

BLACKFRIARS

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CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES	The Editor	1
THE PLACE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH	Hugh Talbot, O.Cist.	6
THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY RE- CONSIDERED	John Baptist Reeves, O.P.	12
THE ROYAL UNIVERSITY OF MALTA	Professor A. H. Armstrong	18
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LILLE	John Fitzsimons	22
THE CONTRIBUTORS		25
REVIEWS: University and Education (Gervase Mathew, O.P.; A. H. Armstrong; Kenelm Foster, O.P.; Walter Shew- ring; H. M. Chew; Sebastian Bullough, O.P.). Philo- sophy (Gervase Mathew, O.P.; Victor White, O.P.; Ian Hislop, O.P.; Langdon D. Fox).		26

SUPPLEMENT: FIVE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES.

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES

As the end of the war approaches, the realisation that the struggle afterwards may be equally as hard is beginning to gain ground. Few people giving any thought to the matter look forward with much hope of relief to the post-war period of peace, for they understand in different ways that the war is a symptom of a disease which few have seriously attempted to cure. This disease will necessarily have taken firmer hold of civilisation with each succeeding day of hostilities, so that to a considerable number the curing of this ill, or even a removal of part of the disease, seems beyond any human power. Civilisation has moved so far from its Christian origins, and scientific materialism has soaked into the bones of so many normal men, that it literally needs a miracle, a divine intervention to bring back peace with sanity. The divine must descend into this chaos to bring form.

There is, however, a large class of people contriving to bring back prosperity and happiness by sheer human effort or, even more commonly, by a subhuman mechanical force that will work according to plan irrespective of human wills and whims. That spirit lies at the back of most post-war planning, and it is materialist, that is in practise atheist, in character. Such men think that by arranging international markets and national security they can abolish wars which in fact flow from a false intellect and a distorted will. They aim at erecting a world factory for mass producing the happy and contented citizen.

There are others, less foolish, who recognise the spiritual and intellectual source of modern ills, and have guessed that men's minds and wills have generally sunk to the level where lie totalitarianism, communism, brutality and murder, and who can see that the cessation of present hostilities will not free us from this evil unless there be a widespread change of heart. Several very diverse means of effecting the change have been suggested, from the spiritual rejuvenation of a return to the land to the apocalyptic conversion of the whole world to the faith of Christ; but of these means the most promising (and the hope is slight enough) is the reconstructive influence of the purified university. If the seat of our evils lies in a wrong attitude of mind, the centres of education, of learning and of culture bear the greatest responsibility, since men's attitude of mind is the *raison d'être* of a university.

Ever since their appearance in the Middle Ages the universities have exercised great power in moulding the minds of European citizens. The centre of universal learning has always offered the widest freedom for study and discussion. In consequence it has conceived and given birth not only to healthy movements of new vitality, such as that marked by the Council of Trent, the theologians of which were trained in the Catholic universities of Europe, or again the Oxford Movement, but also revolutions and heresies on the scale of the French Revolution or Modernism, of which the descent may be traced to some extent from the deliberations of doctors and professors in European universities. Lenin is the schoolmaster type that emerges from many universities and wields such power over the growing people entrusted to him. From the university to the schools and so to the people at large the influence spreads out for good or ill both nationally and internationally. Granted that the university attracts to itself the most lively intellects and gives them wide scope for development, it inevitably exercises a power disproportionate to its numbers. Academic unreality indeed draws off much of this strength, but only the defunct centre of study is given wholly to mere abstraction, though the power released from a living one is

too often blinded by this same academicism. It is estimated that before the war there were a million university students in Europe, and of these 50,000 were English, while in England the proportion of students to population was one of the lowest. These men and women are the most vocal members of the national communities and of decided if not violent views. Their power and responsibility requires no elaboration here. In 1938 Lord Samuel could justly say: 'Looking round the world to-day we see how greatly it needs guidance. We live in an age of intellectual confusion, in an age in which all sorts of noxious ideas take root and spread . . . The world needs above everything else a synthesis of philosophy, science and religion, and until philosophy, science and religion can reconcile themselves and give our age the guidance it needs, mankind is not likely to escape from the perils that surround it. In this the universities must play the chief part. It is for them to educate the educators and to lead the leaders.'

The purpose of a university has been well outlined by Oxford's Chancellor, Lord Halifax, in his address to the Catholic University of Quebec, when in May, 1943, he spoke of 'that essential unity of purpose which must govern and inspire the work of every true university That purpose never changes and can never be less than the training of the human mind to search out and to know the truth Those who serve truth serve a mistress who will brook no rival.' And he went on to show, following Newman closely, the central position of theology since the origin of a false idea about man lies in a false idea about God. 'Newman argued that theology, so far from restricting knowledge or limiting its horizons, was the true inspiration of all our learning. Now with slow and halting steps the world returns to the wisdom of Newman—that "religious truth is not only a presentation, but a condition of general knowledge."' Thence the Chancellor proceeded to a strenuous and significant appeal for prayer. Ultimately indeed a university should be closely connected with the spirit of prayer and contemplation, for those who teach and learn are concerned with Truth, the living Truth: they are concerned to live the Truth, and to make the Truth live. Hence the universities were conceived in the womb of Mother Church and suckled at the breasts of her Sacred Doctrine and Law, though now her offspring have so often rejected her and even directly assaulted her. To turn to another great authority, we find Pope Pius XI writing in his encyclical on Education: 'Right back in the far-off middle ages when there were so many (some have even said too many) monasteries, convents, churches, collegiate-churches, cathedral chapters, etc., there was attached to each a home of study, of teaching, of Christian education. To these we must add all the

universities spread over every country and always by the initiative and under the protection of the Holy See and the Church.'

The true home of the University is the Church, as its very name suggests, for it signified the gathering of all the professors and all the students at a place of learning into an organic whole, no matter what their nation or their science. It acted as a corporate body, so that the Queen of the sciences came eventually to rule all knowledge; it was necessarily a Catholic University; the two make redundancy; a true university is Catholic and its theology gives life and unity to the organism. Yet the universities have often so inverted the true order and subordination of the sciences as to destroy their own organism. They have largely ceased to be universities for they have ceased to be Catholic.

Catholic Universities, therefore, wherever they exist to-day will offer the greatest means of avoiding the evils of our modern decay. They must be the leaven. They must be islands of wisdom in the sea of modern foolishness. That is the burden of the present number of BLACKFRIARS. Through the kind co-operation of the Newman Association and the professors of different Catholic Universities in Europe it has been put together with a view to focussing interest both on the idea of such an institution as the great human means of redeeming Europe, and also on the individual universities which must be resuscitated or revived after the war, and this implies the gathering of resources during the present exile. This contribution to peace may seem to some slender and idealistic, but it is the widow's mite, one of our only gifts on the human level.

The plan, like all plans, conceals some dangerous traps where the ideal is not harmonised with the real. Thus the self-conscious and perhaps self-righteous aiming at an immediate social goal gives to such educational plans an atmosphere of pragmatism that always degrades learning. First of all, if after the war England and America (and presumably Russia too) take it upon themselves to re-educate Europe, particularly by means of the secular universities, they will perpetuate the central error of the day, that might is right, what works is true, the pragmatic test. For their only brief will be success in arms. To the question—By what authority?—they would have to reply: Our planes, tanks and guns. Our way of life and our way of thought must be right since we are the victors; and so the distrust of British hypocrisy will grow. The Archbishop of Baltimore, preaching at the installation of the new Rector of the Catholic University at Washington, said recently: 'It is well for us to be reminded that a nation is not great simply because it can boast of a well-trained or even of a victorious army. Its real claim to greatness lies in the moral character of the main body of its citizens;

in their humble recognition of the dependence upon God and of their corporate, as well as their individual, obligation to abide by his laws It is here that the Catholic University, which is founded upon the Primacy of the Spiritual, can make a vital contribution to our national welfare'

There lies the importance of the Catholic University. It teaches by a recognised authority; it has a mission; it must uphold this primacy of the spirit, as well as the organic unity of life and learning. Yet even so the foundation or the restoration of Catholic Universities will require an influx of graduates drawn of necessity from secular universities, where their Catholicism has been subjected to the steady influence of their materialist surroundings. The best of Catholics in our universities finds it hard to escape the general way of thought, many succumb almost entirely. On what authority can these claim to re-educate Europe or Germany alone?

To introduce a political aim as the primary purpose of a university, even if that political aim be to educate an international opinion, is to risk upsetting the order of values and so ruining the University. The centre of learning must be centred on learning, not on action as such, nor on politics. The centre is above politics yet including it within its organic universe; action, right action, must flow out like an abundant stream from the spring of true and detached thought. Certainly it would be fatal for the members 'to retire to their "ivory towers" to speculate, leaving the world outside the academic cloister to wrestle as best it may with the difficulties that beset it,' as the Archbishop of Baltimore put it, but it would be equally fatal to turn Catholic Universities on the continent into self-righteous nursery maids trying to keep fretful families of brothers and sisters in order. A balance must be struck between academism and pragmatism.

The present number of BLACKFRIARS is of necessity confined to Europe. It would have been illuminating to include also such examples as Washington or Manila. But for the purpose of reconstruction the European universities have first to be considered and in particular those under German occupation. Rome, Louvain, Lille, Nijmegen, Tilburg, Lublin, in various degrees these have been rendered inoperative or simply closed down. Lublin has been adopted by Fordham University, so that it may continue its existence in exile, and it is to be hoped that this example of American hospitality will be followed by others, so that after the war there may be a ready supply of graduates from Catholic universities who will be available for this important work of reconstruction.

THE EDITOR.