

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Belief and Teaching

Timothy S. Healy, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 32, no. 4 (1984) 481–489

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

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Belief and Teaching

TIMOTHY S. HEALY, S.J.

In 1989 Georgetown will celebrate its two hundredth anniversary, and it will also mark the first two centuries of Catholic higher education in the United States. Two hundred years isn't very long in the life of the Church. But American Catholic colleges and universities have involved the Church so uniquely in one of her own great inventions that the anniversary is worth keeping. Only in the United States do a gaggle of universities, full members of the nation's intellectual community, still fight to keep and hold true to their Catholic heritage. Their stubbornness, unique in the Church, raises questions over which all of us ought to worry. How does the Church live within a university? How do the two institutions interact on common ground? Indeed how do they share in the minds and hearts of faculty and students? In more local terms, what is it that makes and keeps Georgetown Catholic?

Georgetown, like the sea, "has many voices." One voice speaks to a secular institution with a secular job to do. Part of our nature therefore makes us of and for time. Another voice, however, speaks of faith, and that part of us which is for both time and eternity. The Church also lives here, in two distinct ways. First it leads its own life on our ground; secondly, the Church joins in, shares, and influences the life and work of the University itself.

THE CHURCH WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

The Church's own life is different because she leads it in a university community. Her great acts are: the formal celebration of

her liturgy; her pastoral care for the souls of her own and her preaching of the gospel; the building of a community of faith within the larger university; the choice of problems she presents to the University for study and research.

The Church's *liturgy* is the full and formal celebration of the mysterious gift of life and salvation bestowed on us by the Lord God. It is the preeminent place for the proclamation of God's word and it is the solemn act which makes present His sacrifice, the recall and invitation to all men to share in His being. Within a Catholic university, liturgy must be public, accessible and frequent. It must also be sensitive to the needs of the young. Universities deal with the young and aim through them to change political and social reality. When the pilgrim Church works and lives in a university, it should, as it does elsewhere, work its own change in its religious rituals as in its being. One of the Church's greatest pastoral works is her preaching. Universities canonize words, and care not only about the substance of discourse but about its style as well. The Church's teaching can be a great expression of belief, a rich reinforcer for the young, and in its own right, an art form.

The Church's *pastoral life* is her care for the souls in her keep and that care is different from the University's. A confessor is not a psychologist, a pastor is not a social worker, and a religious presence does not necessarily solve problems. Students, however, are not divisible, and the Church's pastoral as well as the University's professional counseling both face problems rooted in live young people who can't be chopped up and shared out among different offices.

The *community of faith* matches the multiplicity of communities—ethnic, religious, athletic, social, and regional—which makes up a university. Georgetown gains here, since the Church works to make a strong and lively community of belief at the center of the University's being. This community of faith should be large enough to be felt in the University's teaching and learning, but still adaptable enough to mix with the other communities, talk with them, interact with them, teach them, and learn from them.

Many Catholic universities have resident within them religious communities. They perform several services for the university. At Georgetown the Jesuits are an anchor to the institution's past, and remind all of us of the tradition which individual Jesuits live. Together they are also a model community at the heart of the Uni-

versity, from which other communities can draw sustenance, with which others can discuss *common problems*, and to which they can look for leadership. Finally, individual Jesuits translate, in ways as spectacularly different as they are themselves, both the tradition of their commitment and its constant renewal.

The Church will also call on the university to help with problems for which she needs study and reflective understanding and help. There are too many examples for a full catalogue. Where medicine is taught, the Church must learn how to bring to bear her wisdom and her immemorial understanding of the sacredness of life. No public problem is more immediate to the Church's concern (or indeed to the nation's) than the management of refugees and of immigrants. A more crucial problem is America's effort to speak up for human rights in the rest of the world. The Church knows too many places where the lack of human rights hinders and indeed stops her work. She also cares for the training of young Americans who must understand that political power carries human responsibility. Finally, the Church can help the university to focus on its own life and work. There is much to be said on behalf of the American university, and much to be said in criticism. The Church should be part of this ongoing dialogue, secure in her position within the university, trying to lead both her people and all others to a rational grasp of learning and its limits.

In one work the Church can be of enormous help to the university, and that is in the citizenship of the university itself. Georgetown exists within a political jurisdiction, owns land, employs people, mounts payrolls, and in a host of ways touches the lives of its neighbors. It must establish its own citizenship and then in turn take its place in fighting for the larger realities within the life of the city, such as good schools, equal opportunity, and a decent life for all. In these matters Georgetown has the imperatives of its own secular being, but the Church reinforces, strengthens, and personalizes them.

THE CHURCH IN COOPERATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY

The second life the Church leads in a university, is through its influence on and its dialogue with the work of teaching and learning. What does the Church say to the teaching and learning that goes on in the university, even the secular teaching and learning?

What does the Church know that is significant, and that enhances both? This is the toughest question of all and the one about which the least has been written. Look at Georgetown, like any college or university in the clarity of its secular being, and then ask how it is or how it ought to be different in what it learns and what it teaches, because it is Catholic. Education remains principally a secular business, and the university is a secular entity with a clear secular job to do. The Church, however, can deeply influence how that secular job is done. At least five basic Catholic ideas will influence what a Catholic university like Georgetown teaches, and how its faculty and students do their shared job of learning.

1. Loving contemplation is the highest of man's activities and the only one he will perform in both time and eternity.
2. The universe is sacramental, and reveals and signifies its Creator.
3. Theological study and reflection enrich and strengthen both teaching and learning in any university.
4. Man is one, and his learning should strive for the same kind of wholeness.
5. All education has a moral dimension, since learning looks ultimately to conduct.

LOVING CONTEMPLATION

We owe to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas the deep Catholic notion that the blessedness of man lies in *loving contemplation*. This is the great base of the liberal arts curriculum, aimed at knowledge and contemplation, rather than at the distracting techniques of earning a living. Catholic universities are far more comfortable with the contemplative than with the active world, far more at home in the traditional liberal arts and sciences than with the career-oriented programs that "turn the wheel and look windward."

The liberal arts and sciences have a theological dimension as well. Objects have shape because they come from the mind of God. They can be contemplated precisely because man's mind derives from the same source and indeed works best if it knows both seed and shape in the things it contemplates. The importance of shape makes the Aristotelian and Thomistic ideal of contempla-

tion influential not only on the curriculum, but on the way in which the curriculum is presented. Contemplation is learned individually, not in groups. The faculty members in a Catholic university have the double burden of dealing with the individual as well as in inculcating a full and subtle grasp of the shape of the curriculum. The anarchy that marks colleges and universities is profoundly Catholic; laid against the interchange between faculty member and student, all other realities on the landscape are of secondary importance.

The contemplative instinct shapes the curriculum. The major concentration on one field of study is, for instance, intended primarily to build a measuring rod deep in the student's mind by which he can forever after tell the difference between knowledge and ignorance because he has the direct experience of how developed knowledge feels. One's "major" bears very little relation to career, to the grim business of earning a living. It is intended to foster discrimination, to reduce arrogance, and to curb the threat of energetic folly.

Contemplation reaches even into professional training. A Catholic university cannot settle for a law school which is concerned only with the techniques of the law, or for a medical school which loses itself in technical procedure and forgets the art of healing. We must fight to make sure that even professional education is still education and not simply training. Our deepest and most Catholic instincts lead us in that direction, and anything else is untrue to our own heritage, as well as a betrayal of the young citizens who come to us to learn.

A SACRAMENTAL UNIVERSE

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* with their gentle insight that the acts and movements of pilgrimage mirror the acts and movements of man's life suggests the ancient Catholic idea that the *universe, by nature sacramental*, both symbolizes and reveals its Creator. Gerard Manley Hopkins says that God's word, "rides time like a river."

Seeing all reality as symbolic enables the teacher to correct a false accent in most American higher education. That is an over-intellectual stress, the notion that knowledge itself is the only good a university serves. Symbols reach further and have a deeply

transforming effect upon one who understands them. A student is involved, held in a state of tension far higher than mere intellectual fascination, and can indeed move from that tension to commitment. Symbolic understanding is never fully cognitive, either for the individual or for the community. Because the Church urges a symbolic view of the universe, she is a great corrective to the necessary specialized work which higher research involves, and perhaps upon the not quite so necessary departmentalization of knowledge throughout the university. The symbolic view of the universe enables any university to settle for integration as the norm and fragmentation as its painful exception.

When we turn to professional schools, symbolic thought is still needed. In law, medicine, and all professional training, Georgetown ought at least to work on integration in time; the professional student can be helped to remember the philosophical, political, and theological underpinnings of the profession he has chosen. It would be a great tragedy if we ever so cut off our collegiate teaching and learning from our professional teaching and learning that the two were not even united in the minds of those who learn.

THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY

The *presence of theology* in the curriculum accomplishes one good thing just by being there. Theology deals with an absolute, and so discourages the creation of lesser absolutes. American higher education has known absolute science, absolute art, even absolute athletics. Academic theology challenges every one of them.

The university in its turn conditions the teaching of theology. Catholics understand men and women as made in the image and likeness of God, and for this reason both intelligent and free. At times religious schools have forgotten the second element in God's image and likeness, freedom. The university insists that theological teaching by rote, imposition, or arrogance indoctrinates and distorts. This recalls the Church itself to the best of its own thinking. No one who shares the Catholic tradition can accept any reading of faith that denies freedom, that does not see faith itself as a loving gift. Schoolmen indeed have fought for freedom within their churches for centuries. This may be the reason the Holy Ghost has tolerated us for so long.

THE UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Even for Catholic schools "*unity of knowledge*" is difficult to achieve, for all that it is so clearly an obvious goal of liberal education. The departmentalization which university structures impose upon learning is unhealthy for much that students and faculty wish to do. It contributes to a lock-step rigidity, not unlike the "chain of being" that leads up to theology as "queen of the sciences." Georgetown must strive to make certain that its belief in God works overtime against the self-sufficiency of human knowledge, or even of limited academic disciplines. The same theology which recognizes the validity and indeed honors the scope of all kinds and subsets of learning, must also by its mere existence, deny completeness to any one of them.

In our modern time, however, another unity may be equally important, the unity of flesh and spirit. Although Jesuits first made popular the tag *mens sana in corpore sano*, even in Catholic colleges the principle is frequently ignored, particularly in two activities much distorted by all American schools, art and athletics.

Much of what universities teach, particularly when they teach for licensure, substitutes process for product. In art we have reversed that and lost all sense of process. We teach art principally as product. Students learn to recognize schools, movements, and epochs. They understand how one movement drifts into another, how one dramatist sets the stage for his followers. Rarely are they asked to dig into the resistant stuff of paint and clay, almost as rarely into the equally intractable stuff of words. By making the arts wholly intellectual, we deny their fundamental character.

The situation is not much better with athletics. Even Catholic colleges have lost the sense of man's duality. They no longer understand that all games and sports are religious, civic, and moral exercises, as indeed the Greeks first knew them to be. By using the body to make beauty we condition the soul to understand and love it. This is a profoundly moral operation, it mirrors society even under stress, reflects honor on its leaders, and teaches and glorifies the individual young athlete.

This ancient, indeed religious, view of athletics aims at more than running down hyperactive adolescent libidos. It helps us teach the young to work together under discipline. Athletic (like artistic) endeavor also works a profound integration of body and

soul. Both results make sense to a faith and in a university based upon the Incarnation. To the question "how meet mortal beauty?" Hopkins answers with Catholic common sense. Beauty, he writes, "keeps our wits warm to the things that are."

MORAL DIMENSIONS

Few things in the tradition of either Judaism or Catholicism are more conspicuous than insistence on the link between *learning and conduct*. The "justice of God" in the Hebrew scriptures is linked to what men do. In Catholic teaching, the whole thrust of asceticism is toward choices that will help an individual shape or reshape his life. Ignatius of Loyola is typical in reading contemplation as the prelude to action. The notion that love or understanding can be separated from conduct is foreign to both Catholic teachers and mystics.

Virtue is, of course, rarely included in the school curriculum. That does not mean that in a multitude of serious ways it cannot be taught in the classrooms. To pick one modest example, universities have very little tolerance for doubt about the virtue of truth telling. The plagiarist is flunked, expelled, or fired. The young absorb this lesson, early and well. All schools and colleges have moral codes and canons they expect their members to obey. Georgetown shares many of these, and adds the great Catholic insights in defense of life, and in support of the family as well as the high Catholic ideal of sanctity.

CONCLUSION

In no university do teachers shape citizens for one time only. The young men and women at Georgetown will live in and run the United States thirty to fifty years from now. That means that any man's world is being "changed in the bones of his sons," or in Whitehead's terms, this republic is remade year in and year out in the minds and hearts of its young. Georgetown adds to the task of secular renewal, the notion that in so far as it exists on earth, the city of God also seeks its renewal. Similar to Whitehead's concern with the remaking of the republic, is our constant care for the remaking of the Church. A university conscious of that obligation may be a constant source of worry to its bishop. But in order

to remain Catholic, Georgetown must admit that the second re-making can be no less urgent than the first.

The pilgrim Church may from time to time pause, but always must admit that she has here no lasting city. The same is true of that form of her life known as the Catholic university. That we and our students reach our fullest growth in learning, wisdom, and grace, remains an ideal that no university, Catholic or otherwise, will ever fully achieve. Like the Church itself, Georgetown must admit that our highest aims are "never here to be realized" and then accept the poet's definition of ourselves as workers "who are only undefeated—because we have gone trying."