

The Transcending Orthodoxy: Revealed Truth Authenticating Academic Freedom in the Catholic University

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WHAT IS—rightly conceived—the relationship between academic freedom and the revealed truth of the deposit of the faith in a Catholic university?¹ Are they mutually exclusive, as the contemporary conventional wisdom likes to suppose? Does, therefore, one have to prevail and vanquish the other in an essentially conflictive relationship? I shall put radically into question this powerful preconceived notion and argue that *revealed truth authenticates academic freedom*. My case is based on a fundamental assumption that I will not establish but rather presuppose: Only in light of a thorough understanding of the idea of a university—and, with it, of a Catholic university—is it possible to address constructively the relationship between divine Revelation and academic freedom. Launching my considerations from this supposition, I shall address four questions: First, what is a university, and indeed, what is a Catholic university? Second, what is academic freedom? Third, what is revealed truth? And fourth, what is the relationship between revealed truth and academic freedom? In the course of

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answering these four questions, I shall formulate three theses that state my central argument in condensed form.

I.

It is an interesting fact worthy of contemplation that many, if not most, colleges in the United States—admittedly quite often for tangible pragmatic and pecuniary reasons—are striving to upgrade themselves to universities. And they do this without explicit references to tangible family resemblances that they—formerly colleges—now might share with those institutions of higher learning that call themselves universities. This wide-spread trend among what one might call upwardly mobile colleges suggests, among other things, that the very notion of “university” has the character of an idea, a norm, a standard to which institutions of higher learning and of advanced research are willing, indeed eager, to conform themselves. It is by way of this idea, norm, or standard that they mutually recognize and acknowledge faculties, students, and degrees, and by way of which they make each other available for mutual accountability in various assessment processes. Hence, in order to address the question, “What is a university?,” we must turn to the idea of a university, an idea that emerged in medieval Europe—the exceedingly few exceptions affirm the rule—with and in the Catholic university and that, arguably, should therefore continue to be most perspicuously realized in a Catholic university. Pope St. John Paul II seems to embrace this conclusion when he states in the opening line of his Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*: “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.”²

One of the greatest Catholic theologians of the nineteenth century understood exceedingly well this point that the Catholic university—rightly understood and authentically instantiated—should be the paradigmatic realization of the idea of a university. In his still surprisingly relevant work, *The Idea of a University*, John Henry Newman states that “[a]s to the range of University teaching, certainly the very name of University is inconsistent with restrictions of any kind. . . . A University should teach universal knowledge.”³ Newman identifies three characteristics that are essential to the idea of a university, characteris-

² *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990) §1.

³ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New York: Longman, Green, and Co., 1947), 19 (Discourse II, sect. 1).

tics to which, I think, contemporary universities still have to measure up in order to deserve the denomination “university.”

First, a university is an institution of teaching universal knowledge. While no single university has to teach all extant academic disciplines, a university—differently from a polytechnicum and a college—must *in principle* be open and aspire to teaching universal knowledge. The very idea of knowledge already implies universality as a telos or tendency. Universality is not simply an *accidens* incidentally attributed to knowledge. Rather, universality identifies the entelechy of knowledge properly so called. Conversely, as Newman rightly observes, “knowledge, in proportion as it tends more and more to be particular, ceases to be knowledge.”⁴

Second, the unity and interrelatedness of university disciplines reflect the unity and interrelatedness of all knowledge. The university lives, indeed, from an underlying metaphysical principle, the convertibility of truth and being, such that no truth can contradict another truth and that all truths are inherently interconnected. Incidentally, the nominalist, and now postmodern, thesis of the radical incommensurability of the domains of discourse destroys the unity of truth and knowledge, and with it the very idea of a university.

Third, the university is not an accidental, but a *per se* unity that carries its end or purpose in its constitutive practices of education and inquiry. In short, the interior unity of the university is constituted neither by a central heating system nor by sundry sports teams—be it football or basketball—but by practices of education and inquiry and a curriculum that reflects tangibly the inherent interconnectedness of universal knowledge.

We have reached the apposite point to turn to the second question—What is academic freedom?—and begin to answer it by way of stating the first thesis.

II.

Academic freedom in its positive sense—that is, authentic academic freedom—realizes the idea or essence of a university. Like every other being in this world, natural or artificial, the university is a specific entity. This entity constitutes the highest species in the genus of school. For, the university realizes the genus of school most extensively, intensively, and comprehensively. Simply to exist as a university is its first perfection.

⁴ Ibid., 99–100 (Discourse V, sect. 6).

To realize its *telos* or end is its second perfection. Like any other being, the university realizes its *telos* or end by way of activities characteristic of its nature. The end of the university involves securing and conveying universal knowledge. This entails, first, conveying old and new knowledge, second, acquiring new knowledge, and third, integrating knowledge by reflecting comprehensively and critically upon it.

Now, quite likely you will expect me to say: academic freedom is the indispensable ambience *in* which this overriding end of the university is to be realized. Understood in this way, the point of academic freedom would be to facilitate the university's second perfection, that is, to facilitate the realization of its *telos* by way of activities characteristic of its nature. Now, exactly this is the conventional wisdom that—while not completely wrong—turns out to be insufficient, to say the least. For the account of freedom that this understanding of academic freedom (as facilitating ambience) presupposes is exclusively the negative freedom of procedural liberalism, the freedom from contingent interference. This notion of academic freedom is too formalistic, too two-dimensional, and too a-teleological (in short, too un-academic) to be worthy of denoting academic freedom in its full and perfective sense, a sense that characterizes the positive freedom for excellence. Authentic academic freedom is not merely a facilitating ambience. Rather, *exercising authentic academic freedom is nothing short of realizing the very essence of the university*. In this sense, academic freedom is constitutive of the idea of a university because the knowledge characteristic of the university is essentially “free” knowledge (which accidentally can also turn out to be useful).

Authentic academic freedom receives its specific sense from the distinction between the *artes liberales*, the liberal or free disciplines, on the one hand and, on the other hand, the *artes serviles*, the applied or useful arts or sciences. While the *artes serviles* may be part of a university, they are not essential to a university, but are essential to what should properly be called a “polytechnicum,” an institution like MIT, Cal Tech, or Virginia Tech. Consider again John Henry Newman: “Knowledge, I say, is then especially liberal, or sufficient for itself, apart from every external and ulterior object, when and in so far as it is philosophical.”⁵ The freedom denoted in authentic academic freedom is the freedom that arises from the philosophical character of knowledge.

But what exactly is this philosophical character of knowledge? In his

⁵ Ibid., 98 (Discourse V, sect. 5).

classic *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*—a book that I regard as an absolute “must read” for all university faculty, administrators, and students—the philosopher Josef Pieper offers a helpful clarification. He states:

Strictly speaking, a claim for academic freedom can only exist when the “academic” itself is realized in a “philosophical” way. And this is historically the reason: academic freedom has been lost, exactly to the extent that the philosophic character of academic study has been lost, or, to put it another way, to the extent that the totalitarian demands of the working world have conquered the realm of the university.⁶

Consider also T. S. Eliot’s perspicacious comment: “What is more insidious than any censorship, is the steady influence which operates silently in any mass society organized for profit, for the depression of standards of art and culture.”⁷ If Pieper and Eliot are right, and I have good reason to think they are, the greatest enemy of authentic academic freedom turns out to be also the greatest enemy of the university qua university: its total instrumentalization and its consequent transformation into a polytechnicum—under the now misapplied label of “university.” What undermines and eventually destroys authentic academic freedom also undermines and eventually destroys the university itself. It is not surprising that, under the pressure of a comprehensive instrumentalization of all university disciplines in conformity with the totalizing logic of the world of work—namely, the by now globalized dynamic of production and consumption—authentic academic freedom devolves into the merely negative freedom from interference. This purely defensive freedom is meant to protect academicians from being turned into pure commodities, from random replacement, from economic exploitation, and from politically and managerially manipulated intrusions into their class rooms and into the substance of their teaching and research. In a context of such instrumentalization and consequent liquidation of academic work—and, note well, also of academic disciplines—academic freedom in its most minimal and indispensable realization is indeed negative freedom. It is the freedom that protects teaching, inquiry, and disciplinary integrity from open and hedged attempts at manipulation and functional-

⁶ Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1998), 75.

⁷ T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960), 32.

ization, attempts that aim at substituting the search for truth with the search for utility, or worse, at reducing truth itself to a function of utility. In order to do justice to this most basic and rudimentary aspect of academic freedom, we must differentiate between, on the one hand, the *inauthentic freedom of indifference* and, on the other hand, the *protective negative freedom from interference* that can be exercised well only within the confines of the truth and the common good. Severed from the confines of the truth and the common good, the protective negative freedom from interference will always eventually degenerate into the all too familiar inauthentic freedom of indifference, the root of which is nothing but the sovereignty of self-will beyond truth and falsehood, beyond good and evil.

While academic freedom understood as negative freedom is not without its importance in the contemporary context of the commodification of higher learning, the quite frequent reduction of authentic academic freedom to the merely negative freedom of protection from extrinsic interference is detrimental. For, the fight for and the insistence upon this kind of negative academic freedom not only blocks sight of what authentic academic freedom is but also of what the root problem is that necessitates this self-protective measure, namely, the transmutation of all knowledge into a form of *technē* and of academicians into hired experts and clerks. Having replaced authentic academic freedom that arises from—to put it in Augustine's words—the *gaudium de veritate* (the joy of searching for and discovering truth) with the computational metrics of research output, the late-modern research university has forgone the community of scholars and students, the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, and only recognizes stakeholders and staff that meet quite accidentally in the processes of knowledge production and knowledge consumption.

This problem festers at the very root of the late-modern secular research university. It becomes obvious as soon as *authentic academic freedom is recognized as nothing but the very realization of the essence or idea of a university*. Differently put, authentic academic freedom exists only where inquiry and teaching are ordered to truth and where the community of academicians is reflexively aware of this teleological ordering of the practices of teaching and inquiry. Newman puts this crucial matter the following way:

Truth is the object of knowledge of whatever kind; and when we inquire what is meant by Truth, I suppose it is right to answer that Truth means facts and their relations, which stand

toward each other pretty much as subjects and predicates in logic. All that exists, as contemplated by the human mind, forms one large system or complex fact.⁸

Viewed altogether, [the sciences] approximate to a representation or subjective reflection of the objective truth, as nearly as possible to the human mind.⁹

Being ordered to this end, the approximation to a representation of the objective truth as nearly as possible to the human mind, and pursuing this end through the means appropriate to each academic discipline in light of its specific subject-matter by way of inquiry and teaching, is the realization of authentic academic freedom and concomitantly of the essence of the university. Note well that the realist understanding of “objective truth” that Newman proposes and that I endorse differs considerably from its scientist appropriation that began in the seventeenth century and that constitutes the prevailing understanding today. It is the understanding of objective knowledge constitutive of the “polytechnicum”: “objective truth” as quantifiable, verifiable, impersonal, and detached. Since the *universitas scientiarum* includes humanistic studies and philosophy, objective truth necessarily transcends the merely quantifiable and verifiable.

Now let us turn to the question of what such academic freedom looks like in the various fields of inquiry and teaching. In the *natural sciences*, authentic academic freedom is realized emphatically not in the all too eagerly looked for applicability. Rather, authentic academic freedom is realized paradigmatically in the very philosophical reflexivity that enables scientists, first, to make explicit the antecedent and largely implicit philosophical presuppositions and moral commitments they bring to their inquiries and teaching—what Michael Polanyi called personal or tacit knowledge and what Edmund Husserl referred to as the *Lebenswelt* from which the natural sciences arise and from which they receive their wider meaning—and, second, to maintain the critical distinction between, on the one hand, historically successive models and paradigms and, on the other hand, a transcending truth toward which all inquiry and the very succession of paradigms and models are teleologically ordered. It is the staunch and persistent realization of authentic academic freedom that protects natural scien-

⁸ Newman, *Idea*, 40 ff. (Discourse III, sect. 2).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43 (Discourse III, sect. 2).

tists from reducing themselves to mere laboratory technicians and to executioners of the research agendas dictated by the economic and political interests of the bio-technological and the military-industrial complexes.

In the *technological* and otherwise applied sciences, authentic academic freedom is realized in the reflexive awareness and thematization in the very practice of inquiry and teaching of these sciences that every applied science qua applied science depends on antecedent moral commitments and a concomitant teleology of the common good and of human flourishing in order to make sense as an applied science in the first place. It is not essential to a polytechnicum, but rather to a university and the concomitant realization of authentic academic freedom, that these antecedent commitments and the concomitant teleology of the common good be reflected in the context of teaching these applied sciences.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, in the *humanistic studies*, authentic academic freedom is realized paradigmatically insofar as the question of being human is thematized and the antecedent ontological and moral commitments are made explicit that drive literary, historical, and artistic inquiry and teaching. Note well that all humanistic studies are ultimately forms of moral philosophy—that is, morally committed inquiries into what it means to be human. As Thomas Pfau put it in his recent magisterial study *Minding the Modern*, humanistic studies realize authentic academic freedom by cultivating “responsible knowledge,” which is “knowledge not merely sought and appraised with regard to its causal efficacy and contingent utility but integrated into an articulated framework of human ends.”¹⁰

In *philosophy*, authentic academic freedom is realized paradigmatically insofar as it is here that the nature of the “academic,” and hence the nature of the university, is explicitly thematized and extensively reflected. A prime example would be Edmund Husserl’s late work *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. In this still eminently relevant study, Husserl undertook a genuine task of philosophy in the way Newman understood it as the true end of all intellectual training, as well as of the university itself: “[T]he true and adequate end of intellectual training and of a University is not Learning or Acquirement, but rather, is Thought and Reason exer-

¹⁰ Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 49.

cised upon Knowledge, or what may be called Philosophy.”¹¹ Here we see authentic academic freedom in its fullest realization because, when thought and reason are exercised upon knowledge, truth itself is thematized reflexively. Newman puts the matter again succinctly:

[T]he comprehension of the bearings of one science upon another, and the use of each to each, and the location and limitation and adjustment and due appreciation of them all, one with another, this belongs, I conceive, to a sort of science distinct from all of them, and in some sense a science of sciences, which is my own conception of what is meant by Philosophy, in the true sense of the word, and of a philosophical habit of mind.¹²

If we spell out the implications of Newman’s statement, it becomes plain that every university discipline must be philosophical in order to be academic, and thus to realize authentic academic freedom. Unsurprisingly, it is philosophy in the tradition initiated by Socrates, continued by Plato, expanded by Aristotle, the Stoics, and Plotinus, deepened by Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas, and developed by Leibniz, Hegel, and Husserl—in short, nothing but the expansive tradition of philosophy in the perennial sense—that is the genuine guardian of authentic academic freedom.

Last but not least, I shall turn to *Catholic theology*. Authentic academic freedom is realized paradigmatically in Catholic theology thus: The transcendent truth, Truth Itself, that is *formally* the end and goal of all the other academic disciplines, is *materially* received by divine faith and articulated, interpreted, clarified, specified, and defended in the labors of the *intellectus fidei* called Catholic theology. Authentic academic freedom in Catholic theology has its primordial and originating *Urform* in the most perfect Christian instantiation of the freedom for excellence, namely, the Blessed Virgin’s response to the Angelic Salutation: “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38; RSV). The academic freedom of Catholic theology has a decidedly Marian shape: the active undergoing, the active suffering of divine things. Only the revealed truth in its fullness embraced in an ever deepening effort of the *intellectus fidei* sets Catholic theology fully free: free from error, free

¹¹ Newman, *Idea*, 123 (Discourse VI, sect. 7).

¹² *Ibid.*, 46 (Discourse III, sect. 4).

from being co-opted by the spirit of the age and by the idol of pure positivist or historicist *Wissenschaftlichkeit*, free for contemplation of the revealed truth, free for inquiry into the revealed truth, and free for teaching the revealed truth.

I had claimed earlier rather boldly that authentic academic freedom and, concomitantly, the essence of a university are paradigmatically realized in a Catholic university. How can I make good on such a bold claim? Newman understood perfectly well that an authentic Catholic university is most fundamentally committed to the catholicity of truth, which means that all university disciplines share the common *telos* of truth. *Authentic academic freedom realizes the catholicity of truth in a comprehensive and integral curriculum that reflects the interior coherence of a potentially universal knowledge and that thematizes the philosophical, academic aspect of each discipline.* Unsurprisingly, authentic academic freedom and the catholicity of truth depend on each other. The catholicity of truth gives full scope to academic freedom, and academic freedom realizes this scope as the freedom for truth as it is approximated carefully by hypothesis, experiment, and model in the natural sciences, as it discloses itself phenomenologically in humanistic studies, as it is honed in the process of aporetics and dialectics in philosophy in its perennial sense, as it is discovered in the free play of mathematics, and as it is contemplated in Catholic theology as received from God directly by way of Revelation, Incarnation, and inspiration. The catholicity of truth and the search to which it gives rise is ordered to the final end toward which the human intellect itself is directed, the immediate vision of the supreme Truth, who is God.

Hence, by way of conclusion the second thesis: *The catholicity of truth assures and sustains the realization of authentic academic freedom in the Catholic university and thereby protects it from being functionalized and instrumentalized in the ways typical of the modern secular research university.*

To summarize: Insofar as the positive freedom for excellence is ordered toward and achieves the realization of the final end of the human intellect, and insofar as authentic academic freedom is the positive freedom for excellence, academic freedom is ordered toward and achieves the full realization of the human intellect and is secured and defended by its intrinsic teleological orientation toward truth. In short, it is nothing but truth that, as *telos* of all genuinely academic activity, best protects and fosters authentic academic freedom. Authentic academic freedom is corrupted and eventually destroyed when it is severed from truth and misunderstood as an instantiation of the typically modern freedom of indifference, the consequent replacement of

truth with utility, and the subsequent transformation of the *artes liberales* into the *artes serviles*—in short, the transformation of the university into a polytechnicum with a liberal arts appendix.

After having considered the nature of the university, which is the nature of the Catholic university and the nature of authentic academic freedom in distinction from the merely negative academic freedom from interference and the inauthentic freedom of indifference, we can now turn to the question, What is revealed truth?

III.

Catholic theology is the one and only university discipline for which “the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth”¹³ is an essential property. This unique difference characterizes the position of Catholic theology in relation to all other university disciplines: the contrast between, on the one hand, being claimed by and already knowing the fount of truth and, on the other, the search for the ultimate truth. This characterization is correct as long as one understands that the relationship of revealed truth to Catholic theology is emphatically not one of a positivist *datum*, the sheer givenness of facticity that would grant theology the rights of ownership analogous to those we hold over commodities of our own. On the contrary, the relationship of revealed truth to Catholic theology is that of a *donum*, a gift that puts theology into the position of recipient. Therefore the relationship of Catholic theology to revealed truth is emphatically not the critical conceptual *dominium* a misplaced *Wissenschaftlichkeit* exercises over revealed truth, but rather one of intellectual stewardship (*procuratio*) in relationship to the gift of revealed truth. Revealed truth is received in divine faith, which itself is a gift of grace, a *donum*—and, emphatically, not an empirical *datum* to be simply acknowledged as a fact and subsequently submitted to the epistemic *dominium* of critical rationalism.

Furthermore, revealed truth is simultaneously given and transcendent. As *transcendent*, revealed truth surpasses the confines of our knowledge, but as *revealed* it is received according to the mode of the human knower. Revealed truth as revealed is essentially testimony about God received from God. As given in communication, it necessarily takes propositional form, whether as narrative or as argument. Furthermore, revealed truth is not had without the instrumental causality of ideational, discursive, magisterial/doctrinal, and liturgical/sacramental mediation and specification. Catholic theology depends

¹³ John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, §1.

directly on a twofold source and an indispensable, divinely instituted *instrumentum* by which it receives these specifications of revealed truth: Sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition as received, interpreted, and doctrinally specified by the Church's magisterium. The twofold source, sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition, and the *instrumentum* form an interdependent unit whose parts work together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, the Council Fathers of the Second Vatican Council put it thus: "In the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others."¹⁴

Revealed truth is of a kind that is always first and foremost suffered, undergone—and *as such* actively received. As stated above, the Blessed Virgin is the paradigm for how revealed truth is rightly received—actively received precisely as suffered, as undergone. Revealed truth is testimony that is always *qua* testimony propositional. Yet, revealed truth remains at the same time transcendent truth. Its propositionality does not reduce its transcendence to the sheer facticity of conveyed information; it does not reduce the spirit to the letter, but rather conveys the spirit by way of the letter and transcendence by way of propositionality. The propositionality characteristic of inspired testimony is the very conduit of the transcendence of revealed truth. Revealed truth has its acme and center in the incarnate Logos, the Word of God made flesh. Analogous to the hypostatic union of the human and divine natures in the person of the Logos, the Son of God, where the human nature of Christ has a specific created historical concreteness, divine truth *qua* revealed truth also has a distinct propositional concreteness as it is received by and into the faith of the Church, a created concreteness that is apposite to the way knowledge is received in the human knower. Yet at the same time, revealed truth has an inexhaustible depth of surpassing transcendence irreducible to the empiricist *datum* of mere historical facticity and impervious to the proud epistemic *dominium* of critical rationalism.

In Catholic theology, authentic academic freedom cannot be realized, therefore, in the flight from the testimonial propositionality of revealed truth into an essentially trans-propositional, apophatic religious transcendence or into a primordial and essentially pre-propositional religious subjectivity. Nor, for that matter, can authentic

¹⁴ *Dei Verbum* §10.

academic freedom in Catholic theology be realized in the flight from magisterial authority. Rather (and this is the third thesis), *authentic academic freedom in Catholic theology is realized precisely in the fidelity to the testimonial propositionality of revealed truth as conveyed by sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition, and as specified by the Magisterium of the Church*. The flight of Catholic theology into a purely negative academic freedom from interference where the magisterium of the Church or, more fundamentally, even the very testimonial propositionality of revealed truth is taken to be an interference, into a positivist or historicist *Wissenschaftlichkeit* that is incongruous with the very subject matter of Catholic theology, simply amounts to the abandonment of authentic academic freedom, and hence to the self-abolition of Catholic theology as a properly *academic* university discipline.

What is true for the integral part, is also true for the whole. Therefore, what is true for Catholic theology is also true for the Catholic university. The Catholic university is academic in the proper sense of the word precisely insofar as it realizes that its relationship to the supreme Truth, as mediated by the Church, is essential to its institutional identity.

We have reached the apposite point to consider finally the relationship of revealed truth to the authentic academic freedom as it is realized on academic disciplines other than Catholic theology.

IV.

The relationship of revealed truth to authentic academic freedom realized in other academic disciplines is governed by the fundamental principle of the catholicity of truth, namely, that truth cannot contradict truth. When things are in good order in a Catholic university, revealed truth quite obviously informs Catholic theology formally and materially, informs the liturgical life as well as the core-curriculum, informs existentially all academicians by way of what is called the “formation of conscience,” and—by way of Catholic theology—informs the moral suppositions of the humanistic studies and the applied sciences. In this way, via a truly *academic* Catholic theology, revealed truth protects, secures, and strengthens the exercise of authentic academic freedom in other university disciplines. In short, when things are in good order in a Catholic university, revealed truth, as believed, taught, liturgically celebrated, and lived, informs all operations of the university. It is needless to say that Catholic theology and philosophy (in its perennial sense) play a central role in the curriculum as well as in the intellectual life of such a university. For, it is in the dialogue between these

two paradigmatically *academic* disciplines that the catholicity of truth is reflected upon explicitly and the nature of authentic academic freedom articulated and defended. It is also needless to say that if a Catholic university were to banish Catholic theology and philosophy from its core curriculum and even from the university itself, it would thereby forego its commitment to the catholicity of truth, indeed, it would simply decapitate itself.

Conflict between revealed truth and authentic academic freedom may arise from the failure of disciplines other than Catholic theology to realize their respective, properly *academic* nature. Recall that “academic” denotes also a critical methodological awareness of the nature, integrity, and limitations of a discipline and an awareness of the limitations of knowledge respective to the disciplinary object of study in any given university discipline. Such a failure to realize the properly academic nature of a particular discipline might consist in indifference to the catholicity of truth, in the confusion of science with scientism, in the replacement of philosophy in its perennial sense with the modus of ideology characteristic of not a few things that presently go under the label of “philosophy,” or in the historicist, genealogist, or neuro-scientistic reduction of humanistic studies. This conflict can, of course, be exacerbated by Catholic theology itself when it abandons its respective, properly *academic* nature, which essentially includes fidelity to the revealed truth. Exactly at the very moment when Catholic theology reduces itself to Christian religious studies—that is, when it embraces and internalizes the unfitting and hence un-academic norm of positivist or historicist *Wissenschaftlichkeit*—does it forego fidelity to the revealed truth and, concomitantly, to authentic academic freedom.

Received, interpreted, and defended well by Catholic theology, revealed truth, in virtue of its transcendence and in virtue of its testimonial propositionality, opens up the horizon of the catholicity of truth and thereby encourages other university disciplines to realize their properly *academic* nature, and thereby their authentic academic freedom. Reciprocally, insofar as the other university disciplines realize their properly academic nature and thereby contribute to the catholicity of truth, they encourage Catholic theology to search ever more deeply the revealed truth and increasingly unfold its surpassing riches. By being maximally academic and thereby realizing authentic academic freedom and thus giving witness to the catholicity of truth, the *universitas scientiarum* assists Catholic theology in realizing its own authentic academic freedom.

V.

In conclusion: Catholic universities have a great gift that secular universities lack. Compared to Catholic universities, secular universities, especially advanced research universities, are like orphaned children who know neither where they come from nor where they are going. And when upwardly mobile Catholic universities eager to catch up with the leading secular research universities eventually leave behind their Catholic identity, they will all too soon begin to suffer from the same condition that ails the secular research universities—the absence of a proper unifying teleology and, hence, the absence of authentic academic freedom. You might recall the astute observation Alasdair MacIntyre made some years ago, that the administrative leaders of major Catholic universities in the United States “are for the most part hell-bent on imitating their prestigious secular counterparts, which already imitate one another. So we find Notre Dame glancing nervously at Duke, only to catch Duke in the act of glancing nervously at Princeton.”¹⁵ Catholic universities mindful of their Catholic identity, of which the catholicity of truth is an integral component, are protected from this fate of mindless imitation. For, Catholic universities receive the gift of accountability from the revealed truth by way of the Church. They are called by the Church to nothing less than to the exercise of authentic academic freedom.

In short, the Catholic university is called to live out a truth that is as demanding as it is beautiful—namely, that fidelity to the revealed truth does not contradict, but rather perfects, authentic academic freedom. By authorizing authentic academic freedom, revealed truth conveys its nature as the one and only transcending orthodoxy that the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, formulates so strikingly: “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”¹⁶ The icon of Christ, the Incarnate Lord, is the very face of the one transcending orthodoxy that is the heart of the Catholic university. And only because Christ fully reveals human beings to themselves does divine revelation authorize authentic academic freedom and does the Catholic university display the very idea of a university. **N&V**

¹⁵ *Commonweal*, October 20, 2006, 10.

¹⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* §22.