

***Universitas* and Postmodernity**

Summary of the Speech Delivered by the Right Reverend Monsignor Jorge M. Bergoglio on Account of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Document on “History And Change”

Many have strived to keep the University foundation mystic but others, instead, have allowed it to become weaker. Mysticism is gradually lost through the successive circumstances that ill-treat it: functionalism, the different kinds of corruption, “internal” struggles, the sadness in our hearts, etc.

We must bear in mind that our environment has changed; some university institutions have sprung up on an “a priori” basis not in accordance with the *universitas* concept or with the individual’s dignity. In these cases we have to look back and remember the distance travelled: to re-read “History and Change,” i.e. its three main principles.

Today, the powerful infrastructure of Modernity keeps on collapsing and that shipwreck is shyly referred to as “postmodernity.” The historical challenge comprises all the ambiguity of crises, and today’s individual tries to reconstruct what was in force “yesterday,” but on the beach he only has the wreckage of an interrupted voyage. In this new situation, in this shipwreck, we play an active role: we are the shipwrecked and we run the risk of trying to reconstruct everything through inertia, using the old parts of an old ship that does not exist any longer; or, on the contrary, the risk of not accepting our uncertainty, thus retraining the creative force of our own history. The shipwrecked is always with his own self and his own history: that constitutes his wealth. The university environment is the correct place to exercise our memory: to meet the principles which allow a dream to come true, to loosen that what hinders its continuity, to be thus faithful to one’s mission which is precisely what has been wished for and that now is and wants to go on being.

How is it possible to recall those principles before this new challenge?

The fight against atheism

We are living within a restless humanity, one that tries to give a meaning to its own existence, one that would like to articulate languages and discourses to recover the lost harmony of knowledge; we are living within a humanity eager to build up its “ego” before insecurity. We cannot consider this new spiritual pursuit as a sign of God’s spirit.

Divinity may be considered as a revitalising energy that meets our need for being accepted, for being calmed down.

On the other side we can find thousands of fanatics raising gods’ flags which justify their aberrations or merely their prejudices and ideologies; this is how the postmodern shipwrecked has been fed from the crowded religious cupboard. This results in theism: an Olympus of gods created in our own “image and resemblance,” in our own dissatisfaction, fear and self-sufficiency; gods that have been trapped in their own insecurity, reduced to mere support or justification of our own hopes and beliefs.

In a certain way we are just like the primitive church, with Jesus’ God immersed in a world where men strive for their own divinity in a secularised life. But the road remains the same: we must announce with our life that the Truth based on Jesus’ love for His Church is really worthy of faith. Today, more than ever, the road is called holiness. The Gospel is transmitted through our lives which become a mirror that does not reflect our own dullness but Somebody Else’s Word.

This creative conversion must take place in the personal experience of the Christian educational community we take part in. More than a University that may produce leading figures or outstanding schools of thought, we must seek a community which must be pleased to base its progress on the Truth and the Beauty; a community inviting to live for what is good. On the other hand, in the silence of learning, in the humbleness of sharing and helping each other, we are going to find the remedy to solve mediocrity that brings about corruption as well as the remedy against indifference.

Our fight against atheism has been converted into a fight against theism.

Making progress through the return to our sources

It seems that in our postmodernity it is unsuitable to face the human fact of limitation, of law, of the required and always imperfect authority. Relativism now tends to discredit values—and in fact any dignity and mission, any vocation, i.e. the feeling of “having been called.” Relativism is just the result of both uncertainty and mediocrity together leading to disbelief, to a non-commitment with the community itself.

We must find our sources once more. The Church gives an everlasting teaching, it puts the human condition into practice basing it on the personal dignity man needs to behave properly. It does not mean that this teaching will be easy. Growth and conflict are inherent to our human condition, but the mission of the Church is to offer its universal message. The relativistic spirit tends to avoid tensions, conflicts; in fact, it is afraid of truth.

The mission of the University shall be to educate itself and to educate others bearing the concept of *universitas* always in mind: man as such is to the Christian a son, his Father’s son, created to fulfil His Wish, His Will that always guides our own. The relativistic concept that

we ourselves are able to find that guidance is practically a shipwrecked voyage more than a new frustration. We, human beings, cannot live without a Law that organises us, without a Call that may guide us, without the Warmth of a Father summoning us.

Universalism through differences

There is another danger brought about by postmodernity: a new nihilism that “makes everything universal” annulling and discrediting peculiarities or strengthening them so violently that they are destroyed in the long run. We have wrongly “made our interests universal” in our concern to survive or just to live the present time intensely. It seems that we have “made ourselves universal” in the “light man.”

Our space is restricted: that is a fact. Consequently this university community should improve communication, the exchange of words and, above all, of the Word that makes us alive, creative, free from the burden of the “flattening nothingness.” Let us not be drifted along, that is the shipwrecked’s alternative: either he resigns himself to the waves or he dares to stand up, like Christ carrying the Cross, and to start all over again.

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