

CAN THE UNIVERSITY SURVIVE  
WITHOUT THE FAITH?

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I

*Introduction*

Is a secular university a contradiction in terms? Born as a theological center at the heart of the Church, can the university sustain intellectual life apart from its origins?

In my years teaching in a curriculum that joins the liberal arts and sciences to theological study, I have often noted a correlation between a student's faith and his disposition towards the human arts and sciences. When the curriculum in a Catholic institution brings these disciplines to the service of Sacred Doctrine, faith itself fuels a student's interest and industry. Contrary to the popular view that faith and reason are antithetical, reality shows the opposite. George Bernard Shaw once said that a Catholic university is a contradiction in terms. The truth appears otherwise. Evidence suggests that the definition of a university must contain the word "Catholic."

The recent apostolic constitution's very title, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, meaning in Latin "from the heart of the Church," indicates the university's ecclesial birth. The constitution notes that the

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unique purpose of the Catholic university is "to consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of *truth*" (emphasis in original text). The Holy Father continues, "Without in any way neglecting the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic university is *distinguished* by its *free search* for the *whole truth* about nature, man and God" (emphases mine).

Thus, Pope John Paul II points out, "*proclaiming the meaning of truth*" belongs first and foremost to the Catholic university. It makes this proclamation, he says, as a "kind of disinterested service." He proceeds to explain: "A Catholic university is completely dedicated to the research of all aspects of truth in their essential connection with the supreme Truth, who is God." This is a bold claim in the modern world. Not merely does it reject the notion of a Catholic university as a "contradiction in terms," but even asserts that only when the "house of intellect" is wedded to faith can the university be true to intellect itself.

Such a claim is hardly surprising, however, since the marriage of faith and reason gave birth to the university in the first place. The opening words of the apostolic constitution read as follows: "Born from the heart of the Church, a Catholic university is located in that course of tradition which may be traced back to the very origin of the university as an institution." It is a great irony that theology has lost pride of place in the modern academy. Modern educators, as is commonly acknowledged, consider sacred doctrine the antithesis of science and all genuine learning. Even in the mid-nineteenth century, Cardinal Newman was obliged to labor long in his lectures entitled "The Idea of a University" to claim a place for theology in the citadel of knowledge. Today, the religious studies of a sectarian school are regarded as an imposition on academic freedom and are barely to be tolerated. Ironically, the very idea of a university came into being when men, motivated by the desire to understand their faith, gathered together all the human intellectual disciplines to form centers of theological studies. The human disciplines were sought and perfected as "handmaidens" to theology. Hence it was that the great universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, Sala-

manca, and the like, still our models of higher learning, came into existence.

Some dismiss as a mere accident of history the university's birth from a supernatural motive. The university would have been born, they claim, regardless of the Christian faith. As evidence they cite Aristotle, Plato and the other pagan sages, in whom wonder and man's natural desire to know first gave rise to philosophy and the sciences. After all, it was to these men that the Doctors of the Church turned in their quest for an orderly account of the faith. With or without Christianity, one might assume, all secular science and learning would have evolved in time. A closely related assumption sees the human mind, unfettered by religious biases, progressing better and faster under the inspiration of human genius alone. The liberation of the human disciplines from their servitude as handmaidens to their queen theology is, in such a view, the true origin of an authentic university whose office it is to serve mankind and not the bidding of any given faith. From such a perspective, the religious university can only seem dogmatic. It cannot be faithful to reason itself, and reason, it is maintained, can only thrive in an atmosphere of "free inquiry." This opinion, or opinions like it, pervades the academic world. It infects even Catholic institutions. The "spirit of Vatican II" movement, which used the recent Council as a pretext for a revolutionary upheaval in the Church, urged that the inspiration of unfettered natural learning be brought to the faith to reshape the faith in its own image. The secular, rather than the sacred, has come to reign over much of Catholic education. The queen of secularism has usurped the true queen of the medieval university.

This rosy view of the self-sufficiency of human reason is not borne out in reality. Technology may merrily go on advancing, but the university, now liberated from Sacred Doctrine, is disintegrating before our very eyes. Left to its own instincts, the university, once the repository of man's collected wisdom, has become a temple of dogmatic skepticism. Moral and intellectual relativism rush to fill every cranny of the modern university.

“Political correctness,” a thought-control mechanism decreed by a self-appointed elite, is swiftly becoming the new secular queen of sciences. Professor Joseph Salemi, in a letter to the editors of *Measure*, describes how colleges dominated by “political correctness” regard this doctrine as a pseudo religion. He writes:

It is well to remember that the doyen of the academic left, Stanley Fish, has seized on exactly this point [religious authority] in his defense of a blatantly politicized and partisan pedagogy. If religious schools can control the terms of internal debate in the name of their chosen orthodoxies, says Fish, then why can't we in the secular schools do the same? An orthodoxy is an orthodoxy, argues Fish, and if religionists can impose one in a denominational institution, politically correct colleges should be able to dictate one to their faculties as well.

“Political correctness” is a religion without faith. In this new religion nature is not elevated by the supernatural. Rather, the will blindly and arbitrarily dictates the terms it wishes to impose upon the human mind. The malaise has come to this: Reason has capitulated, and raw will reigns. The original optimism of the secular intellectual life has surrendered to darkest pessimism; all hope is abandoned. Intellect has failed itself. What is the actual pathology of the death of learning? Reason's refusal to serve theology. Only when reason honored that which was above it was reason true to itself. St. Paul noted just this pattern in his Epistle to the Romans:

What can be known about God is plain [to men] because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they

are without excuse; for although they knew God, they did not honor Him or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds became darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

Not only did men become foolish regarding a knowledge of the true God, but they also became foolish regarding a knowledge of the “things that have been made.”

Where reason without faith goes wrong is evident in the words of John Paul II when he mentions, in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, truth's “essential connection with the Supreme Truth, Who is God.” The idea is even clearer in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* of St. Thomas Aquinas when he says that “almost all of philosophy is directed to a knowledge of God.” Considering that philosophy meant for him the whole range of human wisdom and the liberal education leading to it, one can surely say: all human learning that does not dispose man to a knowledge of the power of God is false and betrays human reason itself. The reason why all perfections of reason dispose toward a knowledge of God—not only to a knowledge of those divine truths that the human intellect can know by its natural light, such as God's existence and His attributes, but also to those that transcend it and are held by faith alone, such as the doctrine of the Trinity in God and of the Incarnation of the Word—the reason, says St. Thomas, is that all of our natural knowledge derives from principles of reason implanted in us by God, the Author of our nature. Thus the principles of all the human disciplines are contained in the divine Wisdom. Whatever is true in human wisdom is in harmony with the whole of divine Wisdom; whatever is false is discordant with human reason itself. If the corpus of human learning does not faithfully return to the living God, its life, in fact, has somehow been cut off at the source. Learning inevitably languishes and dies.

But who will believe this analysis? Is it a matter of faith or of reason? Indeed, St. Paul was inspired to write, "Ever since the beginning of the world, God's invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made," and so men are "without excuse" in failing to honor him, and "they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds became darkened." Contained in these words is the article of faith that God's existence, His power, and His deity can be known by natural reason. When man, following his natural desire to know, asks the things of this world what they are, they proclaim above all to man that they are creatures of the Almighty God, if he will only listen to them. Even the human reason that asks this question answers that it, too, is a spark of the Inaccessible Divine Light. God is everywhere in His creation. All creation "lives and moves and has its being" in God. How can reason, being faithful to itself, help but find Him?

As St. Thomas Aquinas comments on the nature of wisdom at the beginning of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, he is not, in fact, speaking from faith alone but from what is seen even by the light of natural reason. He, of course, is not speaking as one at the beginning of the intellectual road, but as one well advanced, looking back upon the journey. And he can see, as any one of us might if we made the journey with him, that the end was virtually present in the beginning—and if one does not succeed in attaining the end, it is because he has made a bad beginning. "An error at the start," as the saying goes, "leads to great error further on." Whether one sees and agrees with this analysis or not, it is still true; and if true, it will never be false no matter how the world may protest against it. "Those who have eyes to see, let them see."

Be this as it may, I should like to show in a more positive manner how "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*) gave birth to the university, and why theology is not only the "queen of the sciences" but the sole shepherdess who protects them and keeps them true to themselves.

## II

*Credo Ut Intelligam*

When I speak of a student's faith having great bearing on the intensity and care with which he pursues the human disciplines, I do not mean just any version of faith, but the sort we find in the Apostles, who, upon hearing the Lord's parables turned to Him to ask their meaning—a meaning no longer given in the form of figurative language, but rather in open and proper speech. The Apostles were moved to ask not only because they were to be the first episcopal college, whose office it would be to form the magisterium of the Church, to be the primary teachers and keepers of sound doctrine, but also because they saw that the faith would be more perfectly possessed if it could be defined. The supernatural presupposes the natural, and thus Revelation is made to man according to, and not in conflict with, his rational nature. Revelation makes use of man's ordinary knowledge, taken from common experience, and through such knowledge reveals truths surpassing our natural power to see. Lofty as it is, Revelation makes use of human ideas and never violates the integrity of human knowledge.

The natural desire to know relates to the faith, of course, when one hears the good word and tries to understand what it is that is being proposed, as did the eunuch mentioned in the Acts, who asked Philip to explain the words of Isaiah. Furthermore, this desire comes into play when one having "eyes to see and ears to hear" assents to the faith and now seeks to embrace it more intimately—as did Mary, the sister of Martha, who chose the "better part" and sat at Our Lord's feet to hear all that He said. Such is the case even more profoundly with Our Lady, who "pondered in her heart" all the marvels she had seen and heard.

Knowledge thus relates to faith both in embracing it and in growing within it. In a similar way, the sciences engage the intellect in order to grasp their first principles and then to reason from these principles, drawing out their implications. Faith says

to God, "I hear what you say and believe it; now I long to see what it means so I may fully embrace it." Hence, St. Augustine's invitation: "*Intellege ut credas; crede ut intellegas*" ("Understand in order that you may believe; believe in order that you may understand"). We want to focus on the second injunction, "believe in order that you may understand," however, for in this we find the origin of the university arising out of the Catholic faith. As St. Anselm, who is regarded as the "Father of Scholasticism" (the system of studies that gave form to the medieval university), put it, "*Credo ut intelligam*" ("I believe that I may understand"). It was he who first used the expression, "*Fides quaerens intellectum*" ("Faith seeking understanding"). We will want to look more closely a bit later on at the context of his words.

The very idea of "faith seeking understanding," nonetheless, has its paradoxes. Faith is, as St. Paul says, "the substance of what is not seen but believed." How can faith remain faith when it is *seen*, that is, when it is *understood*? Moreover, in this life we live by faith. We see now "as in a glass darkly," but later "face to face." That is, we see now the things of heaven as reflected through the mirror of faith, but in the life to come we shall see God as He sees Himself. Is the attempt to understand faith, therefore, out of the question? Clearly, there is a wide sense in which faith seeks understanding: one "walks by faith" now, seeking to know the living God in the next life. This is what St. Paul means when he explains that of the three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, only charity will remain in us in heaven. "Hope," he tells us, "will give way to possession and faith to knowledge, but charity will remain the same." St. Anselm, however, did not have this ultimate sense in mind when he spoke of "faith seeking understanding." Rather, he had in mind an understanding of the faith sought in the present life. In St. Anselm, therefore, we have this puzzle: how do we now "walk by faith" and seek understanding while we are yet wayfarers? And even if we should try to understand the things of faith, is the effort not in vain? Is it not precisely because the

things of heaven are given to us in faith that they cannot now be seen? "Oh, Inaccessible Light!" as St. Anselm puts it.

A further paradox might come to mind. Suppose "understanding" of the faith were attained, would this not mean a loss of merit? After all, was not "Doubting Thomas," the Apostle, told that "more blessed is he that does not see but believes?" Thus, St. Anselm's phrase "faith seeking understanding" seems altogether unfitting. It is either unprovable on the one hand, or undesirable on the other. Solutions to these paradoxes go to the heart of the mystery of "faith seeking understanding."

First, let us consider whether "faith seeking understanding" deprives the believer of merit. It is important to recall that Thomas the Apostle doubted the physical resurrection of the Lord and said he would not believe unless he could touch the sacred wounds. What he did, in effect, was to reverse St. Anselm's "*credo ut intelligam*" to "*intelligo ut credam*." He insisted that he must first understand in order to believe—which is to say he refused to believe. Insisting that the article of faith concerning the Lord's resurrection must be proved to the senses, he rejects it as an article of faith altogether. In other words, faith, in this instance, depended entirely on verifiable evidence. This is the antithesis of St. Anselm's position. Faith, for St. Anselm, does not depend upon understanding; rather, understanding depends upon faith. Thomas would take the faith out of faith; Anselm preserves faith intact.

Lest Doubting Thomas be thought a poor model for believers, we should recall how he recovered from his disbelief. Upon touching the Lord's wounds and receiving His rebuke, St. Thomas proclaimed, "My Lord and my God." With this he pronounced the deepest mystery of man's salvation: the Incarnation, a religious truth beyond all human power of confirmation. To this day, it is the custom of the faithful to repeat Thomas's words at the Consecration of the Mass. As Thomas, in the Scriptures, professed the divinity hidden beyond the humanity of the One standing before him, the faithful now acclaim the presence of the

Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ beneath the appearances of bread and wine—the traditional *Mysterium Fidei*.

The seeming paradox of faith as the antithesis of reason does not in fact represent a contradiction. Faith and understanding are contraries, it is true. Faith is, as St. Paul says, “the substance of things unseen,” and seeing does put an end to faith. How is it then that St. Anselm, “walking by faith,” can actually seek to understand what he cannot see?

Two truths must be kept in mind: the desire to know is fixed in human nature and grace builds upon nature. How do the two, grace and nature, join with respect to faith and understanding? The doctrine of the Incarnation may be helpful in this matter. At Caesarea Philippi, when Our Lord asked his disciples Who He was, Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus then replied: “Flesh and blood have not told you this but the Father who is in heaven.” Here Peter professes the mystery of the Incarnation, asserting that the man in front of him is the Son of the Father in heaven. In short, the Person before him was at once both man and God. And Our Lord makes it clear that Peter could not have declared this proposition with certitude unless the Father in heaven had inspired him to do so; “flesh and blood,” that is, Peter’s natural powers, could never have taught this surpassing truth. It was hardly the case that he wouldn’t know this merely because he was a coarse and unlettered man. Learning would have made no difference. Peter’s limitations were due solely to the fact that he was a creature; for this sublime truth is “naturally” known to God alone—and to those to whom He reveals it. But even when held through the light of faith, such a mystery surpasses the creature’s power to comprehend.

But notice that Peter was not transported altogether outside his natural powers when this divine truth was revealed to him. He made use of his senses and his reason and surely called upon the natural learning he had acquired through his ordinary experience. It was through his naturally known concepts of “man,” “god,” “son,” and “living” that he understood what he meant

when he declared the Man before him to be “the Son of the Living God.” “Flesh and blood” were enough to give him such ideas. But what surpassed his power to know and could only be revealed by the Father was the proposition: “This man is the Son of the Living God,” the God-man. This proposition is a judgment held by faith alone; reason cannot fathom it. Yet while holding this truth by faith, reason is still totally free to inquire into the meaning of “man” and the meaning of “God” so as to know more perfectly the intelligibility of the proposition that “Christ is the Son of the Living God.” One might indeed come to see that, if Christ is true God and true man, and if the divine and the human natures both encompass intellect and will, then the one person, Jesus Christ, had two intellects and two wills, both divine and human. This realization clarifies the agony in the garden when Jesus exclaimed, “Not My Will but Thy Will be done.” The first reference is to His human will and the second to His divine will, shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Still, despite all that reason may draw from the proposition that “Christ is the Son of the Living God,” it remains an article of belief. And he who holds it, regardless of his learnedness, “walks by faith.”

Let us again ask why the believer is prompted to inquire into a deeper understanding of his faith? One might reiterate that man by nature desires to know, and this desire extends to the ultimate cause of all things. To inquire about the humblest object is to ask its cause, and this query cannot be satisfied until the mind reaches the Supreme Being. And if that Supreme Being reveals Himself to us, especially concerning His hidden Trinitarian life, and we assent by faith, the intellect will still grasp at whatever understanding it may attain of God, even when such understanding is held by faith alone—for, the “slimmest knowledge of the Highest Reality is prized more than the most certain knowledge of inferior things” [Aristotle, *De Anima*]. All of this is surely quite true, yet it is not the deepest reason why “faith seeks understanding.” The human soul is burdened heavily by the body and finds the struggle to reach the First Cause arduous.

The soul's energy quickly gives out in the realm of the transcendent. It readily falls back upon the material, sensible order and upon practical affairs. A Socrates and an Aristotle are rare.

Reason may investigate many matters and reach an understanding. However, without the teachings of faith, reason alone would have no reason to inquire into some of them. An example might be the nature of the *person*. An understanding of *person* is crucial to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Without faith, reason would not be pressed to comprehend these matters. Whether the intellectual issues be those about which reason readily comes to inquire, or those more sublime questions to which faith gives occasion, few minds can hold themselves on a purely rational course without giving in, out of human frailty or vanity, to the irrational. The appeal of novelty and originality feeds our egos, just as rationalizations do the bidding of our appetites. When faith started to lose its controlling place in the university, philosophies began to multiply. Creativity of thought was soon given a value above *truth*. But truth is *one*; error is infinite. St. Paul's words still ring true: "Although they knew God, they did not honor Him or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds became darkened." The distinctly Christian motive for the university was not merely wonder. This motive alone would not preserve the integrity of reason.

The human sciences possess full integrity when they are in service to sacred learning. "To love God above all with your whole heart and whole mind and whole soul, and your neighbor as yourself. In these two commandments are contained the whole of the law and the prophets," Our Lord tells us. Thus, Sacred Doctrine touches both mind and heart, not only revealing, but drawing us towards the Kingdom of Heaven. Hence, the theologian, like all other believers, is led above all by divine charity. The prompting of the Holy Spirit within him moves him, out of the love of God, to seek supernatural wisdom. While such an exalted motive may not apply equally to every theologian and student, the ideal is enunciated and pursued by the masters who

shaped the goals of the first universities. This motive is explicit in Anselm, Aquinas, and Bonaventure, among others. Charity, the love of God, shares with all other loves the desire to draw near the beloved. But union with a spirit can only be attained through knowledge—for in knowledge the knower becomes one with the thing known.

Just as Mary, the sister of Martha, sat at Our Lord's feet out of love and listened to all He said in order to draw nearer to Him through knowledge, so too, do Christians hope in the Beatific Vision. Through this Vision they will be united with God in eternity. Likewise, the Christian, even in this life, seeks to be united to the Living God through a deeper and deeper understanding of his faith. Faith is the believer's partaking in Divine Wisdom, which Wisdom is none other than God Himself. And even now, as a wayfarer, the believer seeks to join himself to God by taking part in the Divine Life, namely, divine self-knowledge. Through an ever more perfect understanding of God as He reveals Himself to man through both nature and the Scriptures, the believer seeks to be ever more perfectly united with the Beloved. Thus, faith seeks understanding.

Such is clearly the ideal embodied in St. Anselm's writings. A first indication of the conjunction of his speculation with charity and devotion is seen when he refers to his principal works as "meditations." He begins his *Proslogion*, the meditation in which he coins the expression, "faith seeking understanding," with the following words of prayerful preparation: "Come now, insignificant man, fly for a moment from your affairs, escape for a little while from the tumult of your thoughts... Abandon yourself for a little to God and rest a little in Him." And then he quotes the Psalm, "I seek your countenance, O Lord, Your countenance I seek." A few lines later he mentions the motive for his inquiry: "He *yearns* to see You and Your countenance is too far away from him. *He desires to come close to You*, and Your dwelling place is inaccessible..." Union with God is the supreme good of his life, the chief object of his love: "I was made in order to see You and I have not yet accomplished what I was made for." In this

we see that the theological inquiry, that is, the perfection of sacred learning here on earth, is an essential part of the Christian life; it is the natural outcome of a life of divine charity.

This purpose, found so explicitly in the works of St. Anselm, was the controlling idea that gave form and vitality to the course of studies at the heart of the original university. This does not mean that the usual human vices were nonexistent in the universities. Certainly, factionalism, personal ambition, pettiness, rivalries, and the like were a part of the scene just as they are today. But an ideal at work in the very concept of the university gave a direction to its efforts and also provided a check on its vanities and errancies. This check no longer exists. The glory of God restrains human weakness, whereas the glory of man gives it unbridled liberty.

The ambition to draw closer to God is not, of course, a guarantee of sound reasoning. St. Anselm himself, in the very treatise we mention, the *Proslogion*, seems to have erred on some fundamental points in his celebrated "ontological proof" for God's existence. In his eagerness to reach God, he evidently stretched human reason beyond its capacities in this present life and claimed more for reason than "flesh and blood" can possess. But those following out his ideal, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, would in time correct such false steps—as if it were a common enterprise to which all "men of good will" were meant, for the good of all men, to contribute.

Universities today may see themselves as having in common an academic life, but scholars hardly share a common intellectual tradition or a common *point de depart* for the life of reason. This fragmentation in academia makes the idea of even a common dialogue, in which real intellectual progress occurs, seem hopelessly naive. In the medieval university, this was not so. It is often looked back upon as an age of intellectual realism, possessed of a commonsense, man-on-the-street optimism, which held that the intellect could actually come to know things, and that the question "what?" had an answer—perhaps not one always easy to work out, yet attainable in some measure. All this has been

largely replaced by skepticism in the schools. The life of the first universities, we must keep in mind, began not in the esoteric ideas coming out of books or lecture halls, but with the ideas that we first grasp in the ordinary world of common experience. The life of reason began with what we all know, and reason's efforts were valid only to the extent that they maintained a "fidelity" to the world that even the peasant knows. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, was not a "Thomist," nor the inventor of his own creative system with its distinctive point of departure. He did not hesitate to use the insights of others, Christian or otherwise. They were ideas or insights about the reality he knew. Learning was a common enterprise engaging the labors of many. No one had a copyright. This, I say, was part of the ideal of the university in its origins, and this ideal inhibited the individualism and innovation that have since given the university an elite and esoteric aspect thus separated from the world of ordinary people. It is not a function of genius that sets the intellectual life apart from the world of ordinary people. Perhaps no merely human mind has had the strength of Aristotle's, yet Cardinal Newman said of Aristotle that he knew our thoughts and articulated them long before we were born, meaning that he analyzed the very thoughts we all have of the world around us, drawing out their meaning and implications in a manner unsurpassed in history. The goal of the first universities was to elevate ordinary understanding, not to betray it. And it did this because all valid learning proceeds from the known to the unknown—and not vice versa. And the known is first in the ordinary knowledge that all men share.

### III

#### *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*

Going from the known to the unknown always begins with reality as we know it in ordinary experience. As physicists, we



may descend to hypotheses about the subatomic makeup of the material world, or, as theologians, we may ascend to the first cause and primary principle of our universe. Whatever the direction, it behooves every thinker to examine carefully his immediate understanding of the world. Any mistakes made at the level of common understanding infect our thinking, whether it goes up to the heavens or down to the minutiae of nature. The believer must be aware of these perils as his "faith seeks understanding."

The truths of the Faith also have a desirable order with respect to what is more known and less known. In his several treatises, St. Anselm inquires about Sacred Doctrine by starting from the Articles of Faith. He does not begin with inquiries into biblical history, or biblical archeology or into ancient literary forms or the like, but he starts from the propositions drawn up by the Church, in its magisterial office, regarding the fundamental truths professed by Christians. The most pivotal of these propositions are set out in the several Credo's presented by the Church, beginning with the Apostles' Creed. Biblical studies, archeology, and the like have a place in higher learning, but they are not normative, that is, they are not the basic teachings of the Faith. They are not, therefore, the point of departure that puts higher education on course. The *Proslogion* of St. Anselm, for example, concerns the very first article of the Creed, "I believe in God..." and seeks to "see" the truth of God's existence and His attributes.

The Articles are thus first principles of sacred science. They have a role in sacred studies analogous to the role which the knowledge of things in ordinary experience exercises in human science. Both have stability and permanence, as the more known to us has greater certitude than the less known. And just as philosophy, grounded in and faithful to ordinary experience, can give us a perennial wisdom that joins us to Aristotle, Aquinas, and to the wise of all eras, so does theology grounded in the Articles of Faith allow our minds and hearts to be one with all believers, from apostolic times until the consummation of the

world. From the Articles one may, as it were, descend into inquiries about their scriptural origins and other temporal questions bearing upon their divine revelation; or one may, as did St. Anselm, seek to ascend to an understanding of the transcendent divine reality itself. It is this second quest, the attempt to lift the mind to God Himself, that gives rise to the university. It supplies the impetus to perfect human learning. I shall attempt to explain.

St. Anselm desired, as we saw in his *Proslogion*, to "draw close" to God through "faith seeking understanding." That is, the theological virtue of charity in his soul moved him, out of divine love, to seek union with his Creator. Every lover seeks union with his beloved. And, as noted above, because God is a spirit, union with Him can only come about by knowledge; the knower forms a union with the object known and becomes one with it. The ultimate joy of heaven is union with God in the "Beatific Vision" wherein God is known not as "through a mirror darkly," as the viator knows Him now through faith, but "face to face," as one who sees directly and "knows as he is known." "This is eternal life, that we shall see Thee, the true God." But even in this life, if nothing prevents it, the inclination of divine charity in the soul moves it to desire a more perfect union with God through an ever more perfect knowledge of Him. For this reason, Mary, the sister of Martha, chose "the better part," and sat at the feet of the Lord listening to His every word, so that she might draw ever closer to Him. St. Anselm, too, chose the better part. And this is why he says: "*Credo ut intelligam.*" For as faith, even in this life, gives way to imperfect knowledge, one partakes ever more fully of the Beatific Vision to come.

The motive for "faith seeking understanding" is, therefore, the love of God, divine charity. But what are the means through which the mind comes to a knowledge of God? Grace presupposes nature; hence, revelation presupposes natural knowledge; faith makes use of natural knowledge and elevates it. Thus St. Paul has written: "The invisible things of God, His existence and His attributes, are known to us through the visible things around

us." This being the case, the human arts and sciences become of the greatest importance for the believer: his knowledge of God will depend for its perfection upon how truly he knows "the visible things around him." Any false understanding about "things" and about the methods by which they are known are absolutely counterproductive to his objective. Following the impetus of charity, he must resist every human weakness and vanity. He gains nothing, in view of his motive in charity, to merely win an argument, to make a reputation, to appear "brilliant," or to gain whatever other worldly consolations a man might seek in the intellectual life. Truth is paramount. "Things," not opinions, occupy all of his interest. The truth about "things," through which he may elevate his mind to God, is his single purpose. This, I say, is the ideal found in St. Anselm's treatises and the model of the original university.

For this reason, liberal education, that education which seeks knowledge for its own sake and not primarily for making and doing, is about "things," about reality, and not about opinions or mere human ideas, no matter how brilliant or creative they may be. It is not a respecter of persons; it is not concerned with who said it, but whether, regardless of the speaker, it is true. "Diversity" in education, which places a premium on who said something and not on what was said, is entirely irrelevant to genuine liberal learning. It affects the believer not one iota whether a truth about "things" was enunciated by an infidel or by a Christian. He embraces truth, whatever its source, because it gets him nearer to God. For this reason, too, characterizing this tradition of education arising with the universities as "Greek" or "Roman" or "European" is mistaken. What may have originated in Europe belongs to the human race.

Theologians observe that among the Articles of Faith, some can actually be known by human reason while others remain "mysteries," forever beyond "flesh and blood," in this life. The former have been called the "preambles" to the faith. That is, they are truths about God and creation that are presupposed by the "mysteries." First among these is the Article "God exists."

This manifestly is presupposed to the belief that there are three Persons in the one God, the "mystery" of the Trinity. Of course, the "mystery" of the Trinity is presupposed to the "mystery" of the Incarnation, in which we assent to the proposition that the second Person of the Trinity, the Word of God, became flesh. It was about the "preambles" that St. Paul spoke when he said that "the invisible things of God may be known from the visible world around us." Most of the faithful will always hold the "preambles" by faith, as long as they are wayfarers, for they will lack the opportunity or the ability to pursue an understanding of them; in any case, knowledge of them is difficult to possess because "almost the whole of liberal learning is required for their comprehension" [St. Thomas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*].

In his *Proslogion*, when his "faith seeks understanding," St. Anselm sets out to understand certain of the "preambles," namely, God's existence and His attributes. We notice that he, unlike Doubting Thomas, does not seek to "understand" these articles so that he might "believe" them, but rather "believing" them, he seeks to "understand" them. His belief is in no way dependent upon his understanding. If anything, it is the other way around.

Since faith is "the substance of what is hoped in but *unseen*," as St. Paul puts it, when the truths of the "preambles" come to be *seen* by natural reason, faith ceases and the merit of *faith* is lost. Yet, as St. Thomas Aquinas points out, in this labor of love the merit of *charity* increases, and, of course, charity is the "greatest of all the virtues." Thus, absolutely speaking, one grows in religion the more he knows when his charity is out of a "pure heart and a good conscience and a faith unfeigned," as St. Paul says. The modern tendency to separate devotion from formal theology, as if it were "unprofessional," is an artificial distinction. It is not in the nature of sacred wisdom.

When St. Anselm inquires about the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word in another treatise called *Cur Deus Homo*, his faith again "seeks understanding" but in this case, unlike the *Proslogion*, he is dealing with a "mystery." No matter how far rea-

son may advance on this question, the doctrine can never be "seen" by reason alone. But before discussing such knowledge further, I would like to take a closer look at reason and the "preambles."

Since the truth of the "preambles" is accessible to reason, such knowledge seems to coincide with what is called "natural theology," that part of metaphysics which treats of God as the first principle of being. The pursuit of such knowledge seems less a case of "faith seeking understanding" than a case of natural reason moved by wonder to seek the ultimate principle of reality. When reason proceeds in this manner, it goes from "the world around us" as known effect to a knowledge of a hidden cause. Such a science uses demonstration from effect to cause and thus from creation to creator. But Sacred Doctrine reverses this order.

In the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, the order of exposition is from God to creation. This order proceeds from God, Who is least known to us, to His creation, which is most known to us. The reason for this reversal of what seems the natural order is that Sacred Doctrine is first the knowledge that God has of Himself and of creation coming from Him and ordered back to Him, which He chooses to reveal to us. He makes us privy to His own knowledge; we are, as believers, partakers of the Divine Science—that is, the science of all things as it is possessed by God and shared with the blessed. The student of Sacred Doctrine, as distinct from the mere natural theologian, desires to join his mind to the intellect of God—for God is the same as His wisdom. In this, the student, the believer, not merely knows truths about God but, in what measure he can, takes on divine wisdom itself, though he still "walks by faith." He is closer to God when he knows in the order that God knows, than when he only knows in the order that man knows. God first knows Himself and then all things through His self-knowledge. Charity is satisfied with nothing less in this life, while still longing for its perfect possession in the Beatific Vision.

Though the believer desires to put on the mind of God dur-

ing this life, he still cannot know God as God knows Himself. The incomprehensible being of God surpasses man's finite powers. And the incomprehensible mode of divine knowing surpasses man's powers as well. Thus, in seeking knowledge according to the order of God's knowledge, man lifts his mind as best he can to partake in it to the utmost. But man can only lift his mind to "see" these truths by proceeding from visible effects to invisible truths. Apropos the first truth of God's wisdom, that *God is*, which is the first matter treated in the *Summa*, St. Thomas invokes five ways of demonstrating God's existence, each beginning from different aspects known to us about the visible world. He proceeds from creatures, even though, as believers, we hold that God is "*He Who Is*." God's way of "seeing" the truth of His existence infinitely surpasses our way of "seeing" it. St. Thomas calls upon the five ways because this is the only manner in which man, in this life, can know, that is, "see," that God is He Whose essence is to be. Thus, in the *Summa*, we see sacred theology, the queen, calling her "handmaidens," the human disciplines, to the tower. In this same call, we see the university come into existence.

Notice how St. Thomas uses the "handmaidens," that is, the human liberal arts and sciences, when he responds to the question, *Whether God exists*, at the very beginning of the *Summa*. He calls upon them in his famous "five ways." These are five different demonstrations from effects in the world around us proving that the first cause, the Supreme Being, exists.

Two questions might come to mind about these "five ways." If each is a necessary argument, why are five given when one will do? And also, why are they called "ways" (*viae* in Latin)? The answers to both questions come together. They are five because they are "ways." I will explain. God, insofar as He is known to human reason, even regarding the "mysteries" of the faith, is known to the extent that He can be "seen" through the visible things of this world. It is not a matter of arguing from the visible to the invisible God, and then setting the knowledge of visible things aside and merely thinking about God. The proofs

are not like a scaffolding used to erect a building and taken down once the building stands on its own. Rather, they are like a ladder that one uses to scale a height in order to peer over a wall. If the ladder is removed, the viewer falls back to earth. He needs each of the steps of the ladder to be able to get a glimpse over the wall at all. So it is with the "five ways." Each sets the ladder on a distinct aspect of terra firma, and from these bases each ascent begins. One proof starts with the fact of motion in things, another from the efficient causality observed in this world, another from the contingency of earthly objects, another from the observed hierarchy of goodness and nobility found in creatures, and another from the order seen in the universe. Since it is all important to set a ladder on firm ground, analogously it is paramount that the intellect attain a firm and certain understanding of motion, contingency, causality, order, and the like. In these facts of creation can be seen their need of a first and ultimate principle.

To attain to such an understanding requires a sound education in the liberal arts and sciences, not one that merely deals in opinions, creativeness, "diversity," or any other qualities that may appeal to us. Rather, theology's sole interest is an understanding of the "things" themselves, so that in understanding truly what they are, their Creator may be seen through them. The "ways" are not many because many certain proofs are better than one (though there may be some truth in this), or because variety might provide "something for everyone." The chief reason they are many is because it is through these "ways" alone that we glimpse God. When St. Thomas proceeds from this first question about God's existence to an inquiry about God's attributes, that is, God's simplicity, eternity, infinity, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, and the like, these attributes are seen to the extent that man, in this life, can see them, only through the "five ways." These are the mind's lifeline for its knowledge about God. Up-root the "five ways" and the theologian's intellect sees nothing.

I shall not attempt here to show why the "ways" are five, no more, no less; that they are many, and not just one, is due to the

fact that the divine perfection, which is one and simple in itself, is multiple in creation. Creatures, because they are creatures, are composite, more or less. That is, because they are created, their existence is not the same as *what they are*, whereas in God, His essence is *to be*. Because our minds connaturally know the nature of the sensible things around us first, and only through them any higher reality, we must proceed to a knowledge of God's simple and infinite perfection from a knowledge of it as seen in its finite and manifold aspects in the things of this world. Thus, we "see" God's pure actuality, for example, more adequately through seeing Him as the unmoved Prime Mover, the First Efficient Cause, the Necessary Being and the unparticipated First Being, than through "seeing" the Divine actuality in only one of these ways. Such knowledge becomes ever more adequate when we see this simple divine perfection through its manifold existence in creatures. But the very finitude and the imperfection that necessarily attach to creatures require us to negate every imperfection that cannot belong to the infinite and perfect God. We do not merely leave behind our first ideas taken from creatures and then move on to other and more perfect ideas about God; rather, we hold onto our own notions taken from things in this world, yet exclude from them all that reason sees cannot be asserted when these ideas are applied to divinity. For this reason, it is evident that in this life we do not comprehend God's being as it is in itself, yet we can know it sufficiently to form true judgments about it. Regarding the points I am now making, and many others made throughout this essay, I can only sketch or hint at the argument. I mention them nonetheless to clarify the central idea: when "faith seeks understanding," not only must it turn to philosophy, and to the other human arts and sciences, but, moreover, it must prize these human sciences to the extent that they remain faithful to their proper methods so as to reveal the *truth* about "things."

When "faith seeks understanding" regarding the "preambles," it is clear that "understanding" supplants "faith." This is not a case of seeing what is yet "unseen" but "believed." But in the

case of the "mysteries," when "faith seeks understanding" what is to be understood will still remain "unseen." What, then, does "understanding" mean in such a case? St. Thomas Aquinas's treatise on the Trinity in God in his *Summa* presents an example. He reasons out the way in which the mind must "understand" a Trinity of Persons in God. This surely does not render the doctrine of the Trinity a matter of knowledge and not belief. Yet, if it is still "believed," in what way can it be said to be "understood?"

St. Augustine observes that the Trinity of Persons in God is seen in creation. Both the procession of the Word in the divine mind, and the procession of the Holy Spirit in the divine will are reflected in the human soul. We know that whenever we think, a concept proceeds in our minds, and that an inclination of the will arises, or proceeds, whenever we love. God also knows and loves, but in an infinitely superior way than we do. Is it possible that, through a knowledge of ourselves, we can come to know that God, Who causes us to know and love, likewise knows and loves, as we do, through processions? If we could prove that it is necessary for the divine nature to have a word or concept perfectly and eternally in the divine mind, and, likewise, an inclination proceeding perfectly and eternally in the divine will, then we, in fact, can see from "the visible things around us" that there exist in God two eternal and perfect processions which entail the relative oppositions of the Word, the Son, arising from its origin, the Father, and again a relative opposition in the inclination arising in the divine will proceeding from the Father and the Son and establishing the Holy Spirit. Thus, three distinct Persons are seen to indwell in the One Divine Being.

If, in fact, we could reason from creatures not only to God's intellectual nature, but also to these processions within His intellect and will, then, of course, the "mystery" of the Trinity would yield to understanding and no longer be an article of faith. The necessity of the relative oppositions mentioned above would exist in the one Divine Being resulting in the three Persons. But as St. Hilary points out: "let no man think to reach the

sacred mystery of generation (i.e., procession of the Word) by his mind." The same is true of the procession of the divine will in which the Holy Spirit arises. St. Thomas tells us why the processions are beyond our knowing: "Intellect is not in God and in ourselves univocally." That is, we do not have altogether the same meaning of "intellect" when it is said of man, on the one hand, and of God, on the other. For one thing, God's intellect never passes from potential knowing to actual knowing as does ours. Again, God's intellect is simple in its operation whereas ours is manifold. And since we cannot "see" the divine intellect, but know it by negation, we cannot judge whether, in its simplicity, it has a procession in its one perfect and universal act of knowing or not. Perhaps one may claim that St. Augustine's argument amounts to a probable hypothesis, but is impossible to see it as a necessary argument to the divine processions.

If, on the other hand, we assent, in faith, to the immanent processions in God's intellect and will, as we do in the *Credo*, then it is still possible to come to "see," by an act of reason, that from the processions there are necessarily three Persons in the divine nature. The "seeing" consists in grasping, through reason, in what the divine processions must consist and that the relations must follow, giving rise to the divine Persons. Again, I have given only a hint of the arguments involved; the whole argument would be a treatise in itself. The important point, once more, is that not only does "faith seek understanding," even with regard to the "mysteries" as well as the "preambles," but that also (as one might notice) the argument depends upon a true and highly developed grasp of philosophy and the related arts and sciences.

The consequence of working through the doctrine of the Trinity for the believer is that what he holds in faith he understands. He can now "see," even as a viator, that the divine Persons are "subsisting relations" and this understanding, in turn, has the most sublime and crucial implications. "By faith," says St. Augustine, "we arrive at knowledge, and not conversely." That is, it is not reason that has led us to faith, but faith that has led reason to "see" what could never be grasped without it. The be-

liever, through the impulse of divine love, has drawn still nearer to the "Inaccessible Light."

## IV

*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*

The idea that theology in the Catholic tradition of higher education is the "queen of the sciences" is often misunderstood. It is taken to mean that theology "orders" the arts and sciences, which serve her not only in their uses but also with respect to their own proper methods and principles—as if somehow their own principles were taken from theology. Sometimes those who take this view are sympathetic to this idea, thinking that in fact all versions of education are colored by one set of predilections or another. I have heard members of accreditation visiting teams speak of the traditional Catholic college as one in which every subject is treated from a distinctly "Catholic" point of view. This caricature of traditional Catholic education is considered an entirely legitimate species of higher education by those who view the "diversity" policy as basic to education.

But others holding this same opinion take a more jaundiced view of its legitimacy. They see the Church slanting "the truth of things" or favoring certain opinions to the exclusion of others in order to justify her religious persuasions. This is the view that, at best, merely tolerates religious colleges or universities, while judging them to be largely in violation of "academic freedom." It is assumed, for example, that "creationist" biology is a religious distortion of genuine science.

In truth, however, Sacred Doctrine, as "queen of the sciences," reigns over them by a negative rule only. She does not have the competence from her own light to direct the various human sciences to their own proper principles and methods; this the light of reason must do. She can, nonetheless, judge their conclusions in cases where they contradict a theological truth.

In such cases, the science itself errs in its own principles, methods, or reasoning. The task of finding the error, however, must belong to the offending science, not to Sacred Doctrine.

But as "queen," Sacred Doctrine also calls the sciences and arts, as her "handmaidens," to the "tower," to help raise the mind of the believer to "understand" revealed truth, as we have already discussed. In this way, she can exercise her office of apologetics, that is, the office of defending the truth of the Faith, by using reason to demonstrate the truth of the "preambles," or by using reason to show at what point an argument which claims to contradict a "mystery" is not true to reason itself—for, if the "mystery" is true, then no sound human argument can be made against it.

It is certainly in the interest of the Faith that the Catholic university know the various human arts and sciences in order to appreciate from where any argument brought against the faith comes. Yet the impetus for the Catholic university to seek these arts and sciences comes primarily *ex corde Ecclesiae*. The theological virtue of divine charity impels the believer, as it did Mary, the sister of Martha, to "choose the better part" and strain every human power to draw closer to God. Thus, "faith seeks understanding" by "calling the 'handmaidens' to the tower." This is the motive of St. Anselm. This is the origin of the university.

The modern university is composed of many departments and subjects, and they seem to be constantly increasing. Some have even called it a "multiversity," indicating that it is indeed not actually *one* center of learning, but many. One would not want to argue that the proliferating "specialties" have no place in the authentic "center of learning." But one might insist that what is at the center, the core, of the university is the "queen" and her "handmaidens," who have been called to the "tower." The heart of the academy must be Sacred Doctrine, philosophy, and the traditional liberal arts and sciences.

In the *City of God*, Augustine observes that, even in its most glorious era, Greek philosophy was divided into a multitude of rival camps disputing vociferously and contradicting one another

about the most fundamental questions. It was, he said, another Babylon, which means "confusion." The "tower" that is the university in modern times replicates the Tower of Babel. The "center" does not hold; confusion reigns. The modern university resembles nothing more than Leacock's frenzied gentleman who "flung himself upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions."

But in its beginning, the university, springing forth *ex corde Ecclesiae*, gave rise to a unity of philosophy, with the strongest guarantee that the human arts and sciences might be faithful to their proper methods and principles. Pope Leo XIII, commenting on the medieval university in his encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, wrote: "When philosophy stood stainless in honor and wise in judgment, then, as facts and constant experience showed, the liberal arts flourished as never before or since; but neglected and almost blotted out they lay prone, since philosophy began to learn error and join hands with folly."

The stamp of the modern university derives from the intellectual movement in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries called the Enlightenment. The conviction of this movement that by reason alone man could find knowledge, progress and happiness, led to a reversal of the roles of faith and reason. More accurately, faith not only lost pride of place, it lost its place altogether.

A recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* on the coverage given to religion in the media reflects the extent to which religion has been marginalized in our society. The following is an excerpt:

[E. J.] Dionne of the *Washington Post*, who covered the Vatican when he was a correspondent in Rome for the *New York Times* from 1984 to 1986, said the conflict between skepticism and faith lies at "the heart of the problem" between religion and secular journalism.

While religious people base their beliefs on faith, Dionne told the *Commonweal* forum, American journalism is "the quintessentially Enlightenment profession. St. Thomas the Apostle, doubting Thomas, could be our patron saint. Our rules say 'Prove it. Show me. Give me the evidence.'"

The modern university goes journalism and the Enlightenment one better. Today's academic is embarrassed even to say: "Prove it. Show me the evidence." The Enlightenment, which supplanted faith with reason, is in turn supplanted by a despair worthy of Pilate's *cri du coeur*, "And what is truth?" Reason has irrationally claimed a competence to judge all things. The folly of this is illustrated in Hamlet's words: "There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." The gods have been revenged for this hubris. Having falsely judged herself to possess the power to judge everything, reason has lost her ability to judge anything.

Can higher education endure? By all appearances it cannot, unless "faith seeks understanding."