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THE UNIVERSITY AND THE CULTURE OF THE PERSON*

The intellect becomes, in a way, everything. Its object is the entire universe of being: "Indeed, everything that exists in any way whatever is given to human knowledge, and hence to the human intellect, as a task, everything that exists in any way—that is, all reality in all its diversity." The human intellect has for its object being in general, but because the object of the human intellect is "in a way everything," then the universe of being is precisely the object of the university's concern. As its name implies, the university has for its object universal knowledge.

> University! *Alma Mater*! ... Serve the Truth! If you serve the Truth, you serve freedom, the liberation of the human being and the Nation. You serve life!
>
> John Paul II[1]

Pope Saint John Paul II spoke these words at the closing celebration of his visit to the Catholic University of Lublin in June 1987. When he spoke these words, Poland was still struggling for its freedom from Soviet hegemony, a freedom that would not be realized for another four years. So much more, then is his claim here remarkable, namely that if the university serves truth it serves to liberate the people and even the nation. We may ask how the educational and research mission of the university can possibly relate to the political liberation of a people and their nation. To answer this, we must reflect on some of the themes of that homily with an eye to understanding John Paul II's understanding of culture and particularly the *culture of the person*—what the person is.

SERVE THE TRUTH

As a teaching and research institution, the university must surely be in service to the truth. The motto of Harvard University, perhaps the most pres-

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[1] John Paul II, Celebrazione della parola nell'Università Cattolica di Lublino: Omelia, Lublin, Poland, 9 June 1987 (http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/homilies/1987/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19870609_celebraz-parola-lublino.html) (my translation).

tigious American university, is "*Veritas*," and most university administrators speak warmly about their institution's service to the truth. However, it is not entirely clear that truth really is a primary value for the modern university. We may note Lawrence H. Summers' remark in his 2001 presidential installation address at Harvard University: "The university is open to all ideas, but it is committed to the skepticism that is the hallmark of education."[2] To claim certain knowledge of truth is generally unacceptable within the secular academy.[3] The contemporary scholar, to be credible, is expected to be skeptical of truth claims. For empirical scientists, a healthy skepticism of claims to know the truth is certainly warranted, for, as the history of physics in the twentieth century has shown—we may think of relativity and quantum theory—today's results may well cast yesterday's certainties into doubt. By the very logic of his endeavor, the scientist is congenitally nervous about claims finally to have attained the truth. She has results and a well-established and accepted theory, but the claim to know the truth is risky for the scientist. On the other hand, the physics faculty of the university offers classes, and it expects its students to learn what physics professors teach. The student who insists that relativity cannot be true or that contemporary animal species cannot have evolved from earlier species will fail his courses and have to leave the university. The student learns what has been taught, accepting the lessons as matters for his belief, on the basis of which (and only on this basis) he will be able to continue his studies. However, to believe something and to base one's future actions on it is to accept it as true. For all their misgivings about absolute truth claims, our scientists do hold to the ideal of truth in their teaching. Even if a healthy skepticism is part of the scientific ethos, the scientist aims for truth.

Truth is distinctively personal. Only persons can know truth and truth profoundly touches the person. Speaking of the university's orientation to all truth, to universal truth, Pope John Paul II alludes to the reason for this in his Lublin homily:

> This orientation and this aspiration are strictly united to the man of every era, to the very nature of the human intellect. "*Intellectus est quodammodo omnia*—The

[2] „Address made by President Summers at his Installation ceremony on Oct. 12," *Harvard University Gazette*, October 18, 2001 (http://www.hno.harvard.edu/gazette/2001/10.18/04-speechtext.html).

[3] See Cardinal Joseph R a t z i n g e r, Homily of Mass "Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice," Vatican, 18 April 2005 (http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html). On the roots of skepticism in modern thought see B e n e d i c t XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections* (Lecture delivered at the University of Regensburg, Regensburg, Germany, 12 September 2006), (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html).

> intellect is, in a way, all things." Indeed, everything that exists in any way whatever is given to human knowledge, and hence to the human intellect, as a task.[4]

There are two parts to this Aristotelian principle, which Thomas Aquinas subsequently adopts.[5] First, the intellect *is* what it knows. To understand a thing is for the intellect or the mind to be formed by that thing. The essence of the object of knowledge becomes a form of the knowing intellect. The essence that one knows is not only an object of knowledge, but it also becomes a means of knowledge. Through its understanding of something's essence, the mind is equipped, as it were, to think more thoroughly about that kind of thing. To know the mathematical concept of *limit* is not simply to know a fact from mathematics, but it is to have the power to think mathematically, specifically to use the differential calculus. To know sonata form is not only to know how Mozart and Beethoven organized some of their musical works; it is to be able to understand how those works develop and consequently to listen to them fruitfully. The chemist is not merely a person whose memory is filled with a catalogue of facts about elements and chemicals. He is, in a way, chemistry-alive.

This principle takes us directly to the heart of the university as a teaching institution. If education were simply about the communication and categorization of facts, then it might require little else than a library, some instructional delivery systems, and a faculty to give examinations. However, because education is about forming intellects, the task of teaching is much more personal, as we commonly see. The prospective chemist, if he is to advance and become a true scientist, entrusts himself to the chemistry faculty. He not only learns various facts about chemical elements and compounds, but follows the professors as they develop arguments and research strategies. He is given his own bench in the laboratory where he learns—partly by watching and largely by doing—how chemicals interact with each other. As he learns, he and his student colleagues increasingly become members of the chemistry community, where they come more and more to understand the common language, the priorities, and the ordinary practices of chemists. Should the prospective chemist seek to enter fully into the brotherhood of chemists, she must complete a dissertation project under a mentor, her dissertation director, in which she shows that she too can sufficiently understand the science to play a contributing role. In German they call the director of one's dissertation a *Dissertations-Vater*, and the analogy is appropriate. He serves not just as an instructor but as a kind of

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[4] John Paul II, Homily delivered during the Celebration of the Word at the Catholic University of Lublin.

[5] See e.g. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, 16; 84.

intellectual father, bringing the young student along into the mature practice of the science and the scientific life of chemists.[6]

The dynamic of education turns out to be deeply personal, as John Paul II himself makes clear in his encyclical on faith and reason.

> In believing we entrust ourselves to the knowledge acquired by other people. On the one hand, the knowledge acquired through belief can seem an imperfect for of knowledge, to be perfected gradually through personal accumulation of evidence; on the other hand, belief is often humanly richer than mere evidence, because it involves an interpersonal relationship and brings into play not only a person's capacity to know but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others, to enter into a relationship with them which is intimate and enduring.[7]

Even as our young new chemist gradually perfects his knowledge through his own accumulation of evidence and formulation of new research strategies and results—perhaps surpassing his teachers—he has not by this overcome his dependence on others. The practice of the sciences is necessarily and inevitably communal. Provocatively Charles S. Peirce writes: "He who would not sacrifice his own soul to save the whole world, is illogical in all his inferences, collectively."[8] What the American philosopher means by this is that in venturing a scientific thesis, however certain he may feel concerning it, the individual scientist (in any discipline) cannot stand alone but must submit his thesis to the society of science, to be corrected or confirmed by that society. If he refuses so to "sacrifice his scientific soul" by falling into errors that others may correct, he is illogical. His inferences cannot be affirmed as true. The growth of scientific knowledge is necessarily communal.

Precisely because the practice of science—whether the science in question be a physical science, a social science, or one of the liberal disciplines—is communal, it is also deeply personal. Because her intellect is formed by her science, she is different intellectually from the non-scientist. What she shares with her scientific colleagues is her mental formation, by which she shares with them a particular valuable good. The members of the scientific community share a common good that non-specialists do not share. It is here that the ques-

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[6] One might well ask why not a "*Dissertations-Mutter*"? To which the simple answer is that this is not the term that the Germans have given us. A more serious philosophical answer might take us to Socrates and his *maieutic* mission of intellectual midwifery, bringing to birth the truth that lies within the learner (see Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150 b-c). It is doubtful, however, whether the Socratic method alone adequately serves for the learning of chemistry.

[7] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* on the relationship between Faith and Reason, section 32.

[8] Charles Sanders Peirce, *Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic*, in *Collected Writings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), vol. 5, 220-21.

tion of skepticism, to which Lawrence Summers pointed, finds an answer. The contemporary scientist, especially in the empirical sciences, is constitutionally nervous. Every scientist knows that his claim to have arrived at the truth is provisional. Another's discovery in ten years or next year or tomorrow may reverse what a scientist discovers today. John Paul II makes much the same point: "Scientific affirmations are always particular. They are justified only in consideration of a given starting point, they are set in a process of development, and they can be corrected and left behind in this process."[9] Even if this should happen (and someone else wins the Nobel Prize), the scientific community has moved forward, ever closer to the truth. Their common project remains, even as its canons slowly evolve, and truths of nature remain as the common goal.

The second aspect of St. Thomas's dictum, "*Intellectus est quodammodo omnia*," is that the intellect becomes, in a way, everything. Its object is the entire universe of being: "Indeed, everything that exists in any way whatever is given to human knowledge, and hence to the human intellect, as a task, everything that exists in any way—that is, all reality in all its diversity."[10] The philosophical importance of this for Aquinas is that the human intellect has for its object being in general, but its importance for our purposes here is that because the object of the human intellect is "in a way everything," then the universe of being is precisely the object of the university's concern. As its name implies, the university has for its object universal knowledge.

As an institution, the university itself does not know or understand. It is the human intellect, the mind of *this* person or *that* one, that is formed by the truth so as to understand it. However, John Paul II adds:

> By that very name, institutions bearing the name "university" announce this fundamental truth about the human being, about human knowledge. All reality is given as a task to the human being from the perspective of truth.[11]

This has twofold importance. First, the scope of the university is universal, directed not only to some realms of knowledge to the exclusion of others, but to the knowledge of everything real. Second, the university is a witness to the adequacy of the human mind to reality. A philosopher, I do not well understand Keynesian economic theory and its relationship to that of Friedrich Hayek. Most philosophers (and economists) can make little sense of 11-dimensional

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[9] John Paul II, Address delivered to the scientists and students gathered in the Cologne Cathedral, Cologne, Germany, 15 November 1980, section 3, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, 24 November 1980: 7.

[10] John Paul II, Celebrazione della parola nell'Università Cattolica di Lublino (my translation).

[11] Ibidem.

strings in physics. But this is beside the Holy Father's point, which is that *some* human minds can understand the complexities of human economic exchanges, and *others* can master the esoteric mathematics of contemporary physics. Even if no individual mind can grasp all these realms of knowledge, they are accessible to human intelligence, given to humanity as a task to complete. Human beings are responsible before the truth. The university is a privileged vehicle through which men and women—and the society as a whole—can meet this responsibility for truth.

TRUTH AND CULTURE

John Paul II persistently insisted that because the university serves culture and as culture serves the nation, the university plays a vital role in the lives of the people. In an important address to UNESCO in June 1980, he stated:

> The problems of culture, science and education do not arise, in the life of nations and in international relations, independently of the other problems of human existence, such as those of peace or hunger. The problems of culture are conditioned by other dimensions of human existence, just as the latter, in their turn condition them.[12]

For its part, authentic culture depends on truth of which the human being is both subject, as the creator and developer of culture, and object, as one who lives in and is addressed by culture. Appealing to a principle drawn from the Second Vatican Council, he writes: "Culture is that by which the human being as human becomes more human, he 'is' more; he more fully achieves his 'being.' Here is the basis for the capital distinction between what a man is and what he has, between being and having."[13] Through culture, indeed, the culture proper to his own people, the human person develops more fully as a human being in every way that characterizes his humanity, because he is not the simple product of material forces.[14] And this is why "the primary and essential task of culture in general, and indeed of all culture, is education. Indeed, education consists in the fact that the human being becomes always more human, that he

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[12] John Paul II, Address to UNESCO, Paris, France, 2 June 1980, section 3 (http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture). John Paul II repeatedly cited this address in his visits to universities in his travels around the world. It contains the heart of his message on the importance of culture to human life.

[13] Ibidem, section 7. "A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has" (Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, section 35, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

[14] See John Paul II, Address to UNESCO, section 8.

can 'be' more and not only that he can 'have' more."[15] Indeed, when the focus of human life turns from "being" to "having more," then the effect is alienation, as human beings become subject to ideological or political manipulation by various public forces. The meaning of humanity itself can go lost.[16]

In this context, the university's role is critical. Speaking to the university community of St. Andrew's College of Education in Scotland, John Paul II said:

> From its very origins and by reason of its institution, *the purpose of the university* is the acquiring of a *scientific* knowledge of the truth, of the whole truth. Thus it constitutes one of the fundamental means which man has devised to meet his need for knowledge. ... Any interpretation of knowledge and culture, therefore, which ignores or even belittles the spiritual element of man, his aspirations to the fullness of being, his thirst for truth and the absolute, the questions that he asks himself before the enigmas of sorrow and death, cannot be said to satisfy his deepest and most authentic needs.[17]

The university is a particularly privileged forum for the forming the minds of young persons. There they learn not only the facts and techniques of the arts and sciences, but also by observing their professors what it is to be an educated person in their society. Through their educational life in the university, they undergo a formation—much of this is perhaps unnoticed, but it is nonetheless real—as future cultural leaders who will form their national culture in coming decades.

TRUTH AND THE WORD

This responsibility for universal truth has a deeper basis than we have uncovered so far. In one of John Paul II's favorite texts from Vatican II we read: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light."[18] For the philosopher this is a challenging text, because it implies that without Revelation—and, therefore, without theology—our philosophical anthropology is incomplete. The incarnate Word is that very Word through whom all things were made (John 1:3), the very image of God through whom and for whom all things were created (Col. 1:16). To know this Word, therefore, is to know the plan for creation, to possess the fundamental understanding of reality. It is literally to know the mind of the Maker. Ac-

[15] Ibidem, section 11.

[16] See ibidem, section 13.

[17] John Paul II, Address to the staff and the students of Saint Andrew's College of Education, Glasgow, Scotland, 1 June 1982, section 5 (http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820601_st-andrew-college.html).

[18] *Gaudium et Spes*, section 22.

cording to St. Thomas, this knowledge will become explicit to the blessed as they contemplate the divine Essence in the next life.[19] However, even in this life, to know Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, is in a way to know the heart of reality. We may say that a kitchen maid who knows Christ knows more truly than a particle physicist who does not. This does not mean, of course, that the economist's or medical researcher's expertise can be replaced by the saint's mysticism. If St. Teresa of Ávila sought learning more than holiness in a spiritual director, so too do we look for medical expertise in those surgeons who open our bodies with their scalpels!

What is the importance of this? It *might* be true that a holy person who knows Christ may be a more successful scientist than an atheist, but there is no evidence (that I know of) for this. Discovery of scientific truth does not seem to correlate with the depth of one's faith. Rather the importance of mystery of the Word made flesh in this context is, first, that the scientist is pursuing something real. Reality is ultimately reasonable, as Pope Benedict XVI argued in his Regensburg address.[20] The scientist's 'faith' that his researches will eventually be rewarded is validated by this revealed truth. Because the plan of the universe is found in the *Λογοσ*, the Word of God, then all our researches into truth are ultimately possible, even if today we cannot see a way to their solution. Even more important, however, than this guarantee that our researches into truth are not in vain is the implication of this for our own nature. Again we can turn to the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.

> Man judges rightly that by his intellect he surpasses the material universe, for he shares in the light of the divine mind. By relentlessly employing his talents through the ages he has indeed made progress in the practical sciences and in technology and the liberal arts. … Still he has always searched for more penetrating truths, and finds them. For his intelligence is not confined to observable data alone, but can with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable, though in consequence of sin that certitude is partly obscured and weakened. The intellectual nature of the human person is perfected by wisdom and needs to be, for wisdom gently attracts the mind of man to a quest and a love for what is true and good. Steeped in wisdom. man passes through visible realities to those which are unseen.[21]

We have spoken much here about the special sciences—economics, chemistry, and physics—but, as this text indicates, reality is deeper than these sciences. Karol Wojtyła addresses this in a particularly important text in *Love and Responsibility*, where, analyzing the religious interpretation of the sexual drive,

[19] See St. T h o m a s A q u i n a s, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, IIae, q.3, a. 8.
[20] See B e n e d i c t XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University.*
[21] *Gaudium et Spes*, section 15.

he distinguishes between the "biological order"[22] and the "order of existence."[23] Wojtyła says that the biological order is a product of the human intellect, which must be distinguished from the natural order, which is the order of creation. By this he does not mean at all to imply that the discoveries within the biological order are false or misleading. The biological sciences, which have their own canons and criteria, are competent to attain truths. However, this order is not identical to the order of creation. What biology knows is defined by the canons of that science. The point of Karol Wojtyła's analysis is that the human sexual drive cannot be fully understood in biological terms alone. A direct consequence of this, according to Wojtyła, is that from here "it is easy to leap into autonomism in ethical views."[24] Biology is wonderfully useful—we may say the same of physics, chemistry, economics, and literary criticism—but of itself it cannot reveal the full truth about the human person.

A higher science, wisdom, is needed. In his address at the Catholic University of Lublin in 1987, John Paul II sharpened the point, reminding his hearers of what he had taught in his first papal pilgrimage to Poland.

> During our first meeting at Jansa Góra in 1979, I said that the university is a place of struggle for the humanity of the human being, and that it is a matter of liberating man's enormous spiritual potential through which he realizes his own humanity.[25]

In the text from *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyła had warned that to regard the sciences as completely explanatory of the truth about man leads to a purely utilitarian approach to ethics under which the task of reason is merely to calculate the balance of pleasures and pains, of advantage versus disadvantage, whereas, properly understood, reason "directs our whole being and sets the course for our objective development and perfection."[26] Wojtyła adds: "Man possesses reason not first and foremost so that he can calculate the maximum of pleasure in his life, but above all so that he can know the objective truth, ground the principles possessing the absolute meaning (norms) in that truth, and in turn live by them."[27] For the human person, ethics is not simply 'one more science,' but rather is central, fundamental. Because the human

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[22] Karol W o j t y ł a, *Love and Responsibility*, transl. by Grzegorz Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2013), 40.

[23] Ibidem, 41.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] J o h n P a u l II, Celebrazione della parola nell'Università Cattolica di Lublino (my translation).

[26] Karol W o j t y ł a, "On the Directive or Subservient Role of Reason in Ethics," in Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays,* translated by Theresa Sandock, OSM (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 60.

[27] W o j t y ł a, *Love and Responsibility*, 225.

person is capable of self-determination, he cannot rely only on instinct or desire to guide him, even if he tries to ignore the voice of conscience and the insights of reason. The person is free—he has freedom of choice—and this is based on his rational capacity for self-determination. As a spiritual being he is ethically conditioned. No empirical science can replace ethics. In an important article published in 1976 Karol Wojtyła wrote: "After nearly twenty years of ideological debate in Poland, it has become clear that at the center of this debate is not cosmology or philosophy of nature but philosophical anthropology and ethics: the great and fundamental controversy about the human being."[28] Who a person is, the content of his personhood, is determined by what he makes of himself by his ethical decisions. By his acts, which are ethically qualified, he determines himself. And to live ethically, he must know the truth, the truth about the good.

SERVING FREEDOM

"University! … If you serve the truth, you serve freedom, the liberation of the human being and the Nation." Too often our societies see their universities in purely functional, economic terms, as though the warrant for their existence is to provide scientific and technical expertise for economic development and to provide young people with the intellectual tools to succeed personally within the national economy as they contribute useful services to that economy. The prestigious American Association of Universities, a consortium of the premier research universities in the United States of America describes its purpose:

> The raison d'être of the American research university is to ask questions and solve problems. Together, the nation's research universities constitute an exceptional national resource, with unique capabilities. … By combining cutting-edge research with graduate and undergraduate education, our research universities are also training new generations of leaders in all fields.[29]

This ideal is not what Pope John Paul II had in mind when he said that by serving truth the university serves freedom. The truths of the sciences are, as we have said, only partial and provisional.

More to the point, they are not the most important truths. However, they are not truths easily ignored. Not far from my home institution, a well-established Catholic liberal arts college, Saint Joseph's College, has closed its doors be-

[28] Karol W o j t y ł a, „Person: Subject and Community," in Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 220.

[29] *America's Research Universities: Institutions in Service to the Nation (White Paper of the American Association of Universities)* (http://www.aau.edu/resuniv/WhitePaper1.01.html).

cause of insurmountable financial problems. From around the United States, as well as from Spain, Lithuania, and other lands, we hear similar stories as declining student populations combined with the pressure on the young to obtain marketable skills increasingly induces colleges and universities to emphasize the practical education in business and the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) specialties in order to attract students and sources of funding. Furthermore, in the United States even the wealthiest universities rely increasingly on low-paid adjunct professors and graduate students to handle much of the undergraduate teaching load. These economic and financial pressures notwithstanding, the cultural role of the university cannot be ignored. If anything, we may well argue that it should be revitalized. Addressing American Catholic educators, John Paul II spoke warmly of his own experiences teaching in the university and of the importance of its research into the sciences, but he went on to add this:

> The goals of Catholic higher education go beyond education for production, professional competence, technological and scientific competence; they aim at the ultimate destiny of the human person, at the full justice and holiness born of truth (cf. Eph 4:24). True academic freedom must be seen in relation to the finality of the academic enterprise, which looks to the total truth of the human person.[30]

Pope John Paul II spoke these words in Washington, D.C., the seat of the U.S. government, a place filled with the symbols and institutions that represent and by which we Americans exercise our freedom. When John Paul II addressed his homily to this university community in 1987, Poland had not yet regained her freedom, as she would only two years after that visit. However, I suggest that his words are as relevant and important now, to both Poles and Americans, as they were in 1987. In the face of the increasing power of the utilitarian ideology of a "bourgeois liberalism with its ambition to ground everything in the unchecked initiative of the individual, conceived as a little God,"[31] a regime in which the individual is conceived not so much as a person—as a spiritual being—but as the bearer of rights determined according to his subjective conception of reality and the good, we see our freedom increasingly constrained within strict limits based not on the interests of a dictatorial regime but of a vision of man according to which there is no truth of man, no truth about the good, no knowledge about God beyond that which the "little

[30] John Paul II, Address to the Catholic University of America, Washington, USA, 7 October 1979, section 5 (https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19791007_usa_washington_univ-catt.html).

[31] Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, translated by John J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 92.

God" conceives in his own mind. In the United States we see increasingly that civic leaders and educators question our historically treasured rights to freedom of speech, of the press, of peaceful assembly, and of religion—rights written into our Constitution's Bill of Rights—as contrary to the present interests of a progressive society. This pathology, if I may call it that, is even further advanced in the European Union. The source of this pathology, as Maritain recognized and John Paul II would certainly agree, is a loss of the truth about man, the truth about the human person.

In *Centesimus Annus*, written after the fall of Communism in Europe, Pope John Paul II attributed the errors of "Real Socialism" to its failure to grasp the truth about the human being. Yet his words about that defunct international system remain relevant to the post-Communist era.

The atheism of which we are speaking is also closely connected with the rationalism of the Enlightenment, which views human and social reality in a mechanistic way. Thus there is a denial of the supreme insight concerning man's true greatness, his transcendence in respect to earthly realities, the contradiction in his heart between the desire for the fullness of what is good and his own inability to attain it and, above all, the need for salvation which results from this situation.[32]

The most important truth, the truth that must lie at the core of the university's mission, is this truth about man's true greatness, a truth that is not grasped by the several special sciences. Although these sciences—biology, psychology, political science, economics, and the others—enhance our understanding of humanity and the human condition, they do not address the human person in his greatness, according to the ethical character by which he determines himself in freedom as good or evil and serves to form the culture in which he lives.

Institutions of higher education face serious challenges in the contemporary social and economic environments. To address those challenges will require vision and creativity from those who administer these institutions. Some colleges and universities may fail for lack of students or funding. Nevertheless, if our cultures are to be preserved and renewed, if the dignity of the human person is to be defended, the guiding principle of our universities must be the truth about the human person, as the one who knows the truth,[33] especially the truth about the good.

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[32] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, section 13.

[33] See *Fides et Ratio*, section 28.