

## **A Christian Critique of the University**

By Charles Malik, Ph.D. Former President, United Nations General Assembly

Dr. Charles Habib Malik (1906-1987) completed his academic career as the Jacques Maritain Distinguished Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at The Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He held numerous research chairs and administrative positions at American and Middle Eastern universities. The Western world knew and revered Dr. Malik primarily as an international diplomat. He served the United Nations in a variety of positions, including chairing the committee which drafted the final text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948.

The first three chapters of Dr. Malik's influential book, *A Christian Critique of the University*, first published in 1982, are reproduced here as a stimulus for discussion at the *Ted W. Ward Consultation*, November 2000. Dr. Malik was uniquely qualified to critique "the mind and spirit of the university." Throughout his career he published articles and books on philosophical, diplomatic, and international matters in America, Europe, and the Middle East. Dr. Malik also served universities throughout his life. In his own country, he was a founding member of the Lebanese Academy. He was chairman of the philosophy department at the American University, Beirut, then Dean of Graduate Studies; from 1962 to 1976 he was Distinguished Professor of Philosophy. Dr. Malik was a signatory for Lebanon of the United Nations Charter in 1945. He served the U.N. for fourteen years, at various times as President of the General Assembly and of the Security Council. More than twelve countries decorated him for his contributions to human rights and international peace.

His address, first given at the University of Waterloo's Pascal Lectures, derives first from Dr. Malik's living faith in Jesus Christ. John North, Chairman of the Pascal Lectures, observed in his foreword to the book from which these chapters are drawn, "Seldom does a man so love those who may not agree with him that he reinforces their strengths while standing firmly in the face of their disagreement: one senses how much he is aware of being loved—and forgiven—himself. It is enough to set one in pursuit of Maliks Master."

The university is one of the greatest creations of Western civilization. There is the family, the church, the state, the economic enterprise, the professions, the media and the university. These seven institutions with all their living traditions and with all that they mean constitute the substance of Western civilization. And while in other civilizations there are families, religious institutions, states, institutions for the creation of goods and wealth, a profusion of crafts and professions, and even certain public modes of disseminating information, the university, as universally recognized today, is more distinctive of Western civilization than of any other.

The original model of this institution is the Brotherhood of Pythagoras and the Academy of Plato. All universities trace their ultimate origin to these two ancient Greek intellectual communities. The Lyceum of Aristotle was an offshoot of the Academy. And while, of course, there are universities today in all cultures and civilizations—in China, India, Africa and the Islamic world—these universities, to gain world recognition and respect, namely, to gain admission into the world fraternity of universities, find themselves, increasingly compelled to pattern their organization and curriculum after the models obtaining in the Heidebergs, the Sorbonnes, the Oxfords and the Harvards of the West. Every non-Western university, as a university, has either copied the principles and structural lines of its existence (including for the most part its curricula) from Western universities, or is run by scholars and administrators trained either in Western universities or under other scholars themselves trained in Western universities. The converse is not true: Western universities do not depend on non-Western universities either for the curricula of their schools and departments or for the methodologies of their disciplines. Moreover, non-Western universities cannot hold their own, as universities, except by

maintaining intimate, and sometimes organic, relations with Western universities, and by keeping unbrokenly abreast of the immense scientific and scholarly productivity of the Western centers of learning and research.

From Pythagoras and Plato to the present the Western university has developed under autonomous laws of its own, quite unaffected by intellectual happenings outside its own tradition. The original Greek thrust could not have been deflected or substantially modified by the little that has been transpiring in non-Western realms. The Arab-Islamic learning of Baghdad and Cordoba, which helped stimulate the awakening of the West afterward, was itself originally ignited by this thrust. Under the West in this connection I include of course the universities of the Soviet Union because the great Soviet universities antedated the Revolution of 1917 and were all grounded in the university concept of the West.

### CONTINUING GREEK INFLUENCE

The reason the universities of the world are Greek in ultimate origin stems both from the nature of knowledge and the nature of the genius of the Greeks. The Greeks, more than any other people, displayed an irrepressible and unbounded passion for the exercise of reason and an incredible curiosity to investigate and know everything; and the university is nothing if it is not the home of free inquiry and unfettered curiosity. "All knowledge is of the universal," proclaimed Aristotle, and this is precisely the inalienable principle of the university. By knowledge Aristotle means scientific knowledge. Thus from the beginning the horizon of thought envisaged by the Greeks was the whole of mankind; they lived and thought in the presence of the unity of the human mind. Man as man was their theme. No people on earth surpassed them, or even approached them, in this.

What you know, or think you know, that you cannot articulate in such a way as to share it with all mankind is not knowledge. It could be faith, it could be feeling, it could be intuition, it could be hallucination, it could be daydreaming, but it is not knowledge. It remains your private property until you manage to convert it into knowledge, namely, until you succeed in communicating it to others, indeed potentially to all mankind. Knowledge is essentially publishable and shareable with all men. Knowledge therefore is not the possession of this or that individual or culture alone; knowledge is never something esoteric: knowledge, as knowledge, is universally human or it is something fake.

Knowledge is the realization of the unity of man as man, and therefore of the essence of all men. Scientific knowledge tells man, every man from Tibet to Timbuktu and from Copenhagen to Cape Town: you have the innate power of seeking the truth of every being, from God to the multiplication table, and of knowing as much of that truth as it is humanly possible to know.

The Greeks, especially Aristotle, devised, and subsequent universities which inherited the Greeks developed and refined, the norms of scientific investigation and communication. The norms and canons are the cumulative property of the sciences and disciplines of the university, and no scientific creativity can transpire in total isolation from them. If we examine the written history of practically every science and every intellectual discipline we shall find that the original conception of that science or discipline was Greek and almost invariably (mathematics excepted) Aristotelian; even on mathematics Aristotle has some very trenchant things to say. Only as we enter into and appropriate the living traditions of the departments of knowledge in the universities can we create scientifically; and this means, whether we know it or not, becoming Greek, or, for the most part, Aristotelian, in mind and outlook. Aristotle is at the base of practically half of Western civilization.

It is interesting to Ponder why Chinese or Indians or Muslims or Arabs can enter Freiburg University or the Sorbonne or Oxford or Harvard or Chicago University or Toronto University and specialize and earn a universally respected academic degree in their own Chinese or Indian or Muslim or Arab culture, but no German or Frenchman or Englishman or American or Canadian can enter any Chinese or Indian or Muslim or Persian or Arab university and specialize and earn a universally respected academic degree in his own German or French or British or American or Canadian culture. The reason is that these non-Western universities (and therefore their own native cultures which they themselves reflect) have not yet sufficiently caught the insatiable original Greek curiosity about all being; they are interested in others only to a degree; for the most part only utilitarianly, only to use them, only to learn from them. They are not interested in knowing their essence, their being; they are for the most part wrapped up in themselves; the others are perhaps too strange, too forbidding for them; their original, natural, wholesome curiosity is somehow inhibited.

### OPENNESS TO THE TRUTH

Western scientific curiosity is so unquenchable (but for one qualification about authentic interest in Christianity which we shall presently introduce) that the West is always complaining against the restrictions the communist and many noncommunist realms impose upon Western scholars and thinkers in their voracious search for the truth of the histories of those countries and the contemporary conditions in their societies. To highlight this feature the West often labels these societies “closed” in contradistinction to its own open societies.

More than by anything else, Western civilization is defined by total fearlessness of and openness to the truth. To the extent this civilization begins to harbor reservations about this fearlessness and this openness, it ceases to be itself, i.e., Western; and to the extent a society, any society, has developed fearlessness of and openness to the truth, it has become Westernized. It follows that, when we speak of a civilized society, whether Western or non-Western, we are in effect saying, so far as origins are concerned, a “Hellenized” society.

An inhibition of original curiosity has blunted Soviet universities about, for instance, the knowledge of Christianity. Christianity is cavalierly dismissed as so much nonsense or superstition or untruth or opium in the hands of the exploiters and oppressors. Nothing authentic is known or taught in Soviet universities about Christianity; whereas practically everything is known or taught in Western universities about communist doctrine and practice. And, as we shall see, this blunting, inhibiting virus has infected Western universities themselves with respect to the knowledge of Christianity. The non-West is gradually overpowering the West! The original universal Greek curiosity is gradually becoming overwhelmed!

### THE UNIVERSITY'S DOMINANT INFLUENCE

This great Western institution, the university, dominates the world today more than any other institution: more than the church, more than the government, more than all other institutions. All the leaders of government are graduates of universities, or at least of secondary schools or colleges whose administrators and teachers are themselves graduates of universities. The same applies to all church leaders. How can you create economically without some technical training? But the technical schools which provide this training are some sort of mini-universities, and their administrators and instructors are themselves graduates of colleges, universities or technical institutes. The professionals—doctors,

engineers, lawyers, etc.—have all passed through the mill of the secondary school, the college and the university. And the men of the media are university trained, and some have undergone specialized advanced instruction in communication and journalism.

What about the family? In this age of universal education no parents are unaffected by the university, for they themselves are graduates of secondary schools, colleges or universities. And everybody—parents, children, students, professors, administrators, professionals, church leaders, government officials, business people, industrialists and media people themselves—are perpetually exposed to the bombardment of the media. The universities, then, directly and indirectly, dominate the world; their influence is so pervasive and total that whatever problem afflicts them is bound to have far-reaching repercussions throughout the entire fabric of Western civilization. No task is more crucial and urgent today than to examine the state of the mind and spirit in the Western university.

The rest of this essay is for the most part an enumeration of problems and projects to be exhaustively investigated in order to find out the mind of Jesus Christ about the university. This study is a preliminary work. It raises the fundamental question and points out the avenues to be explored in trying to answer it. In the last chapter we suggest, in a most tentative manner, a mechanism that could serve as the means of grappling with the question. Of course the mechanism outlined is a dream; it could even be a fantasy. If an honest Christian critique of the university could come up with a better suggestion, more modest and more practicable, I would yield to it at once. The question is of such magnitude that merely to raise it is not enough: by the very nature of the task we are called upon to propose lines of action.

If the university today dominates the world, if Jesus Christ is who the church and the Bible proclaim him to be, and if we happen to believe that what the church and the Bible claim about Jesus Christ is the truth, then how can we fail, not only to raise the question of what Jesus Christ thinks of the university, but to face the equally urgent demand: what can be done? We are dealing with the power that dominates the world; how can we then rest without seeking to ascertain where Jesus Christ stands with respect to this power? The university and Jesus Christ—these are the two inseparable foci of our thought.

The following discussion falls into six sections: (1) the identity of the critic, (2) the swerving of the universities from their grounding in Jesus Christ, (3) the sciences, (4) the humanities, (5) some problems, (6) a plan for action. (Editor's note: only Malik's first two points are included in this article.)

## IDENTITY OF THE CRITIC

The critic in the final analysis is Jesus Christ himself. We are not offering our opinion; we are seeking his judgment of the university. This very position itself is a preliminary judgment of the university; for one spirit more than any other characterizes the contemporary university, and that is, that there is no Jesus Christ in himself, or, for that matter, there is no being in itself: there is only our opinion of Jesus Christ or of this or that being.

But Jesus Christ exists in himself and he holds the entire world, including the university, in the palm of his hands. This is a dogmatic statement, of course, but ours must be a "Christian" critique of the university. And those who know him and love him and trust him and seek his presence day and night are granted, at his pleasure, his Holy Spirit who guides them into all truth, including the truth of the university which we are seeking. Do we, however, err? Of course we do, but despite our error Jesus

Christ remains and his judgment remains, and his Holy Spirit will correct our error if we are open enough to him. The question, What does Jesus Christ think of the university? is valid, and it has an answer. We may not know the answer, but the answer exists, and we may expectantly seek it; if it eludes us, it is still there. A Christian critique of the university could degenerate into sheer sophistry unless the ultimate reference were to Jesus Christ himself. We are thinking of Jesus Christ himself when we venture to criticize the university. We are not thinking of the university first and then as a sort of afterthought of Jesus Christ; we are thinking of Jesus Christ first, and all along and in his light we see the university. Least of all are we thinking of ourselves and our opinion.

We are asking, seeking, knocking to find out exactly what Jesus Christ thinks of the university. He himself assures us that if we ask, seek and knock hard enough and sincerely, it shall be given us, we shall find and it shall be opened unto us. He likewise assures us that a grain of mustard seed of faith will perform wonders. We take his word on both the grain of mustard seed and on the efficacy of asking, seeking and knocking. In view of the unique place and power of the university today I know of no more important question to ask than: what does Jesus Christ think of the university? All other questions without exception are relatively silly when this question looms in the mind.

To the non-Christian or the atheist or the naturalist or the radical secularist this question itself is silly and irrelevant, because what Christ thinks of the university, even if Christ as such existed, makes no difference whatever to the university. The university is wholly autonomous and follows its own inherent laws of development. Christ makes no more difference to the university than he does to the myth or development of physics or mathematics or the course of a raging war. But to a Christian who knows and believes in Jesus Christ as he is given us in the church and the Bible, and who at the same time realizes the unequalled power of the university in the world today, no question compares with this one.

Since the university determines the course of events and the destiny of man more than any other institution or agency today, it is impossible for a Christian not to ask the question: what does Jesus Christ think of the university? To a Christian this question is an absolute imperative.

I have put it in this form rather than in the fashionably more acceptable form: How do we see the university from the Christian point of view?, because this way of putting the question soon lands us in some form of subjectivism which, as the bane of modern thought, is precisely, as we shall see, what is at stake with the university today. "From the Christian point of view" has no solid foundation unless the word Christian here means Jesus Christ himself. So from the very start I have put aside all such questionable phraseology as "from the Christian point of view," "in terms of Christian principles," "applying Christian principles or values," "from the standpoint of Christian culture," etc. In fact it is already a concession to entitle this study *A Christian Critique of the University* rather than simply and directly *What Does Jesus Christ Think of the University?* The real title of this book is this latter formulation.

There can be of course, and there is, a communist or a materialist or a nationalist or a liberal or a Muslim or a Hindu or a rationalist or a secularist or an atheistic critique of the university; and I think I know who is the critic or what is the ultimate criterion of the critique in each one of these cases; but whoever that critic or whatever that criterion might be, in a Christian critique of the university the critic can only be Jesus Christ himself. Every word that I say here, if it does not conform to the will of Jesus Christ, I abjure forthwith. And whoever objects to any position or proposition of mine is under equal obligation, if he cares, to demonstrate that it is at variance with the will of Jesus Christ.

In the nature of the case, therefore, this inquiry can only be conducted in fear and trembling. I know in whom I believe and I trust his Holy Spirit to guide me into the truth I am seeking; I do that

despite my fear that my many infirmities would stand in the way. The attempt is worth making, despite the possibility of error; for, as we saw, the university literally dominates the world, and therefore no question can have priority over the question of what is the mind and the spirit of precisely this agency which thus dominates the world. If Jesus Christ exists, as we believe he does, the inquiry can be grounded in nothing more final or authoritative than Jesus Christ himself.

Everything depends on this fundamental personal-theological position. A Christian does not seek proofs of God's existence; rather, like Pascal, a Christian already believes in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who is identically the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He believes in God through Jesus Christ himself, as he receives him in the living church and in the Bible. He is originally inextricably integrated into the living church and the Word of God which is the Bible. And he lives his faith. A Christian critique of the university is not a speculative-rationalist exercise carried out, à la Kant, "within the bounds of mere reason"; rather such a critique must be originally grounded in existential faith in the Holy Trinity; otherwise it would not be "Christian." The faith is derived from Jesus Christ himself in the church and in the Bible, which is the Book of the church; and this means that Jesus Christ is living, that his Spirit can guide us into all truth, including that of the university, and that the critique of the university from the point of view of Jesus Christ himself is absolutely firmly grounded.

If a serious Christian objects to our interpretation we beg him or her in the name of Christ to put forward an alternative one. We may adopt it and forgo ours. The point equally binding on both of us is that if the university is the most determinative institution in the world then we are both under Christian obligation to think about this matter and to try to answer the question: what does Jesus Christ think of the university? Other critics cannot discharge their obligation by only criticizing the present position. Do such critics think Christ is pleased with the university today? Then let them answer our critique of the university where we show in what respect Christ cannot possibly be pleased. And if they think that Jesus Christ is not wholly pleased with the university, then let them articulate exactly where Jesus Christ is pleased and where he is displeased. My primary intention is to raise this question in such a vigorous way as to force all serious and responsible Christians to think it through themselves.

I repeat: every assertion ventured forth here is made in the name and presence of Jesus Christ (a name and a presence which, while we claim them confidently, we nevertheless seek in total fear and trembling). While I respect every man's opinion, neither his opinion nor mine matters; the only thing that matters is whether the assertion expresses the judgment of Jesus Christ; if it is shown that it does not, the assertion will be immediately withdrawn. The first and last formal and material presupposition of this entire inquiry is precisely this position. Otherwise it is an exercise in fuzziness, in wobbly human effort, in subjectivist rationalism, in futility.

## SWERVING FROM THEIR PURPOSE

I am not thinking of the church-related or the Christian-oriented colleges and universities; these have not yet attained the stature of the fifty or one hundred top universities of the world, which set the pace and provide the model for all other higher institutions of learning. Nonetheless, the critique I am developing applies in large measure even to the church-related or Christian-oriented schools. For, measuring their academic status, as indeed they should, by how close they attain to the norms and standards of the more prestigious institutions, these schools, which claim affiliation to his Name, hardly demonstrate in practice (how could they if they must achieve academic respectability?) that Jesus Christ has any relevance to the matter and spirit of their scientific research and learning. After all, it is these

prestigious universities which, through the unparalleled research they are conducting, provide the Christian schools with all their fundamental treatises and textbooks for their curricula.

A Christian critique of the university will set itself the task, first, of ascertaining whether it is the case that the greater, more established and more influential universities were all founded on and dedicated to Jesus Christ, and whether in the course of time they swerved from that foundation and dedication. By “swerving” I mean the changing of the spirit of the original intention. Notice, for example, the motto on the Harvard seal which pervades all its schools and departments: the words *Christo et Ecclesiae* (For Christ and for the Church) surround the word *Veritas* (Truth). The motto of Freiburg University, in Germany is *Die Wahrheit wirt euch freimachen*, (The Truth shall make you free). How much Harvard, which is perhaps the greatest university in the world, and to which I am most gratefully indebted for all my higher intellectual training under Whitehead, Hocking, Lewis, Sheffer, Perry and others, still is true to its motto with respect to Christ and the church is a question. How much the original intention of the Author of the motto of Freiburg University, to which I am incalculably indebted for my discipleship under Heidegger, is still intended by that university is again a question. This does not mean that some of the most solid research and scholarship in the world is not being produced today by these two great universities and by others like them, nor that I would not send my children, students and friends, as I have often done, to them if they qualified.

People pride themselves on this “swerving.” They interpret it as progress: the liberation of the mind from all Christian religious shackles. The word progress has many meanings; but the most decisive of these meanings is precisely to turn one\*s back on Christ and the church. Progress is defined as moving away from church: the more we do so, the more we progress. There are revolutions and there are counterrevolutions; the greatest revolution ever was Jesus Christ himself; not his miracles, not his ideas, not his teachings, not his moral principles, great and novel and revolutionary as all these things are, but he himself. For nothing is greater, more revolutionary and more unbelievable than, nothing is as great as, the gospel of the crucified, resurrected and glorified God who is to come again to judge the living and the dead. And practically all (not quite all) subsequent “revolutions” were only counterrevolutions to that original incredible revolution. We always have in the womb of history and in the heart of man Christ and Antichrist contending. What a mystery!

The forces of this kind of progress have as their ultimate aim to obliterate from history the very mention of the Name of Jesus and his cross. Inquire diligently what the word *progressive* means (progressive person, progressive doctrine, progressive law, progressive attitude, progressive system, progressive tendency, progressive movement, progressive society, progressive culture, progressive country), and you will find it for the most part directed, consciously or unconsciously, against Jesus Christ. There is always something else put forward to make us forget him: justice, science, culture, prosperity, pleasure, serenity, peace. The important thing is to replace him, to satisfy us without him, to crowd him out of existence altogether. Jesus radically disturbs, and the disturbance must once and for all be put to rest. Little do people know that in the nature of the case this is impossible, because this was once tried in a most radical fashion, and once and for all the attempt miserably foundered. The Man rose from the dead on the third day . . . When progressivism in this sense entrenches itself, no matter how mildly or neutrally or innocently or unconsciously or well-meaningly, in the highest citadel of learning, the university, the matter becomes very serious indeed.

We know that the universities which set a pattern for all other universities were all founded on Jesus Christ, and we know that foundation has now in practice become a relic of the past. A Christian

critique of the university raises the question of why this has happened. Is it a natural phenomenon? Was it an inevitable development? What were the ultimate spiritual causes behind it? Does it really signify progress? Progress from what, to what? Is it reversible? What are its consequences upon the whole destiny of man?

Is it a necessary condition for these great universities becoming so overwhelmingly leading in all domains of research, learning, scholarship, discovery and invention that they unmoor themselves altogether from Jesus Christ? Are scientific progress and the worship of Jesus Christ incompatible? Could a saint earn a Nobel Prize in science, and could a Nobel Prize winner in physics or chemistry or medicine or economics fall on his knees and say the Credo and mean it exactly as Athanasius meant it and as the church means it today? Is it a mere matter of division of labor, so that the university will attend exclusively to matters intellectual and scientific and the church exclusively to matters moral and spiritual? Does this division of labor make no substantive difference to the very process of science and thought to which the university dedicates itself, and to the truth value of its findings?

Can the university be recaptured for Christ? If Christ is going to be utterly effaced, what or who is going to replace him? In this fateful contest, who is going to win: Christ or Antichrist, the real revolution or the myriad counterrevolutions since?

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