology it will never be of prime importance what precisely is intended to be the explanatory value, the 'cash' value as Professor Price would say, of St Thomas' teaching on one *esse* in Christ; they will have learnt other lessons more directly relevant to them as ministers of his universal Church.

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