

## The Catholicity of a Catholic University by Michael Pakaluk

In the following presentation, I shall discuss three questions:

- (1) What it is to be Catholic, considered generally?
- (2) What is it for a *university* to be Catholic?
- (3) How might we respond to the standard objections against Catholic universities?

A point of definition: by "university" I mean "a general and complete community of scholars and students." This is the definition used by *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (ECE) and also by Newman. Note that it departs from the usage according to which what distinguishes a university from a college is that a university makes research primary and undergraduate teaching secondary, or that a university contains professional schools. (Newman in fact says that teaching must be primary in a university, and research can justifiably be primary only in an "academy": a university, he says, "is a place of teaching universal knowledge...If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students...", IU, ix.) By this definition, Assumption College is a university.

### Question 1: What is it to be Catholic?

The Catholicity of the Church is one of its four marks, together with its being one, holy, and apostolic.

The word "Catholic" comes from the Greek, *kath' holon*, meaning literally, "according to the whole". It signifies two sorts of wholeness: completeness, that is, that everything that should belong to a thing is in fact found there; and generality, that is, that it extends as widely as possible.

The new Catechism describes both of these aspects, when it speaks of the Church's catholicity. First, completeness: "In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him 'the fullness of the means of salvation' which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession." (n. 830) We might bring in the four parts of the Catechism here—creed, sacraments, morality, and prayer—and say that the Catholic faith is lacking nothing that belongs to each.

Second, generality, or better, universality: the Church, "while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages...The character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks

for the return of all humanity and all its good, under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit"(n. 831).

The completeness of the Catholic faith is what enables it to be universal. Since it is lacking in nothing, and is a coherent whole, it satisfies the longing of the heart for God, which every human being has, and in itself provides no reason for division or faction. In contrast, any partial presentation of the Christian faith is inherently restricted. Any restriction in the faith, e.g. "American Catholicism," is precisely designed to correspond to the subjective preferences of a particular group (what Newman referred to as "private judgement"). Thus, it will not attract or satisfy some others; and, furthermore, those who see its shortcomings<sup>s</sup> will justifiably look elsewhere for the fullness of truth. So the completeness and universality of Catholicity are intimately related.

But the Catholicity of the Church involves two other elements. The first is its being founded upon and united with the see of Peter in Rome. This element is not essential to the definition, or "essence", one might say, of Catholicism, but is a consequence of the will and decree of Christ, that, in practice, *this* is how his Church will have and retain its Catholic character. The see of Peter is *instrumental* to the Church's catholicity (this is one way of expressing the truth that the Marian charism of the Church is prior to its Petrine charism: the Petrine charism is for the sake of the Marian), but nonetheless it is a *necessary* instrument, as history indeed shows.

That something like this concrete union with Peter might be a necessary instrument of Catholicism, should not be surprising, given the character of the Incarnation, and God's covenant with a particular nation, which preceded and prepared for the Incarnation. God saves us through concrete means. This is one meaning of the claim: "Salvation is from the Jews." It was a particular human who was God, Jesus Christ, who sent out a particular group of disciples. And it is a particular bishop who holds that group together.

The second added element of Catholicity is what the Catechism calls the *missionary mandate* of the Church, which the Catechism keeps separate from the Church's apostolic nature, and actually treats as an aspect of its Catholicity: "Having been divinely sent to nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is *demanded by her own essential universality*, strives to preach the Gospel to all men."(n. 849, my emphasis)

We might say that the completeness and universal character of the Catholic faith is a gift; and our receipt and acceptance of this gift implies, in charity, the desire to give this very same gift to others. It is a desire that the fullness of Christ's revelation (completeness) be embraced by every human being whatsoever (universality). So Catholicity is not merely static and

propositional, but it also implies a yearning and a cooperation with the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, to sum up, to be a Catholic Christian means: to have the complete treasure of Christ's revelation; to have it in a form that all human beings can accept; to possess it through adherence to Peter (the means appointed for this purpose by Christ); and to desire and act to share this treasure with others.

### **Question 2: What is it for a university to be Catholic?**

This is answered directly by *ECE* (in n. 13), which distinguishes four characteristics that it describes as "essential" to "every Catholic university, as Catholic":

1. a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such;
2. a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;
3. fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church;
4. and institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life."

It is useful to understand and organize these four points by using the four Aristotelian causes, the four ways Aristotle distinguished of analyzing and understanding something. Recall that, according to Aristotle, we can understand a thing with respect to its matter (what it is made up out of); its form (what its content is); its purpose or aim (what it strives to achieve); and its what acts to produce it. A university has all four aspects, and a Catholic university is Catholic in all four ways.

I. First, as to its "matter" or components: a Catholic university needs to have Catholic professors, students, and administration. But how many, or in what proportion? This is answered, I think, by the document's remark that there must be a "Christian inspiration... of the university community" as well. There should be at least as many Catholics so that this is the result, that is, so that there is an "ethos" of Catholicism on the campus, and that it is *easy* to practice the Catholic faith there: a good society is one in which it is easy to be virtuous; a Catholic university is one in which it is easy to be a practicing Catholic. Notice that this requires a good number of Catholics who openly and unapologetically live their faith; obviously, cultural or nominal Catholics will not contribute to the university's having this sort of inspiration.

Presumably, of these three groups, the Catholicism of the faculty will be the most important, since the administration's task is essentially to assist the work of the faculty, and the students are taught, and their characters influenced, by the faculty. Here *ECE* gives a concrete norm, which is of pivotal importance: "In order not to endanger the Catholic identity of the University., the number of non-Catholic teachers should not be allowed to constitute a majority within the Institution..."(norm 4.4).

II. As to the "form" or content, the *ECE* speaks of "continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge." The Catholicity of a university will presumably be manifested in the content of what is studied in the university, that is, in the sorts of courses it offers and requires, and in the type of research it encourages.

Theology must play a central role in a Catholic university, as *ECE* affirms. Newman makes the point especially well: "A University," he says, "by its very name professes to teach universal knowledge: Theology is surely a branch of knowledge: how then is it possible for it to profess all branches of knowledge, and yet to exclude from the subjects of its teaching one which, to say the least, is as important and as large as any of them?" If properly taught, theology plays a unifying, integrative role in undergraduate education, since it introduces and clarifies first principles, supplies the basis for morality, and brings every branch of knowledge in relation to a single being, God, who is the author and source of all truth.

Since there is much disarray in academic theology today, it is worth asking what sort of theology should play this role. *ECE* tells us simply that it should be "taught in a manner faithful to Scripture, Tradition, and the Church's Magisterium" (n. 20). Newman evidently has in mind a more philosophical approach to theology, perhaps along the lines of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, or Augustine's *De Trinitate*. But it seems to me that there are two other types of courses in theology, which could similarly play an integrative role in undergraduate education: a study of the history of the Church, especially in its periods of persecution, and through the lives of great saints; and a study of the great, humanistic literature and art of the Church. We might think of these three approaches to theology—philosophical, historical, aesthetic—as analogous to the traditional division of academic subjects into natural science, social science, and humanities.

We should also note here the importance of apologetics. In a recent review in the *New Oxford Review*, I proposed that a course in apologetics should be required at a Catholic university, for three reasons: (1) such a course gives an account of a Catholic university's existence, since it explains why Catholicism is true, and if Catholicism is not true, a Catholic university would be a deception and should not exist; (2) no educated person can believe that Catholicism is true without assimilating these arguments; and (3) an educated

laity cannot have the proper motives for evangelization, and cannot be effective in their apostolate of "like towards like", without mastering these arguments.

The Catholic "content" of a university will also be manifested in the type of research its faculty engage in. *ECE* speaks of faculty members carrying out a "dialogue" between faith and reason. They would study such things as the compatibility of a theory, or school of thought, with Catholicism—its potential to be "Christianized". And we should expect researchers in various disciplines actually to have lines of research, or criticisms of current ideas, suggested to them by their Catholic faith. An example of this would be the Pope's recent address, where he exhorted Catholic philosophers to study the misunderstandings of human freedom which underlie contemporary relativism (one of the themes of *Veritatis Splendor*). One imagines that various departments of philosophy at Catholic universities would respond to the request and initiate serious and systematic investigations of this question.

Finally, it will be manifested in the liturgical and pastoral life of the institution. This will be *complete*, in the sense that no part of the Catholic faith will be ignored, slighted, or denied; and it will be *universal*, in the sense that the university will practice solidarity with Catholics throughout the world.

III. As to its efficient cause, or what produces or brings about a Catholic university, *ECE* says this will consist of "fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church." There are two points here. First, fidelity: a Catholic university needs to aim at being Catholic; it needs to have policies, incentives, and programs in place that directly promote its Catholic character. This will be the responsibility of its administration primarily.

If Catholicity is not aimed at, it will not be preserved; if it is not always being promoted, it will diminish, since, as Augustine remarked about the interior life, not to make progress is to regress. More strongly, it seems to be a rule that either a Catholic university promotes its Catholicism, or it *despises* it, so that authentic Catholicism actually becomes an object of persecution of sorts. This presumably happens because practicing and unapologetic Catholics become a reproach.

But it should be said that difficulties here faced by Catholic colleges and universities are different from those of Protestant institutions, as documented in George Marsden's book, *The Soul of the American University*, about the way in which all of the great, historic Protestant universities of this country became secularized. The secularization of a Protestant university is basically the playing out of tensions already inherent in Protestantism—not unlike the secularization of the United States, which seems to have followed almost unavoidably, given the ambiguous

philosophical character of its founding. But the secularization of Catholic universities results, not from internal pressures or external coercion, but rather from something like a failure of self-love, a relaxation of the ordinary regard for one's own good and welfare.

The other "efficient cause" of a Catholic university is of course its juridical ties with the Catholic church, emphasized by *ECE*, which include: ecclesiastical approval of its founding, continuing communion with the Holy See, and an openness to oversight by the bishop in whose diocese the university is located.

IV. The final way in which a university is Catholic is through its *aims* and *purpose*, which *ECE* says should include "an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family."

We can get a sense of what the distinctively Catholic aims of a Catholic university should be, if we think about Christ's remark about salt: "You are the salt of the earth; if salt loses its saltiness, what good is it?" We should ask: what is the "saltiness" of a Catholic university? What sort of good can it alone promote? What sort of contribution can it alone make? What are the problems afflicting secular universities today, which have straightforward solutions in a Catholic context, but which appear insoluble without the assistance of faith?

There are really two sorts of answers to these questions, depending upon whether we think of the nature of a university itself, or the role of a university in the mission of the Church. I defer discussion of the former type of answer until the third part of this presentation. But if we look at the mission of the Church, it is clear that there are certain things which a university alone, or best of all, can contribute to it. A Catholic university should be, I think, one of the principal ways in which the laity receive an instruction in their faith which is adequate to the role they need to play as leaven for society, and for the apostolate of "like towards like". Furthermore, Catholic universities should be centers of "countercultural" critiques of society and culture that are rooted in the radically transforming viewpoint of the gospel.

In the United States, we see quite clearly the failure of Catholic universities to fulfill these functions. It is not the case that the hundreds of thousands of graduates from Catholic professional schools, for example, are an important element in the "re-evangelization" of society which the Church is now seeking. And, as a rule, Catholic universities are not reputed as centers of a distinctively Catholic critique of misguided cultural trends, such as consumerism, the contraceptive mentality, abortion.

**Question 3: How might we respond to the standard objections against Catholic universities?**

*Objection 1: A Catholic university is a contradiction in terms. No university can be sectarian and universal in its aspirations at the same time.*

**Response:**

(a) Simply given the meanings of words, one would think that a non-Catholic (i.e. non-universal) university is a contradiction in terms.

(b) Grace completes nature. We saw that the two marks of the Catholicity are completeness and universalism. But these correspond to and complete the natural inspiration that underlies the university. This was expressed by Aristotle: "All men by nature desire to know." This universal desire, shared by all human beings, is a desire for knowing everything. Why in fact should scholars assemble together into a community? They do so in order to participate, through their community, in the knowledge which the others have. Thus, although I, as a philosopher, have not been able to pursue the study of chemistry, still—this is the ideal—I somehow share in the chemist's knowledge, if I enter into an intellectual community with him. Yet this desire—which cannot in fact be satisfied in this life by study, no matter how comprehensive—finds its full satisfaction through faith in God.

(c) Which leads to the third point: a university, therefore, needs to be more than an assemblage of scholars; it needs to be a community. But a modern secular university is *not* a community: it has no shared conception of the ideal of human development aimed at through teaching; and its scholars have no shared integrative framework for understanding their research as contributing, in its various ways, to a single end. But a Catholic university can be a true community, because it has a public and shared conception of the good of the human person, aimed at in teaching, and a public and shared understanding of God's existence and nature, in relation to which all research is in a way unified.

*Objection 2: The external control required for a Catholic university is incompatible with the autonomy a university should have. Each academic department has its own standards and methods, and these can only be hindered by a relationship to an external authority.*

(a) If this objection does not hold of an individual, it cannot hold of a group of individuals. But individual Catholics, who are masters of their disciplines, evidently have a recognition, and even jealous regard, for their proper nature. In fact, this sort of regard arguably grows, rather than diminishes, as a Catholic grows in his faith. Why? Because he can better see the glory and work of God in his profession.

(b) If autonomy means, "independence of religious authority", then the objection simply begs the question. If it means, "freedom to practice a discipline according to its appropriate principles", then there is no reason to think that this freedom will be limited by the university's regard for the

"autonomy", in this sense, of religious faith. Christian faith can no more interfere with the autonomy of any academic discipline, than any discipline can interfere with any other.

(c) But sometimes disciplines do conflict with the Christian faith, but, in such cases, what is the appropriate remedy? It all depends whether the Christian faith is true. If it is true, then the correct remedy is to criticize the discipline, in its excess, on the basis of Christian faith. But then this sort of checking and limiting will be a good thing, not something to be deplored. Newman in fact turns this consideration into an argument for the necessity of theology in a university. If it is absent, then, given the mind's quest for a coherent integration, something else will take its place, typically, some other discipline extending itself beyond its proper bounds.

*Objection 3: A university cannot be Catholic, or represent any religious denomination, and at the same time uphold academic freedom. Any difference a university's being Catholic would make, must be at the expense of the freedom of faculty to act as their best judgment dictates.*

(a) If academic freedom is simply the freedom to practice one's discipline in accordance with its own standards, then this objection reduces to the former one.

(b) Academic freedom in any other sense is not an absolute, but, as Marsden observes in his book, has always been understood, in official statements, such as that of the AAUP, to be subordinated to the common good. But if the common good of the university and of society is correctly described by the Christian faith, then academic freedom can without contradiction be understood as falling within these bounds. In short: everyone who thinks about it seriously recognizes that academic freedom is and should be subordinated to the common good. This criticism of Catholic universities, then, must either be based on a different conception of the common good, so that there is not difference, in Catholic universities, with regard to their academic freedom as such, or it based on an *absence* of a conception of a common good. If the latter, then "academic freedom" means some sort of unbridled individualism, and there is no reason for a Catholic university (or indeed any university) to embrace *that*.

*Objection 4: A Catholic university which takes its Catholic character seriously cannot enjoy the good opinion of the rest of academia; it is condemned to second-class status and will be ghettoized. But this is hardly useful to its students or the Church.*

(a) Ghettoization is either the result of bigotry or the outlook of Catholics. The former cannot be helped, but might in fact be made worse through embarrassment at one's Catholicism. The latter should not be a kind of withdrawal or scorn for the secular academy, but rather: a concern to excel in one's profession, with respect to its most exacting standards, for the glory of God.



(b) We should in any case distinguish ghettoization from the formation of a community or alliance of Catholic institutions. The latter is a good thing and is encouraged by ECE: "...cooperation is to be promoted in research, teaching, and other university activities among all Catholic Universities..."(norm 7.1)

*Objection 5: A Catholic university which takes its Catholic character seriously must consign its non-Catholic faculty, students, and staff to an unpleasant, second-class status.*

(a) Actually, the 50% rule of norm 4.4 suggests the opposite; it suggests that it is not necessary to the identity or mission of a Catholic university that all faculty be Catholic. Thus, no individual non-Catholic, or even a large number of them, can pose a "threat" or be a "problem".

(b) Tenure, in a Catholic university, should have the interpretation that the tenured professor is accepted into the "family" of the university, which then has the same regard for his or her welfare, as would parents of their children.

(c) A consequence of the Church's catholicism, is that it sees the good in every sort of believer, and every person of goodwill, and sees this in relation to Christ: this is the image of "circles of dialogue" from Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam*, from Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, and which is discussed in the Catechism in the section on Catholicity. Thus, the university can see its non-Catholic members as contributing to its mission, assuming their actions are not *inconsistent* with the Catholic faith. This can be insured by appeal to the goodwill and professionalism of newly hired faculty: "All teachers and administrators, at the time of their appointment, are to be informed about the Catholic identity of the Institution *and its implications* (N.B.), and about their responsibility to promote, or at least to respect, that identity."

(d) Non-Catholic faculty, who cannot directly promote the university's identity, might make an analogous contribution, related to some special skill of theirs.