

The New Role of Christian Universities in Asia

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Euntes in mundum
universum pr_{ac}dicare
evangelium omni creaturae.
(Mark 16:15)

Dear brothers and sisters: Today is an auspicious day. A great part of the Christian world celebrates the feast of St. Raphael. Furthermore, we are guests of the Brothers of St. Gabriel. And I do not think the competitive spirit of modern society has gone so far as to instill a competitive spirit among the angels. So, Raphael and Gabriel are omens of an auspicious moment—to share with you some of our common concerns. I wish that my address, under the inspiration of the two archangels, be more than just a theoretical talk.

I begin with an apology. It is the significant fact that we here in Asia have to speak English—a minority language among Christians, let alone among Asians. Furthermore, English is an elite language of only 10% of the world population, although almost 70% of the scientific papers are written or translated in this language. Now, we cannot express in one single language all the glamour and richness of the human experience. And I hasten to say that in one single religion we cannot express all the glamour and richness of the human experiences and divine manifestations either. To the limitations of speaking in English compounds the limitation of speaking Christian language. It is also a minority language. And yet, we have to try

from this one single perspective to see, as well as we can, the entire human panorama. This predicament of our human situation has already been described by the Vicar General, and Dr. Kasai has also stressed the seriousness and dangers of our human civilization. Both have reminded us that our survival is at stake. This is why any kind of small talk is out of place today.

My presentation is going to have nine points preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion. This makes the discussion easier. I may be provocative, although at the end I am going to make room for “realistic” accommodations. But let me give at the beginning a piece of my mind regarding this important topic you have chosen for ACUCA this year. I am mindful, of course that I have the privilege of not being infallible. The topic is so important that I have allowed myself to go to the roots of it and touch only indirectly the particular issue. The concrete problem, namely “the role of persons of other faiths and traditions as teachers in the Christian universities and colleges,” will be the concern of the eight different papers. I would like to address myself to the foundation which may provide the basis for a certain type of answer to our particular problem. In other words, the particular issue is a special case of the general problem which I will attempt to unravel, namely, *The New Role of Christian Universities in Asia Today*. It is a fundamental reflection which, on purpose, will not propose concrete proposals and practical steps. These have to be worked out together, in dialogue, and with all your experience. It is not for me to spell them out. I shall remain (and I say it without an apology) in the realm of the general, but also important and vital, issues.

It is really with fear and humility that I accepted this task, because I am fully aware not only of my responsibility, but also of our responsibility. We cannot fumble today with the situation of the world in which we live. Let me begin with an explanation of the new title by referring to the words of our introductory Worship.

First, *Christian universities and colleges*, not “individual teachers.” There is always occasion for individual witnessing and doing good. We may do good, we may witness to the Gospel, and walk a way of sanctity wherever we live. This is not my problem. The justification that in this college, or

anywhere, we may be doing a lot of good, is not my subject today. I am not speaking of the good which is possibly, or certainly, done by different individuals in different institutions, be they Christian or non-Christian. The good we do is not in question, although, very often, alas! this answer is given as a justification for something that transcends the task of the individual. My topic is not, I insist, that we are all doing a good job, or that we are all witnessing to Christ, or that we are taking advantage of this or that situation, where we are, in order to carry out a wonderful apostolate. I would be the last person to judge that, and I have no authority whatsoever to criticize it. The subject matter of my talk is the university *qua* university, and not whether individual teachers are doing good here and there.

Secondly, *the new role*, not the old role. In the new role the non-Christian teachers are as essential as the Christian. A modern Christian university is not a church or only for church members. It is a community of people concerned with learning, knowledge, wisdom, higher education as we call it. A modern Christian university is not a community of Christian believers, as a church is. It is something of a different nature. A college can be all male, all white, all rich, all Christian. A college is a more or less homogeneous group, and this homogeneity is perfectly legitimate. A university is different, and I would add that it is a contradiction in terms, and against the founding idea of the university, to make such discriminations.

Let us recall that the university is the only institution in Western history which has lasted over 900 years and which has overcome the crises of Europe first, Western civilization subsequently, and the present-day situation up to now. As for the future it is to be seen if the university will resist the technocratic impact. The unifying force of the university is *mythos*, not *logos*, it is an ideal, an urge, not a particular content. It is a desire of a formal content and not of a material content. Otherwise, the university would be practicing a discrimination, an apartheid, intolerable in something which holds itself to be university and not uniformity. It would not be a university if it would put extrinsic limitations to the members of that particular institution, which under this name has withstood the interferences of popes, kings, presidents, tycoons, and politicians of all sorts. It is, for instance, against the very nature of the university to require a particular nationality to teach or study in it. This goes against the very essence of what the university stands for. And in fact, in most universities which maintain a certain standard you may be English, Spanish, Sudanese

or whatever, and be a full member of the university. The governments may impose certain restrictions for practicing medicine or law in their respective countries but not for studying in the universities of the country—although, of course it is an indirect way of imposing restrictions. But this is another—and sad—matter. If you make a discrimination by reason of nationality, you are already doing something against the very nature of the university. If you discriminate by reason of confessional belief, you do the same thing. This does not mean that the university does not have a unifying force, but in my language the unifying factor belongs to the order of the *mythos* and not of the *logos*. A *mythos* is something unquestioned because we take it for granted. From within itself it appears unquestionable, and thus it elicits consensus. The university is based on the free pursuit of knowledge with no other boundaries than those inherent to knowledge itself and no other censorship than the critique of its peers. Today this institution is in crisis, but this is not my topic here.

Besides other political and cultural factors, the traditional idea of the European university was born out of three principles;

1. a dedication of one's life to the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of wisdom.
2. a realization of this ideal in company both of colleagues dedicated to a similar quest and disciples eager to learn from the knowledge and experience of the seniors.
3. an intellectual freedom zealously kept (often the students were rectors of the institutions and financed the *magistri*) in face of the religious and political powers of the time.

When, in the climate of Christendom, the *“mythos* was the Christian *res-publica* or *imperium*, the universities were Christian almost as a tautology. But this is not the situation today. When the universities were founded in countries outside Christendom the name Christian university began to be used in a sectarian way.

My thesis would then be that the new role is to cease to be confessionally Christian in order to become truly “uni-versity.” Playing with words I would say truly catholic. Christian scripture tells us that to love one's life is to lose it. Perhaps to cease to be restrictedly “Christian” would be the way to be authentically Christian. Who strives to be only specifically “Christian” may cease to be Christian altogether. This is the great challenge to present-day Christianity. To sum it all up; “Christian

university” began as a redundancy, continued as a sectarian label, and tends to become obsolete today.

What is the difference between a Christian and a non Christian teacher? There may sometimes be more differences among Christian teachers themselves than there are with their non-Christian colleagues. I wonder if the links among people today follow this kind of orthodox party line between Christian and non-Christian denominations, and not perhaps between many other allegiances, like political ideals, ecological convictions, cultural activities, and other commitments.

So far for the introduction, but I still said I would make reference to the providential words of the introductory prayer which we heard. I refer to the Gospel read by the Vicar General, of Mark 16:15. It could not have been a more appropriate choice. Anyone dealing with the topic of a Christian university should have these words in its own heart;

“Walking into the whole cosmos proclaim (sing, dance) the good news to the entire creation.”

I am extremely happy to comment on the reading which has introduced our meeting, because I, for one, would not like to make a dichotomy between the devotional aspect and the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of our lives. The text says, walk, step in, simply go as a pilgrim, without instruments or aids of any kind. It continues saying: *into the whole cosmos*; and we know that *cosmos* is not a geographical category. Penetrate into the inner fabric of reality. And then the text goes on; proclaim, i.e. sing, dance, manifest, contagiate, _ What? “The Good News,” namely that the imprisoned should be visited, the hungry fed, the worried consoled, oppression eliminated, injustice healed, hatred overcome. And this to the entire creation, and not to humans only.

This “keynote address” would like to be just a prayer, to have the key to open our hearts in order to convince us that we should take to heart the radical injunction of this Gospel. Otherwise, we are not loyal to our vocation, both Christian and human.

I would like to put some *sūtras* before you. *Sūtras*, like principles or aphorisms, may allow us to create a certain understanding if we meditate on them and put them also under scrutiny and discussion.

1. THERE IS AN INJUNCTION TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL.

The introduction has already made the point. But this injunction is only authentic if it is felt, not as a heteronomous imperative, but as an inner urge. That is, as something which I do spontaneously without putting it as a goal, or as a purpose. It is not a means for something else, reward or whatever. The most elementary psychology would tell us that the moment we want to be witness to something, that witness is suspect. The moment we want to prove something, we may succeed or not, but then the proof is connected with our will; it is not impartial witnessing. Not without reason it has been written that whenever you have to give witness “you should not worry beforehand about what you have to say.

This is for the Western spirit a most difficult thing to accept, because, as Schelling said in a lapidary phrase, “the will is the primordial being.” When something escapes the control of our will, we lose our bearings, we do not have certainty and we fear that we are nowhere. We can only witness once we do not wish to witness, or as Lord Buddha would say, the very desire for *nirvana* makes impossible its attainment. In fact, Christ is not the object of the *kerygma*, he is the subject. Only Christ is the proclaimer, the very subject. The proclamation is not the individual will, nor even the individual person, but the divine spirit enlightening every one of us. *Kerygma* is not propaganda.

Furthermore, what is this proclamation about? It proclaims the glad tidings, not Christ. Christ is not the object of the *kerygma*, “but whatever I have told you, whatever I have shown you.” The injunction is to present, proclaim, dance, sing, and especially do what Christ did and said. This is the gladdening news. There is one thing which we may learn his life but which he does not want to be proclaimed: he escaped from being proclaimed Messiah and told us that it was good that he went away otherwise the Spirit would not come. And what he told us is clear: Yes, yes, no, no. No double talk. You cannot serve God and Mammon. Anything for which you need Mammon is not my business. The injunction to proclaim the gospel is not an injunction to advertize Christ—and thus to control the sales. Only a pure heart can truly witness.

I am keen in underlining the point that there is an injunction to proclaim the gospel, because what I am trying to say in the following *sūtras* is not watering down the first *sūtra*,, but just enhancing and purifying it.

2. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL WAS LINKED WITH ONE IDEOLOGY, ONE CULTURE, AND ONE RELIGION.

This is a triple link. I repeat: *the proclamation of the gospel* (our first *sūtra*) *has been linked with one ideology*: that of the Judeo-Hellenic world, the Roman Empire, Christendom, the West, Technocracy, in accumulated succession.

The majority of Christian dogmas are formulated in Greek concepts. I remember once telling Pope Paul VI in a private audience, when he asked me what I was doing, that I was asking myself whether in order to be a Christian one has to be intellectually a Greek and spiritually a Semite. Do the Christians of other continents need to be circumcised in their own minds according to Hellenistic culture, and to be circumcised in their own hearts according to the Abrahamic tradition? Yes or no? This is the embarrassing question that Asia asks in the third millennium to the entire Christian community.

The proclamation of the gospel has been linked with one ideology. We are children of our times and this link is in a certain way unavoidable. We should not be afraid of any ideology, but we are now aware that from the Christian Marxists who will say that the only way to be an enlightened Christian is to be a Marxist, from the church in South Africa which will tell us that the only way to be a realistic Christian in that country is to defend apartheid, from the Thomists, Barthians, democrats, and whatnot who will prescribe to us what is an intelligent, a radical, or a humane Christian, there is an immense gamut of opinions. After all these experiences we are sufficiently aware that we cannot be tied to one single ideology, although an ideology may be linked and in each case necessarily linked with the Christian self-understanding. But until now the Christian *keygma* was, and still in a great part is, tied to one single prevalent “meta-ideology.” It is only with closer world communications and a growing ecumenical awareness that ideological pluralism begins to enter into Christian consciousness. Let me put a delicate but clear example. A dominant Christian ideology of the post-enlightenment era defends the separation between religion and politics like the separation of the supernatural and the temporal order. In this sense His Holiness Pope John Paul II asks Catholic priests to keep away from political activities. But politics is not only party politics. The best example of an inseparable relation between religion and politics is the same John Paul II. He has linked Roman Catholicism with a particular ideology and thus for him his political activity is not “politics” but pure Christianity (Christendom).

The proclamation of the gospel is also linked with one culture. Until now this culture is what we roughly call the Western culture. To this culture belongs by and large the realm of the universities all over the world. The immense majority of universities are linked with the Western model of culture. Gurukuls and Buddhist universities are out of touch with the world or hardly exist anymore. As university people we are linked with one particular culture. By and large, in spite of all the efforts that are being made here and there to recover a pluralistic cultural identity, the universities as institutions belong to the modern culture of Western origins and Western archetypes.

More difficult still, and more delicate too, *the proclamation of the gospel has been linked with one religion.* Nowhere it has been said that to proclaim the liberating news of Christ is identical with preaching Christianity. To be sure, Christianity has come into being out of this initial impulse. But Christianity itself has changed and evolved. To preach the gospel today does not necessarily mean to defend a universal papal political power according to the never revoked pontifical bulls of Boniface VIII. It may well be that similarly as Christendom yielded to Christianity in the Renaissance, this latter yields to *Christianness* in our present times.

Whatever this may be, we acknowledge the legitimacy of religious pluralism, and the fact that the gospel's injunction is an ever old and new challenge for each period.

3. HISTORICAL INERTIA IS CONVERTING A CROWN OF GLORY INTO A GROWN OF THORNS.

This third *sutra* is almost a corollary to the identification of the Christian *kerygma* with the state of affairs referred to in the previous one. I am not passing a judgment about the past. I am trying to understand the present. And I find here a crying example of what I call the "inertia of the mind." One of my childhood ambitions is to succeed one day in formulating the law of the inertia of the mind as Newton discovered that of matter. Matter and mind, if there are no outer resistances, both keep on going even when the initial impulse is no longer there. I think I have almost all the parameters, but this is not my topic today.

My topic here is to show how historical inertia, which, incidentally, is heavier than that of matter, has converted the crown of glory of Christian institutions of the last centuries into a crown of thorns. In spite of the many faults we find with the Christian colonization of Asia since the expansion of "Christian" Europe, we have to recognize that in this respect, when hardly anybody took care of the sick, education of the new generations for the

incoming changes, awakening the self-consciousness of girls, etc., many Christian missionaries did it. Many beginnings of Christian colleges and universities began with this impulse of truly promoting education, identified at that time with Christian education (here is the *mythos* referred to before). I may even be prepared to entertain the idea that they were so successful that the entire population got conscientized and now it is society itself which takes care of most of such activities. I am not denying the right of the churches to collaborate with such activities of welfare and justice, and even to put their resources and experiences at the service of the different nations. But I am stressing that the identification of education with Christian education, and the opinion that the essential role of Christians is to run educational institutions, is no longer tenable. I am even venturing to say that such activities begin to have today the opposite effects from those originally intended, I have been saying for ever a quarter of a century in India that the Christian institutions of learning have had by and large the effect of vaccinating their students so as to render them immune against a more complete and genuine Christian conversion.

In more academic terms I am saying that faith, and what we may call the faith of Christians, is not identifiable with any ideology, culture, and even religion. In front of the scandalous situation of poverty and injustice today, perhaps enlightened Christian action should give priority to such endeavors, which, as I am still going to say, do not exclude academic participation and involvement. I am only detecting that the old model is crumbling down. Historical inertia is exhausting its momentum.

4. MODERN SCIENCE AND MODERN EDUCATION HAVE BECOME EITHER THE SUBSTITUTE OR THE CLOAK FOR THE GOSPEL.

Due to the same historical inertia, modern education has often found in the teaching of the liberating tenets of modern science a substitute for the also often ankylosed interpretation of the gospel. The translation we have heard today of Mark's Gospel was "teaching all nations" which is not even the proper translation of the parallel passage of Matthew. And, of course, by "teaching" the common reader understands anything from business administration to mathematics and history which is different from dancing, proclaiming, singing the good news and putting it into practice. I am not saying that it is not a Christian duty, for it is a human duty, to contribute to make good citizens and good scientists. I am detecting, though, an intriguing parallelism between what our ancestors called the *preparatio*

evangelica and *our preparatio scientifica*, between the making ready for the gospel and our scientific training. There is an intriguing similarity between the old and now so discussed dictum: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, “outside the Church, no salvation,” and our practical belief that *extra scientiam nulla salus*: “outside Science there is no salvation for humanity.” Without scientific education, we translate, there is no full human life possible. My suspicion is that this is a substitute for the teaching and preaching of the gospel. And we justify ourselves, because we create good citizens, great scientists, very honest individuals. I am not saying it is wrong. I am saying this is not Mark 16:15.

One can well understand that, experiencing that scholastic theological “truth” did not make their students free, the new generations of the Renaissance desired to try whether the new scientific discoveries would make them freer. Galileo was sociologically right, although philosophically wrong. Bellarmino was sociologically wrong and theologically ill-equipped, although his philosophical instinct was right.

Today one begins once again to wonder whether modern science—and scientific education—can be a substitute for a liberating wisdom. Another indication that Christians are somewhat uncomfortable with such a substitution is that they justify themselves by saying that they do not teach only science or business but that they add ethics. Christian universities teach ethics and add that it is Christian ethics. I wonder if anybody knows what is a specifically Christian ethics. There is something uncanny in being satisfied by reducing the Christian mission in “foreign lands” to teach Christian ethics, as if all those countries were unethical, as if we could not teach Buddhist ethics because Buddhist ethics were not as ethical as Christian ethics, as if we had to teach Christian ethics because the ethical behavior of others were immoral. This is an unacceptable position. It is a kind of insult to all other religions.

The problems here compound because each ethical system has a metaphysical basis. And then either we are teaching surreptitiously a sort of Christian metaphysics, or we are simply propounding an ethical system disconnected from the underlying metaphysical assumptions of Buddhism, Hinduism, secularity, and so on, creating thus not only confusion, but proposing an inefficient ethical system which will not resist the pressures of ordinary life because it is left without a metaphysical grounding.

And yet there is something exceedingly important in the ethical analysis of our prevalent techno-scientific civilization. A sort of consensus is

growing across religious boundaries, not excluding secularist religion, that there is something essentially dehumanizing in this technocratic age. This leads us to the next *sūtra*.

5. THE FACTUAL SITUATION OF THE WORLD MAKES REFORM OF THE SYSTEM UNCHRISTIAN, DESTRUCTION IMPOSSIBLE, AND TRANSFORMATION THE ONLY ISSUE.

Reform is unchristian. I could have said similarly that it is unbuddhist, and so on. But we may be allowed here to limit ourselves to the Christian reflection, which incidentally has been exposed for a longer period to the dehumanizing seeds of the present system because this latter is born as a hybrid from the Christian religion itself. But I repeat that any traditional critique of the technocratic system, from whatever corner of the world, would yield similar conclusions.

Putting together the experiences of the “industrial revolution” and the results of the efforts of the last thirty years for giving a human face to the present-day system, we may fairly agree with the most perceptive critics of our times that the period of reforms, and reformations, is over. It would only prolong the agony of an unjust system, it would tend to make the rich richer, the machines more powerful, the human person a mere number of an undifferentiated mass, with the only consolation that individuals may indulge their idiosyncrasies provided they do not disturb the general march of society. I am not alone in taking this stance, in which, curiously enough, conservatives and progressivists seem to agree. But I alone claim responsibility for what I have called the tragic law of our times (which that saintly bishop Helder Camera did not like much), namely that any positive improvement, *within the system*, on the micro level, has negative repercussions on the macro level. Once we have reached the boundaries of the world market and the saturation degree of our times, any increase in one point is achieved at the expense of a decrease somewhere else. Or, putting it more plainly, in a competitive society not all can be the winners. Should we remember the facts of the transfer of wealth, yearly, by the billions of dollars, from the so-called “third world” to the first, by virtue of the inherent dynamics of the system? Or the foreseeable fact that in the last ten years the GNP of Asia and Africa has decreased 15% in spite of the fact that some elites of those continents have become immensely rich and that a middle class has “developed”? Who pays the price? What we have created today, without necessarily personal ill-will—I insist—is worse than the *Lumpenproletariat* of the first industrial revolution. Even accepting that in the

long run a reform would yield positive fruits Christian and human conscience cannot accept the sacrifice of present-day generations under the pretext that their great-grandchildren shall have it better.

Destruction is impossible. First of all because the powers that be would not allow it. They are too powerful and too intelligent. They would smash any movement trying to undermine the basis on which this modern society rests. For any victim the so-called political terrorists have caused, the official anti-terrorist forces have made seven. Secondly, these acts of “terrorism” and sheer destruction would trigger only a reaction among the majority of the people, who would then opt for the status quo as lesser evil. Thirdly, total destruction, besides being a naive dream, overlooks the fact that not all is evil in the technocratic system, let alone among the technocrats. We do not eliminate the archetypes by throwing bombs, to put it in one word. Experience should have taught us the fiasco of revolutions that are only destructive. *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*, as the French sarcastically put it. We have only a change of guard, although under different names, and obviously different people. The new “lords” simply repeat, and often for the worse, the patterns of their predecessors. The human being is something infinitely deeper than a bundle of needs, and society much more than an economic market, as if it were at all sufficient to deliver the goods by any efficient *deus ex machina*. Fourthly, and certainly not least, genuine violence cannot be justified, the means do not justify the ends, not only for extrinsic moral reasons, but also because there is an intrinsic link between the means and the ends. If the means are flawed they will contaminate the ends brought about precisely by those means.

Transformation is *the only* issue. A. Perhaps more academic word is metamorphosis. A third more Christian name is *metanoia*, so differently translated as penitence, repentance, conversion, change of mentality and so on. Properly speaking, I would suggest a more literal rendering of the word and more in consonance with the oriental spirit. It means, or may also legitimately mean, not so much a change *of nous*, of mentality, but a *meta-nous*, a going beyond the mental, the nous, a transcending the purely rational approach to reality.

Whatever this may be, these three names indicate a change in the very form, *morphe*, essence, rationality, on which we have today based human life on earth. This conversion is more than a moral question. It is metaphysical, and I would add, religious, spiritual, human, radical. I would even say, mystical. At any rate, it is something linked with the deepest core of the human being.

Here mere theory will not do. Pure investigation would help to preach a good sermon, write a nice book, or even convince people. But it will not work. How many drunkards are convinced that drinking is bad? Mere praxis is insufficient as well. Changing the structures, modifying the constrictions, breaking the institutions, experience should have taught us by now that this does not work either. How many revolutions have ended where they began? Theory without praxis is powerless, praxis without theory is blind.

This is not the proper place for an academic footnote showing how Cicero translated the Greek *theoria* by *contemplatio* and thus changed the original meaning of the Latin word which implies both action and theory at the same time. If I merely think about poverty, I may get a clear picture of its nature and causes, and may find it so complex that my action is paralyzed. We do not know where to begin and what is to be done. If I simply try to eradicate poverty I may worsen the situation in the long run, if I do not strike deeper. On the other hand, if I contemplate about poverty, the thinking, and not the good will alone, will lead me to action as its natural outcome and intrinsic completion. Not without reason the great contemplatives were also activists.

I would like now to say something about the place and role of the universities in this transformative action.

6. THE UNIVERSITY SHOULD LEAD THE INTELLECTUAL AND CORPORATE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES.

Three points may here suffice to preface this *sūtra*.

First, the situation of the world. It is not only the Club of Rome, not only the prophets of doom, not just the left-wing or alternative organizations; there is a mounting consensus including official and well-established institutions that the world has only 50 more years of existence if we do not introduce radical changes in our life-styles, and obviously in our ways of thinking and behaving. It became startlingly manifest, just to quote a recent example, in the meeting of the "Global Forum for Human Survival" which met at Oxford a couple of years ago and will meet this January 1990 in Moscow once again. To the thousands of children starving daily we may add the sarcastic fact that the world today feeds an army of some thirty million people engaged in "keeping the peace of the planet." And yet there are over twelve hundred lethal victims of war every day in the over twenty major existing armed conflicts. There are roughly one thousand victims of traffic accidents daily, without mentioning all the man-

made injustices and exploitations. In short, there is a mounting unrest among the peoples of the world. And today they cannot be put down as another rebellion of slaves of olden times. The struggle is no longer between classes, races, religions or even nations. The conflict has been interiorized within all those groups and even inside the human person as well. Two fellow workers, two Jews, two Roman Catholics, two Thai, a married couple, and a single person within itself, can be torn apart in fundamental issues which they see as of capital importance. The very division between Christian and non-Christian teachers, which we will have still to discuss, becomes here exceedingly unimportant. The real chasm lies elsewhere. At stake is the very existence of the planet. In spite of all the pre-programmed propaganda of vested interests in describing the benefits of modern civilization, when all is set on the scale, more and more people are beginning to discover that the balance is rather negative. And, paradoxically enough, this sober evaluation is the most realistic sign of a healthy optimism.

Second, the traditional role of the universities has been precisely one of criticizing the status quo. The universities founded by the Church and protected by the princes have been throughout their history one of the main causes for upsetting the established order. The universities of India today are a clear example of this. They follow an ancient tradition since Francis I, the “Sacer Romanus Imperator,” who in 1158 made the university of Bologna *sui juris*, i.e., an independent institution, which it already had been since 1088 when some schools began teaching and learning independently of ecclesiastical institutions.

There is a great danger that the present-day universities, which were founded long ago and whose protectors have vanished, become now puppets in the hands of the governments which fund them provided they obey their interests. I do not need here to elaborate on this point. Suffice it only to mention the classified research done in many universities throughout the world for military purposes and competitive multinationals. Indeed already since the beginning the universities did challenge the *sacerdotium* and the *imperium*, the prevailing *mythoi* of that period, as today they have to withstand the pressures of money, the *mythos* of our time.

Third, the greatest cry against the present world situation comes from the so-called alternative movements and marginalized people and institutions. An elemental sociological reflection shows that any minority and opposition group, if not officially recognized, will develop one-sided

opinions and tend to more or less extremist practices. I am not criticizing the extraordinarily important role of all those movements, in spite of perhaps well-founded criticisms. I am only introducing the topic of this sūtra.

It says that it belongs to the very nature of the university to be one of the natural loci where an intelligent and thorough critique of the human situation be carried out. Universities should be the natural centers where such theories and actions are studied. And we should remind ourselves of the existential and emotional contents of the very word *studium*. If we leave the critique, and the protest when necessary, only to others, then we share the responsibility of the consequences. The critique of the technocratic complex which conditions our modern life is an essential task of the university today. And this is an intellectual enterprise of first order. The universities should react at being simply factories for supplying human skilled workers to feed the needs of the industrial megamachine. Neither *trivium* nor *quadrivium*, neither liberal arts nor even sciences were supposed to be training specialized brains to work in the great industries of the world, be they called medicine, pharmaceuticals or sciences. The whole of education has undergone a mutation and we should be aware of it, if somehow we carry on the traditional name of university. Not without reason were the technical schools in Europe distinguished from universities.

Now, this search cannot be done by the universities alone. The universities need collaboration with all those other agencies because they are much more in contact with real needs and concrete situations. They offer not only experience, but also action and practical means. In their turn, they also need the university. They need not only the more serene, non-attached and intellectual approach which the university can provide; they need also the sociological respectability that the university still carries with it. A symbiosis between the different institutions concerned with these problems is imperative.

I am not advocating which party the universities should favor, nor am I assuming that they need to be only in the opposition. They could well be the defenders of the established order. I am only saying that they are the natural arena where the interaction should take place, that they are the natural agents of change, and the proper places for the corporate effort of humanity towards a deepening of the theory and praxis of a worthy human life. To give up this ideal, in spite of the many obstacles to it, is to betray the very nature of this institution.

7. THE OPTION FOR THE POOR IS A UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE.

I am neither preaching “social gospel” nor proposing that the university should be an institution exclusively dedicated to social justice. I am saying that the university is not an ivory tower outside time and space, and that what has been recently termed “option for the poor” is more than a decision to fight social inequities and economic injustices. It is an awareness that reflects the situation of the world in discipline, which the university also lives. It indicates basically a way of thinking, a field of thought which entails a style of life in the deepest sense of the word and an awareness of universal solidarity. I am not saying that the university should compete with activists and religious people in bringing about social reforms. I am stating that the option for the poor is a university challenge, precisely because it entails a way of thinking, and it represents a new vision of the human reality. In an existential way it goes against the bulk of present-day trends and of what we call civilization.

I see the new human vision like this. Until now, from Hindu Gurukuls, Buddhist centers like Nalanda, Greek institutions like Academia, Christian monastic schools, scholastic universities and more recent secular colleges, university education had simply ignored the other, the *mleccha*, the non-monk, non-free citizen, non-Christian, non-orthodox, or non-rich. In a word, the university had ignored the other. It was at best a non-person. The option for the poor represents this opening to the other, this interest in the widest possible human community which includes not only the non-male, the non-white, the non-Christian, the non-conformist, and the handicapped, but the symbol of the really alienated in our times: the poor.

This does not mean that university education should not maintain its standards and exigencies. It means however that it does not exclude anyone by reason of the most alienating force today, which is precisely no longer sex, race, or religion, but poverty. It means that human solidarity is stretched to its outmost limits.

I see the challenge on a threefold level. *First*, on the level of present day human life. We should learn from the lessons of the past. Slavery was rampant, Nazism came, dictatorships of all types were dominant, capitalism was pervading the human mentality and most universities kept quiet and continued doing business as usual. The problem is very complex. The university, as any other human institution, is nurtured by the spirit of the times represented by the people of each generation. And yet, it belongs to the essence of the university to transcend these limitations without ignoring

day-to-day fashions of all sorts. This is precisely its intellectual element. But, as I said earlier, it includes also a contemplative factor which entails an inseparable polarity between theory and praxis. Our time has become aware, more than perhaps any other historical period, of the caste separation or elitist apartheid in which we live. Or, in positive terms, we have become more and more sensitive to human solidarity and universal co-dependence of the peoples of the earth. It would be irresponsible to leave the enhancement of the world to politicians and activists of sorts. Not only *homofaber* has an urgent task to perform; *homo sapiens* as well has a role here to achieve.

Second, the “option for the poor” has been too easily interpreted as an economic issue, thus as an invitation to join the Western trend of classifying humankind in terms of GNPs and purely financial and economic values, and thus to crusade in favor of the Westernization of the world. This is partly due to the relative absence of university collaboration in this question. This second level is the level of thinking.

I would like to put it simply: Poverty, in the gospel, in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and practically all religions is not mainly an economic issue. It is a way of life and thus of thinking. It could be brought down to the insight that the *most fundamental* things in life, and thus towards which Man has to direct attention and affection, are the most *elemental* things as well: to speak, love, walk, know, feel, eat, drink, and celebrate, to be born, to grow, and die... . Simplicity does not necessarily mean simplification, and the fullness of human life does not require a specialized input of information. Is not the university concerned with education, i.e., with bringing forth dormant human potentialities so that we may reach that humanness brought about by the cultivation of the spirit of Man?

Thirdly, on the cross-cultural level: It is a paradoxical fact that the most cross-cultural value in the world today is precisely the culture of the poor. They are a cross-cultural reality. And what is this culture if not a culture of survival? But to survive is not only an individual issue for the poor. It is also a collective question for humanity. Furthermore, to survive is to let all the accidentals fall by the way and cultivate the core of life. If I were allowed to make the French pun in English: to survive (*survivre*) is to have a *survie*, a plenitude of life. This brings us directly to the eighth sūtra.

8. CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITIES SHOULD BE CENTERS OF AUTOCHTHONOUS LIFE.

If nothing else, Christianity is not a nation-bound or culture-tied religion. Theoretically at least, a Christian university should not feel bound to a particular nation-state nor to a definitive form of culture. We know, on the other hand, that most universities in Asia, including those of Christian inspiration, were created mainly in order to have an efficient and honest colonial bureaucracy, or a similar one in those few nations which were not directly under colonial rule. The model was practically the same.

Political colonialism is over, economic imperialism still persists, and cultural monophormism is the prevalent model of the universities of Asia. They are, by and large, if not the servants of the State, the obedient followers of the predominant Western model of science and technology, the best Trojan horses for the introduction of the culture which, originating in the West, has practically extended into the entire planet.

I will not enter into debatable questions as to whether the Asian universities should submit to critical scrutiny (allotropic medicine, the nation-state model), and technocracy as the most suitable solutions for the wellbeing of those parts of the world. I will limit myself to state what seems to derive immediately from the nature of the university and the essence of Christianity, namely that the universities of Asia should cultivate the venerable and rich cultures of their respective countries and contribute to enhance and transform them. Asia has glorious traditions of culture and spirituality. It belongs to the university education of these countries to study and develop those cultures, not just as subject matter of specialized studies, but as living fields in which the life of the people can reach that maturity to which each human being aspires.

In other words, universities should overcome the tutelage of Church, State, and Corporations, and not be exclusively linked to one single cultural or religious world; thus they will contribute to the pluralism which we need urgently today in order not to stick in, and perhaps perish, under the totalitarian hegemony of the present technocratic civilization.

It is well known that the separation between religion and culture does not exist in other parts of the world. This entails that under autochthonous life I understand also the traditional religions which by this very fact of being studied and fostered will consequently change and transform

themselves. The old saying of making of a Buddhist a better Buddhist, of an animist a better animist, and of course of a Christian a better Christian applies here directly.

I could also comment on this point from a more political perspective. What the world needs today is decentralization and pluralism to overcome the temptation of the Tower of Babel. The universities have here an indispensable part to play.

All this is very sketchy and imperfectly said. The problems are too overwhelming and complex to allow me to state them in all their aspects. Suffice this brief mention.

I would like to add, however, a kind of corollary which I consider of the utmost importance and which has relevance not only for Asia but for the world at large. It is what I would like to call the *ontonomy of the Fourth Power*. I shall explain.

Since Montesquieu, the political techniques of governments function best with a certain separation (although the expression *separation despouvoirs* is not his) of the three classical powers: the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. I would add a fourth power which the philosopher of La Brede, who lived still under the old regime, did not feel the need to mention. The "Fourth Power" was still invisible because taken for granted. Montesquieu lived in a period of Christendom, secularized and cracking, but still alive. The universities represented that undisputed Fourth Power because knowledge was still unchallenged at its basis. In India we have a somewhat similar division of powers in the traditional caste system, in spite of its many degenerations. The brahmins and panditas, the acaryas and gurus had a recognized independent status and power.

Today we can no longer ignore cultural and religious pluralism, on the one hand, and the uniforming tendency of the political and economical world, on the other, as if these latter were independent of any philosophical and religious foundations. The universities as centers of teaching, learning and search are being almost instinctively made subservient to the prevalent ideology. But this ideology today is, to say the least, insufficient. I submit that without a recognition of the independence of this Fourth Power we cannot have a free life on earth and we are going to fall victims of one of the worst dictatorships of history.

I use the word *ontonomy* in order to underline that the relationship between the four powers is neither one of total autonomy nor one of dependent heteronomy from a superior stance.

The present situation in Asia seems to me extremely important, and the role of the Christian universities truly momentous. To invest this Fourth Power in the intellectual institutions where the pursuit of knowledge is unhampered by other intentions is what we need in the world today, both on the national and the international level. It is clear that I am not propounding a Platonic republic of philosophers and much less philosopher kings. This Fourth Power is free, but ontonomic, i. e., intrinsically linked to the whole, independent but not separable from the other three, not at the service of anybody, not even of itself as a separate body. Here is where the traditional world-views offer more than one point of reflection and inspiration.

The fact that in some “developed” countries the mass media (press included) have been called the Fourth Power under the idea that they represent (and not forge) public opinions shows up to what extent the university has abdicated its role and has been ostracized from life –more than the novitiates of religious orders. Public opinion may be the real Fourth Power. But where is the free arena for the forming of such an opinion? I am not extolling “Oxford-accent” or “Herr Professor” mentality. I am saying that the university is an essential part of the human agora.

9. “CONVERSION” OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Christians have always had a tendency to convert. I detect in this a deeper dynamism than just the often disputable zeal of proselytizing. I take it to reveal an inner urge for a constant transformation, for a never-ending process of overcoming oneself and all the strictures of reality according to that very saying of Scripture that the Spirit makes all things new. In this sense I speak of conversion of the traditional religions, including of course Christianity itself, into something which is the deeper identity of those very traditions. A constant renovation and transformation, this is the radical *metanoia* referred to above. I am not advocating abandoning religions, but transforming them. The crisis of most religious traditions of humanity today is that they feel incapable of handling the human condition as it is. They need to join hands, otherwise they become irrelevant, and life will bypass them.

For Christians it should not be very difficult to accept that the salt they are supposed to be wants not to convert everything into salt, but to enhance the respective taste of the different foods. Light, the other simile, is invisible in itself, and takes the colors of the bodies it falls upon; a Hindu a better

Hindu, a Confucianist a better Confucianist. Religious pluralism, in other words, does not want to convert everything into salt. Christian university centers could foster a renewal of the different traditions. In a few decades, if the world is still alive, many people will begin to say that Hinduism, Buddhism and all other religions need to rediscover those gems hidden there, that are the essential part of human experience and wisdom. Christians have been too fearful of the other religious traditions. Christians act very often as a sect as if they were afraid of having a synagogue, or a mosque, or a prayer hall in a Christian university. Are we going to leave without any religious instruction 70% or more of the non-Christian students? Are we going to fall prey to a petty competitive spirit that prevails in the technocratic society?

This may look like a contradiction, but I think it is not. The role of Christian universities may well be that of fostering the transformation and renewal of traditional religions, all the more when they are often being looked down upon by the elites dazzled by Western technological achievements. A new religiousness is emerging. Man cannot live without it. The name I suggested from the Christian angle is *Christianness*. But this would be another lecture.

We came to hear the role of the non-Christian teacher. And I would dare say that I have not skipped the problem, for my strategy has been to turn the question upside down. The role of the non-Christian teacher is the same as the role of the Christian one. We should overcome this dichotomy without blurring the distinctions. Regarding the role of Christians in the so-called Christian universities, I am convinced that the role is just the same. We are all engaged in the same venture and all oars are indispensable.

Practical Proposals

1. *To teach other religions AS PART OF Christian education.* Thus not just to teach Buddhism to Buddhists (which seems a human right of an integral education for a Buddhist). But to teach Buddhism to Christian students as part of the Christian curriculum, welcoming Buddhist students if they so want. This would overcome a legal difficulty in many countries (which allow the teaching of religion only to the followers of that religion).

2. *To overcome the discrimination between christians and non-christians.* To abolish the expression “Christian/non-Christian” at least among the staff. The example of the “Christian democracies” as political parties as if they had the monopoly on Christian political principles, should be instructive.

3. *To establish a network of collaboration with other agencies, like NGOs and similar groups promoting social justice.* The aim here is to break the isolation of the university and university education –as it is already done in several universities. This collaboration should be done not as extracurricular activities but as part of the university education.