

# The Idea of the Catholic University

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*The group of educators which has prepared this study document is happy to share it with you in the hope of widening and deepening the discussion: "What is the nature and role of the contemporary Catholic University?" Trustees, administrators, faculties, students and friends of our institutions will all have something to contribute to the discussion. The Paris Secretariat of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (77 bis Rue de Grenelle, Paris VII, France) will welcome individual and group comments on the document.*

*A particular word of appreciation is in order for those who prepared the background papers which helped greatly to shape the document. They are: George N. Shuster, John Tracy Ellis, Michael P. Walsh, S.J., Thomas Ambrogi, S.J., Paul C. Reinert, S.J., Neil G. McCluskey, S.J., William Richardson, S.J., John E. Walsh, C.S.C., Lorenzo Roy and Lucien Vachon. The bulk of the final editing of the document itself was done by Robert J. Henle, S.J.*

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## PREAMBLE

Under the auspices of the North American region of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, a group of Catholic educators has met on two occasions during the last six months to study the nature and role of the contemporary Catholic university. The following statement was prepared during the second of these meetings, July 20 through July 23, 1967.

The objectives of the conferences were to begin discussions and study background papers for the next international meeting of the Federation to be held at the Lovanium University, Kinshasa, Congo. Subjects discussed were basic questions concerning the role of the Catholic university in the world today. Similar discussions have also taken place in Buga, Colombia, in Manila and in Paris for the other regions of the Federation.

The North American group agreed that the Catholic university is and has been rapidly evolving and that some distinctive characteristics of this evolving institution should be carefully identified and described. The following statement attempts to call attention to some of these characteristics which seem particularly relevant to the current problems facing the Catholic universities of the world and more especially of the United States and Canada.

Hence, the statement does not pretend to present a full philosophy or description of the Catholic university. It is selectively and deliberately incomplete.

Furthermore, since the discussions were sponsored by the Federation of Catholic Universities and centered mainly on university-level problems, the nature and role of the Catholic liberal arts college or of the smaller university were not considered.

A further important limitation of the statement must be emphasized. The group clearly recognized that the presence of and active participation by persons who are not Catholics in the Catholic university community are most desirable and, indeed, even necessary to bring authentic universality to the Catholic university itself. Those of other views, whether students,

faculty members, or administrators, bring rich contributions from their own various traditions. They also insure by their active participation the seriousness and integrity of the search for understanding and commitment. The group, however, makes no attempt to describe herein how this desirable participation of others than Catholics can be integrated with the Catholic community of learners as described in this document, so that, in fact, their participation would make the Catholic university a Catholic-sponsored pluralistic society. Furthermore, the group believes that those who are not Catholics may find in the Catholic university not only a warm welcome but notable distinctive benefits for themselves.

Again, one of the basic convictions of the study group is that the Catholic university not only can and must be a university in the authentic sense of the word, both traditional and modern, but that, in fact, a Catholic university properly developed can even more fully achieve the ideal of a true university.

Finally, this paper is preliminary to further discussions in preparation for the 1968 international meeting. Clearly, it represents only the thinking of the individuals present at the first series of study meetings and not the institutions they represent nor the International Federation of Catholic Universities.

Neil G. McCluskey, S.J. Secretary

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## STATEMENT ON THE NATURE OF THE CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

### 1. *The Catholic University: A True University with Distinctive Characteristics*

The Catholic University today must be a university in the full modern sense of the word, with a strong commitment to and concern for academic excellence. To perform its teaching and research functions effectively the Catholic university must have a true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself. To say this is simply to assert that institutional autonomy and academic freedom are essential conditions of life and growth and indeed of survival for Catholic universities as for all universities.

The Catholic university participates in the total university life of our time, has the same functions as all other true universities and, in general, offers the same services to society. The Catholic university adds to the basic idea of a modern university distinctive characteristics which round out and fulfill that idea. Distinctively, then, the Catholic university must be an institution, a community of learners or a community of scholars, in which Catholicism is perceptibly present and effectively operative.

### 2. *The Theological Disciplines*

In the Catholic university this operative presence is effectively achieved first of all and distinctively by the presence of a group of scholars in all branches of theology. The disciplines represented by this theological group are recognized in the Catholic university, not only as legitimate intellectual disciplines, but as ones essential to the integrity of a university. Since the pursuit of the theological sciences is therefore a high priority for a Catholic university, academic excellence in these disciplines becomes a double obligation in a Catholic university.

### 3. *The Primary Task of the Theological Faculty*

The theological faculty must engage directly in exploring the depths of Christian tradition and the total religious heritage of the world, in order to come to the best possible intellectual

understanding of religion and revelation, of man in all his varied relationships to God. Particularly important today is the theological exploration of all human relations and the elaboration of a Christian anthropology. Furthermore, theological investigation today must serve the ecumenical goals of collaboration and unity.

#### *4. Interdisciplinary Dialogue in the Catholic University*

To carry out this primary task properly there must be a constant discussion within the university community in which theology confronts all the rest of modern culture and all the areas of intellectual study which it includes.

Theology needs this dialogue in order:

- A) to enrich itself from the other disciplines;
- B) to bring its own insights to bear upon the problems of modern culture; and
- C) to stimulate the internal development of the disciplines themselves.

In a Catholic university all recognized university areas of study are frankly and fully accepted and their internal autonomy affirmed and guaranteed. There must be no theological or philosophical imperialism; all scientific and disciplinary methods, and methodologies, must be given due honor and respect. However, there will necessarily result from the interdisciplinary discussions an awareness that there is a philosophical and theological dimension to most intellectual subjects when they are pursued far enough. Hence, in a Catholic university there will be a special interest in interdisciplinary problems and relationships.

This total dialogue can be eminently successful:

- A) if the Catholic university has a broad range of basic university disciplines;
- B) if the university has achieved considerable strength in these disciplines; and
- C) if there are present in many or most of the non-theological areas Christian scholars who are not only interested in and competent in their own fields, but also have a personal interest in the cross-disciplinary confrontation.

This creative dialogue will involve the entire university community, will inevitably influence and enliven classroom activities, and will be reflected in curriculum and in academic programs.

#### *5. The Catholic University as the Critical Reflective Intelligence of the Church*

Every university, Catholic or not, serves as the critical reflective intelligence of its society. In keeping with this general function, the Catholic university has the added obligation of performing this same service for the Church. Hence, the university should carry on a continual examination of all aspects and all activities of the Church and should objectively evaluate them. The Church would thus have the benefit of continual counsel from Catholic universities. Catholic universities in the recent past have hardly played this role at all. It may well be one of the most important functions of the Catholic university of the future.

#### *6. The Catholic University and Research*

The Catholic university will, of course, maintain and support broad programs of research. It will promote basic research in all university fields but, in addition, it will be prepared to undertake by preference, though not exclusively, such research as will deal with problems of greater human urgency or of greater Christian concern.

#### *7. The Catholic University and Public Service*

In common with other universities, and in accordance with given circumstances, the Catholic

university is prepared to serve society and all its parts, e.g., the Federal Government, the inner city, et cetera. However, it will have an added special obligation to carry on similar activities, appropriate to a university, in order to serve the Church and its component parts.

#### *8. Some Characteristics of Undergraduate Education*

The effective intellectual presence of the theological disciplines will affect the education and life of the students in ways distinctive of a Catholic university.

With regard to the undergraduate -- the university should endeavor to present a collegiate education that is truly geared to modern society. The student must come to a basic understanding of the actual world in which he lives today. This means that the intellectual campus of a Catholic university has no boundaries and no barriers. It draws knowledge and understanding from all the traditions of mankind; it explores the insights and achievements of the great men of every age; it looks to the current frontiers of advancing knowledge and brings all the results to bear relevantly on man's life today. The whole world of knowledge and ideas must be open to the student; there must be no outlawed books or subjects. Thus the student will be able to develop his own capabilities and to fulfill himself by using the intellectual resources presented to him.

Along with this and integrated into it should be a competent presentation of relevant, living, Catholic thought.

This dual presentation is characterized by the following emphases:

- A) a concern with ultimate questions; hence a concern with theological and philosophical questions;
- B) a concern for the full human and spiritual development of the student; hence a humanistic and personalistic orientation with special emphasis on the interpersonal relationships within the community of learners;
- C) a concern with the particularly pressing problems of our era, e.g., civil rights, international development and peace, poverty, et cetera.

#### *9. Some Special Social Characteristics of the Catholic Community of Learners*

As a community of learners, the Catholic university has a social existence and an organizational form.

Within the university community the student should be able not simply to study theology and Christianity, but should find himself in a social situation in which he can express his Christianity in a variety of ways and live it experientially and experimentally. The students and faculty can explore together new forms of Christian living, of Christian witness, and of Christian service.

The students will be able to participate in and contribute to a variety of liturgical functions, at best, creatively contemporary and experimental. They will find the meaning of the sacraments for themselves by joining theoretical understanding to the lived experience of them. Thus the students will find and indeed create extraordinary opportunities for a full, meaningful liturgical and sacramental life.

The students will individually and in small groups carry on a warm personal dialogue with themselves and with faculty, both priests and laymen.

The students will experiment further in Christian service by undertaking activities embodying the Christian interest in all human problems -- inner-city social action, personal aid to the

educationally disadvantaged, and so forth.

Thus will arise within the Catholic university a self-developing and self-deepening society of students and faculty in which the consequences of Christian truth are taken seriously in person-to-person relationships, where the importance of religious commitment is accepted and constantly witnessed to, and where the students can learn by personal experience to consecrate their talent and learning to worthy social purposes.

All of this will display itself on the Catholic campus as a distinctive style of living, a perceptible quality in the university's life.

#### 10. *Characteristics of Organization and Administration*

The total organization should reflect this same Christian spirit. The social organization should be such as to emphasize the university's concern for persons as individuals and for appropriate participation by all members of the community of learners in university decisions. University decisions and administrative actions should be appropriately guided by Christian ideas and ideals and should eminently display the respect and concern for persons.

The evolving nature of the Catholic university will necessitate basic reorganizations of structure in order not only to achieve a greater internal cooperation and participation, but also to share the responsibility of direction more broadly and to enlist wider support. A great deal of study and experimentation will be necessary to carry out these changes, but changes of this kind are essential for the future of the Catholic university.

In fine, the Catholic university of the future will be a true modern university but specifically Catholic in profound and creative ways for the service of society and the people of God.

Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin  
July 23, 1967.

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