

# A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY?

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*Is there such an institution?*

Yes. In the sense of **universities** run by Catholics.

*Can there be such an institution?*

Depends.

*Depends on what?*

In what sense? If in the sense of a **university** run by Catholics or by Catholic Organizations or Religious Orders, or by the Church, then the answer is the same as the answer to the first question: Yes, there are. And there can be. If it means an institution where Christian Doctrines form the core curricula, and christian way of thinking the only accepted way of thinking, then the answer is that such an institution should not be called **university**, because a **university** is a place of all knowledge and accepts all ways of thinking or at least, gives freedom to air different views. If **catholic** is written in the lower case, meaning **universal**, then all universities

may be catholic. And, therefore, the term is redundant and unnecessary. Since there are many universities all over the world, to distinguish one from the other a proper name may be added like Oxford, Cambridge, Stanford, Harvard, London, Assumption.

*Is that all you wanted to say?*

No...

*What else?*

The fact that the "Catholic" church wants to have its own universities and wants to have a say in the curriculum, administration and research programs of all universities that are run by Catholics or Catholic Organizations because they are Catholic Universities in the first sense discussed above.

*And this you find objectionable?*

Yes

*Why?*



"The university is a creation and an instrument of human culture that possesses its own intrinsic dynamism or nature or laws of evolutionary growth and perfectibility that must be respected and actualized if the university is to be itself and fulfill its high promise of contributing to the cultural life of the human family. To a degree, the internal dynamic of the university is the dynamic of the human mind itself. To be self-determining in framing its inquiries, hypotheses, explanations, following evidence, in conducting scholarship in the humble recognition that the knowledge gained reflects the interdependence and critical judgement of scholars as guarantors and safeguarders of quality".

A University is an institution of higher learning that confers degrees in different fields of knowledge, engages in different fields of research and aims at adding to the store of knowledge in the world. A university is a place of inquiry, and even questioning: questioning past theories, practices, beliefs, customs, traditions in an effort to understand them and if necessary correct wrong interpretations and suggest new ones. All these things can be accomplished only in an atmosphere of free inquiry and research.

*And you feel that in a Catholic University this spirit of free enquiry is not only not fostered but is actively discouraged?*

Yes.

*Isn't it strange?*

Yes and No!

*Why yes and no?*

Yes, because if the Church controls curriculum offerings, research projects and methods of research, then the necessary academic freedom is absent.

Besides, the Catholic Church champions freedom and the spirit of inquiry and fights for it whenever and wherever Church freedom is threatened or curtailed. But it is disappointing to see this same Church denying such rights when it is a question of questioning its own authority, doctrines or teachings.

On the other hand, it is not so strange because all organisations, including the Church, are jealous of their beliefs, doctrines and practices and do not permit indiscriminate questioning of their cherished values. This may be because secretly they feel that their beliefs don't stand close scrutiny. In their own hearts they may not be convinced of the truth of their beliefs. If by questioning, these values are shown to be false, **as they are afraid they will be**, then they will have no ground to stand on and they won't be able to justify their own beliefs, values and the reason for their existence.

*Could you elaborate more on both of these ideas?*

Yes, gladly. If the Church interferes in curriculum offerings, only certain courses can be offered. If the Church insists that only certain particular authors and particular books can be used, then other authors and other views are left out. If the Church insists that research can be done only in certain areas and in certain ways, then other areas and other fields are left out.

*And this does not agree with your idea of a university?*

No, because it goes against the very purpose of establishing a university.

*Which is?*

Increasing knowledge and giving birth



to new knowledge.

*Which cannot be accomplished without freedom of inquiry and research?*

Precisely.

*Why, then, do you think, the Catholic Church puts restrictions on freedom of research and why does it want to have a say in curriculum offerings?*

I believe it is because the Catholic Church **lacks faith in Man and God** in spite of all its protests to the contrary.

*What you are saying is quite serious. Could you elucidate your ideas a little more?*

Most willingly.

The Catholic Church is obsessed with keeping people on the **right path**. **Right thinking** is the pre-requisite to **right living**, and **right thinking**, for the Church, means **thinking** like the "official" Church. Any deviation from the "official" thinking of the Church is frowned upon. In such a situation, no new ground can be broken and no new ideas are born. In contrast, the Lord, when he made man, endowed him with reason and the ability to think and entrusted him with the responsibility of looking after himself and the world in full freedom. The Lord thus put a lot of **faith in Man**.

The Catholic Church insists that as a consequence of the "Fall" human reason is vitiated and prone to error and needs to be controlled and guided by its teaching. This effort to eliminate all error is counterproductive, since man does things by **trial and error**. And trial and error are the means of advancement and progress for man on earth. The attempt to keep man from error cripples him and reduces his action-possibility. The Church wants man to be infallible when the Lord

created him fallible. The Lord, by denying man freedom, could have prevented the "Fall" but he didn't do it! The official Church acts as if it knows better than God. And thus shows little faith in God and Man.

*You want men to have the freedom to think their thoughts and do things the way they want. And you admit that this will cause problems and create some evil. But you believe that this is the only way open to man. You also believe that man can learn from his errors. And that the unfettered human spirit is the best guarantee for self improvement and other improvement.*

I do because that is what the Lord does.

*Why then is it that the Catholic Church with all its wisdom does not see this point?*

It is not that it does not see the point. It does. But it is afraid of the consequences. The official church, the **hierarchical church**, is an institution that has its own interests at heart. And it will not tolerate anything that it thinks is against its interests. The church wants to maintain its authority: its power to **bind and loose**; which, in practice, means more **binding than loosening**. It prides itself as the guardian of all truth. And truth means what it says. Whatever is not according to this is not truth. Once the Church allows other ways of thinking, its authority will be lost, its truth will be questioned. And this it cannot tolerate. It doesn't see the point for its own survival as an institution.

*But it seems that this is short-sighted.*

I couldn't agree more. Indeed, it is short-sighted. If the truth that the Church claims as true is **true** then no amount of



questioning can destroy it. It can only deepen it. The Lord himself said: "the truth will prevail". As I said, the Church lacks faith. The Lord himself wants the "Church" to be questioned, because he also said: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Jews thought that by **killing Jesus, killing truth**, they could solve the problems. And what did they achieve? They proved Jesus right. The Lord knew better. And we know better. The Lord himself questioned. The Lord was a non-conformist. The Lord said, "the letter kills, the spirit saves." The Church has not learned the lesson. The Church will crucify Christ again- and that means "the truth". "I am the truth, the life and the way."

The opposition of the Church then can have some advantages if we are not intimidated, if we go on with our thoughts, research, and break new ground. One day the church will see the truth. It will always be a little too late. But given the nature of the Church, it can't be helped. There are many examples of this. Galileo, Luther, Teilhard de Chardin, Hans Kung. These are people who got into trouble with the Church because they didn't think like the Church. All these are people who were frowned upon, castigated by the "Church" at one time or another; these are the spirits who have taken us to new frontiers and won the grudging admiration of the church. The examples cited above show the folly of curtailing the human spirit and its spirit of inquiry. And the harm that can be done to both God and man. The Church herself becomes an object of derision because of this. In this 20th century, there are lots of research going on in the laboratories of universities that are frowned upon by the Church, especially, in the fields of "genetic" engineering and bio-technology. These have given us greater understanding of the miracle of life and of ourselves and has

harnessed energies for the well-being of man everywhere. The Church, as someone has well said, "arrives at the scene always late and out of breath." But it need not be like this always.

*From this discourse what useful conclusion or conclusion can we derive?*

A university, as an institution of higher learning dedicated to the pursuit of truth, whether church affiliated or not, should have the freedom to determine its curricula, its program and areas of research without any let or hindrance from any source whatever so that it can fulfil its mission as producer and disseminator of knowledge for the benefit of man everywhere. All that it takes to do this is to have a little more faith in man and God. Not that man will always be right, not that he will not fall into error. But man has the ability to understand his errors. He can learn from them and overcome them. All that it requires is to accept the truth about man: **that he does things by trial and error**. And that is his way of advancing knowledge. If the Church cannot accept this and denies man the possibility of error and sin, then it commits a grave sin and a fatal error. A grave sin, because it rebels against the "human condition". The Church would have man perfect when he is imperfect. This is a sin of pride, a sin of rebellion. And the Church is guilty of a grave error because the truth about man is that he is liable to error.

All wise men minimize risks; but they do not eliminate all risks. The Church should follow this example. Once we eliminate risks, there is nothing more left to do. Wise men will learn from past mistakes and listen to people who are qualified to speak. The church, then, should limit itself to its own areas of competence, where it can speak authoritatively.

The church must accept that it is not qualified to speak on all issues. It must admit that as a human institution, it is prone to error like all other human beings. A little bit of healthy humility would keep the church from rushing into areas where angels fear to tread. The Church should take what it considers to be its mandate: "**teaching all nations**" with a grain of salt and leave to competent people what they can do best. In this way, the Church will serve as the humble servant of the Word.