

I have been asked to write some account of the place of theology in the new universities, not simply as an academic discipline but as an interpreter of the whole academic process. This is a matter which I have long considered of the highest importance, not only for the Church but for the maintenance of integrated learning in the secular universities. Newman's writings on this very matter, both in *The Idea of a University* and elsewhere, are too well known to need recapitulation. Indeed his prophetic gifts are only beginning to be realized in this as in so many other matters. The age of the Second Vatican Council is in many ways a Newmanic age and the principles for which he stood, no less than the ethos of true learning which he breathed, interpret, almost magically, the needs of our age.

The whole problem which forms the scope of this article has been admirably delineated this year in a book already reviewed in these columns, *Theology and the University*, 'an ecumenical investigation,' edited by John Coulson. It is a documentary of the first order, and I may be forgiven if I begin by a recapitulation of some of the things which it has to say. The editor himself, sums up the discussions in one sentence: 'Theology can choose; it can remain dead and neglected, or take the pressure of the times and live; but if it chooses life it has need of three things: a university setting, lay participation, and the ecumenical dialogue'.

The Abbot of Downside in an introductory paper, points out the warning of the failure of the Council of Florence (1439). Here the top level negotiations between Catholic and Orthodox were successful but broke down completely and failed disastrously because there was no understanding on the other levels. Here is surely a message for our own times. Unless the *aggiornamento* is to be doomed to failure, it must penetrate all the strata of human society – and a beginning must be made with the intelligent laity who must play their full part in the life of the Church. Indeed, it is the first duty of the Church not just to safeguard the faith of the traditional Catholic but to teach all nations. The truth must be freely pursued and this means that it must have that universality in practice which is no longer denied to it in theory.

During the last twenty years Catholic participation in the life of the universities in this country has gradually turned away from the merely defensive mechanism to a positive apostolate. But let us get it quite clear that by the word 'apostolate' we mean the Christian activity of committed persons rather than any apologetic aggression. Moreover, Christian revelation is not meant to be an impediment to the pursuit of truth but its safe guide. As Dr Monica Lawlor shows: 'It is important for the Catholic student to escape from the no-parking notices'. It is equally important for knowledge to be informed by God's revelation of himself in creation.

John Coulson himself, in an examination of Newman's later thought, makes it clear that there was an evolution and development therein which accommodates it

exactly to the present situation. We do not want a Catholic university which will create a ghetto in this country, as it has already done to some extent in America. On the contrary, we want full participation on the highest levels of objective scholarship, by scholars in all the disciplines, who are committed to the Christian way of life.

Father Charles Davis in a key paper points out that theology needs the university so that it will ask the right questions: the questions that keep it at the growing point of human knowledge and within the consciousness of contemporary men: 'It is only the theologian who can see the theological relevance of what others are doing and he, therefore, needs not to live in isolation, but in an environment alive with an awareness of what is going on within the various parts of human knowledge. Otherwise our theology will always be the theology of a past culture, never the theology appropriate to this'. Father Davis goes on to show that for a theology to be healthy it must be studied by lay people and this because it must be alive to the development of the other forms of human knowledge, otherwise it will be impoverished and dead. He goes on to emphasize that theology today must be ecumenical and carried on in a dialogue with other Christians. Divided churches in dialogue must have theologies in dialogue.

Mgr Francis Davis, who has been lecturing on Christian Doctrine to a mainly Anglican audience for the past seventeen years at Birmingham, contributes a paper which is invaluable from the practical point of view. And indeed all the papers in this volume unite in building up a picture which could well help to bring into being a theologically literate laity in this country.

There are no longer any sanctions here to prevent a Catholic from taking a full part in the life of any university. Indeed an ever increasing number are doing so. It is already being recognized in some of the younger universities that the committed Christian of high academic achievement has a special role to play which can give a basic integrity to each of the faculties and to all learning. There is an ever increasing awareness in the secular and humanistic fields that expert specialization can impoverish real learning because of its omission or neglect of that *je ne sais quoi* which provides the integral balance. The committed Christian in the universities can play the role of St Paul on the Areopagus and declare: 'Him whom you know not, I declare unto you'. The unknown God will be revealed not by the technique of the Index but by the positive revelation the of whole of existence and by a Christian philosophical and theological contribution to all sound knowledge. Here is an opportunity which we can neglect at our peril.

From a practical point of view it is my conviction that a two-fold thing is necessary. First we must realistically bring about an entirely new relationship between the universities and the seminaries. Religious orders in this country have already established some kind of pattern, but with the best will in the world, they can only touch the fringe of the problem. It can only adequately be resolved by a complete and drastic re-

thinking, topographically and from the point of view of syllabus and curriculum of the system in which secular clergy are trained. For this remains an anachronistic legacy of penal times and creates an alarming dichotomy between the clergy and the laity.

In the last eighteen years, an ever-increasing number of the laity have had the opportunity of university education. The universities are providing the leaders in most branches of current society, even in the industrial field. This is a new pattern and it is not likely to alter. If the proposals of the Robbins Report are adopted, it will be intensified. It follows from this that no section of lay life will be unaffected by what goes on in the universities. The present seminary system, however, remains almost entirely cut off from university contact. It would be wrong to generalize too drastically because certain relationships are maintained. Others which existed somewhat tenuously in the early part of the century have suffered until now from the aftermath of the Modernist crisis. A deeper cause of cleavage at the present time is the contrast in method. The older universities still work on the tutorial system and, although the redbrick universities cannot as yet afford the same practice in this respect, it is still regarded as the ideal. The lecture system is indeed ancillary to personal investigation and the undergraduate is examined on his thought and reading. He is encouraged from the start to pursue his own development. The seminary, on the other hand, still maintains the 'continental' lecture system, which, apart from ecclesiastical establishments, is no longer 'continental'. This system tends to develop the memory rather than the intellect and does not leave much time for the pursuit of primary sources. It equips, rather than develops, its alumni.

Movements are afoot in the life of the Church generally to review the whole method and syllabus of seminary training. If in this country we are to enable the priest and the educated layman to understand one another by speaking the same language and thus avoid intensifying the present dichotomy and the inevitable growth of an anti-clerical laity, it is of paramount importance that we bring the universities and the seminaries together. It will be to their mutual advantage and for the greater good both of the Church and society in general. On the rare occasions when university dons and seminary professors have met, there has been a striking mutual appreciation both of gifts and potentialities, and the most valuable interchanges have taken place. This surely should be the ordinary and normal state of affairs. But it cannot happen until the whole question has been resolved courageously and realistically. Apart from anything else, the faith can only be expressed in the terminology of our own culture, when that terminology is known and assimilated. But in general both systems have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The pattern of the non-Catholic theological colleges in the universities should be an adequate reassurance for those on our side who might feel that the spiritual aspects would suffer. The English university system provides the widest freedom for the development of all kinds of independent institu-

tions in its embrace.

Secondly, we can no longer be content with the system of regarding philosophy, and to a greater extent theology, as the private field of the clergy. The laity must be brought into this in full measure if the Church is to fulfil her true role. As I have already said, our university chaplaincies have, by and large, adapted themselves splendidly to the new-look. The undergraduate of today, thanks to the positive approach, knows more and more about his faith, and has, generally speaking, at least the opportunity of developing an appreciation of its intellectual richness in a manner parallel to his other studies. It can never be completely parallel, however, until he is encouraged to penetrate into the theological field and the theological schools. Lay participation, far from endangering the doctrines of the faith, is going to help us translate them into new terminologies and give them a new relevance for our times. Indeed, such participation will also afford a new interpretation to the other forms of knowledge. The truth, pursued by the layman completely committed to his faith, will be enriched. The committed Christian can contribute to the life of a university in the measure that he is aware of its needs.

A living theology then must have its lay participation and its university setting. I have said little about its ecumenical aspect. That is something, however, which underlies the whole thing, as it indeed underlies every sentence of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, as inseparable from our age. Christianity is in a minority in the world. The *pusillus grex* must speak with one voice for the right impact to be made. The dissident Churches, looked at objectively and prescinding from the tragedies and passions of history, emphasize aspects – and to us sometimes new aspects – of many eternal truths. These emphases viewed dispassionately in the light of true knowledge can today unite, where once they divided. A theology in dialogue is something to be accepted and welcomed.

To my mind there is, therefore, a unique opportunity for a new approach on the part of the committed Christian and Catholic to all our universities and especially to the new establishments. The Church has a contribution to make which is not merely valid but ultimately essential for the maintenance of intellectual integrity. This contribution, however, can only effectively be made if our scholars, clerical and lay, enter fully and objectively as committed Christians into the wide field of all the university disciplines. If they do so, unhampered by any imaginary fear of a conflict between verities, which is anyhow a contradiction in terms, they will be true apostles of the God of all knowledge. At the same time, they must have the humility to recognize – as Father Bede Jarrett recognized when he founded Blackfriars at Oxford – that the secular universities have a contribution to make to the life of the living Church by their impact upon the process of theology.

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