

An open reason University

María Lacalle. Universidad Francisco de Vitoria
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¿What does it mean for the UFV to be a Catholic-inspired university?

From the beginning, our concern about the synthesis of knowledge has been especially present, I am happy to share with you this journey behind us. We have always wondered about what does university mean, and what does mean to be university of Catholic inspiration. And, more specifically, what does it mean for us to be Catholic-inspired university.

I think that, beyond what each one understands by Catholic inspiration, we all agree that it is not just a matter of having crucifixes in classrooms, nor a pastoral department. Even it is also not enough to have a percentage of humanistic subjects in our curricula, including theology. These are important aspects that achieve valuable results, but they still do not reach the core.

What's the challenge that, in our opinion, identifies our idea of university and our mission? It is the awareness that reason and faith are not contradictory, but complementary. Conviction that Christian image of man can influence the scientific approach to what we do, at the same time that the sciences (empirical and social) will influence how we understand faith.

We think that any university will be Catholic if the reason is used in a Catholic sense, if in classes and research occur what Benedict XVI called "open reason". It is, we could say, a "Catholic" way of using the reason, including the whole person, faith and life. We think that in a Catholic university, we cannot leave faith nor philosophical or existential hanging on the coat rack of the laboratory or the library, as if they were strangers in the rational knowledge world.

But it is easy to say and very difficult to be practiced. Since, we know very well that for decades human beings have lost confidence in their own capacity to know the truth, only keeping the empirical knowledge, closing themselves in their own limits and conditioning. This has led to scientism in some areas of knowledge, and skepticism in others. Both are satisfied with partial truths and refuse to ask radical questions about meaning and ultimate foundation of life, history and the world, or they stifle questions within themselves almost before they are born.

And precisely, facing this fragmentation of knowledge, in front of denial of our capacity to know, we want to open the reason and broad our mind to the whole reality. The concept of reason has to "widen" to be able of exploring and embrace those aspects of reality which go beyond the purely empirical aspects of reality and not to be satisfied with partial, fragmentary and dispersed truths, but to raise decisive questions to our life.

¿What does the open reason mean?

Open reason means overcoming fragment and seek the unity of knowledge, asking fundamental questions, recognizing limits of our science and place it in dialogue with philosophy and theology.

- Firstly, the open reason requires the search for the unity of knowledge. The practice is that each academic to specialize in one area of knowledge. It is correct and has allowed the increase of human knowledge, since we cannot know all of everything. But, sometimes, we keep closed within the limits of our little parcel, trapped in a fragment which, without reference at all, is distorted, incomplete, and even wrong. That is why it is necessary to look up a little, and recognize the place our discipline occupies in the whole reality, and recognize the limits of our specific science, and relate it to other areas of knowledge to have a whole vision of reality.
- That search for the unity of knowledge can only be done by overcoming that self-limitation we sometimes impose on ourselves, thinking that we can only know what is verifiable by our own sense, or that it is only worth working for what is immediately useful.
- Secondly, this wide vision makes to question our own discipline about man, about truth, about the meaning of things, about the good and the evil, in short, about what is properly human. These questions, usually, lead us to the limits of our science and realize we need the support of philosophy and theology to answer them. It means there is an effort to avoid reductionism and judge the whole reality from our own parameters of knowledge. As if a neuroscientist were to affirm that freedom does not exist because he only sees nervous reactions when he analyzes brain activity.

In short, an open reasoning academic, while mastering his science, or perhaps by that reason, is capable to reach limits and asking decisive questions for the human being. He is opened to interdisciplinary work, to curiosity and wonder. He seeks wisdom, not only knowledge, and knows that some questions stated by his science can only be answered with help of philosophy and theology. This does not imply we all have to become philosophers. Rather, it implies an attitude of intellectual honesty that recognizes the limits of one's own method and the need to open our reason and enter into dialogue with philosophy and theology.

What is the result we are looking for?

Not, certainly, hybrid as consequence of the juxtaposition of philosophical or theological concepts together with scientists. Nor it means that Mathematics or Genetics academics to explain Metaphysics or Theology in their classes, but rather that in their explanations with students, in their communications, and based on the contents of their subject, they refer them to the fundamental questions, to the truth, to the good, to the reason for

things. It is a matter of rethinking each of the subjects, going beyond limits of each area of knowledge, broadening horizons and seeking in our university work a much deeper dimension to allow:

- Generate a more human science, focused on the good of people and common good. With open mind, we will be able to contribute to scientific community with new perspectives, new questions that show how to generate new knowledge, contributing with ideas and creative solutions in cultural, political and industrial fields.
- To get a transformative teaching with impact on our students, enabling them to acquire not only solid knowledge and skills, but also the ability to think critically, to ask questions, to seek the truth and to commit to doing good.

Fundamental questions

To go forward with the open reasoning, we train and support teachers, so they can ask themselves questions present in the whole scientific work, which connect with the existential questions of man. Finally, science is the answer to the astonishment of reality, hence the confluence of these human questions and scientific work. We mainly work four basic questions:

- Anthropology question: Anthropology is in the heart of every discipline, explicit or implicit. That vision of man marks deeply every content learned and the studies approached. Each teacher should wonder: what idea of man is behind my teaching: individualistic or solidary; materialistic or open to transcendence; genetically predetermined or capable to be free? What type of man is constructed with the knowledge I communicate? And, depending on what you discover, you will have to rethink your subject in the light of a critique of reductive anthropologies and philosophical and theological anthropologies.
- - Epistemology question referred to the truth and the possibility of knowing should lead us to ask ourselves: Is what I am researching or teaching fully true? What is the limit of my science and my method? What are the questions that take me to the limit of my science and that I cannot answer about?
 - About ethics. Question about the person and the truth inevitably leads us to the question about how we should act, both in the context of scientific work and as in technological applications and our own lives. Is what I teach or research good or bad, does it dignify or debase me, does it dignify or debase my students? Does it make a just society and according to the human needs?

- The question about meaning takes us to the essential: does it worth what I am learning or teaching? How does it relate to the life that matters to me? Why do I do it? What is the point of all that I do or learn? There are different levels of meaning, and we hope that both teachers and students ask themselves question about ultimate meaning, God.

Work methodology

Throughout these years we have made many efforts to make open reason a reality in our classrooms and research. As I have already said, it is not easy, among other things, because we received different formation and the thinking that prevails is not in that way. I do not have time to go into details, but I would like to highlight some of the things we have done that do work and which I could say are essential:

- Training: first of all, it is necessary academics of the various particular sciences to receive some training, at least, fully understand the four fundamental questions. Therefore, we have developed a course we called open reason, which is still in hybrid format and with great acceptance and good results. More than three hundred of our professors and over hundred professors from other universities in our network in Mexico have already taken this course.
- Community work: This way is not to do alone, so we created open-minded academic communities, where academics from every specific science, participate with humanities academics. In their monthly meetings they share progress and difficulties, good practices in classroom, they expose themselves to questions from colleagues...
- Personal attention: Besides of the formation and richness provided by community work, we have observed that personal attention is also necessary, as personal support. It helps academics from any specific science, not only to formulate open questions but also to really transform his/her subject, incorporating new contents, new methodologies for students, with challenging questions, a formative way to evaluate...

Otherwise, we also look out of the university for people in same the work who share this awareness with us. In order to attract those people and send something like smoke signals, which can be seen from afar by anyone working to overcome the fragmented vision of thinking, we have made calls for the Open Reason Awards for many years, in collaboration with the Joseph Ratzinger Vatican Foundation. Individual efforts have low impact. That is why we want to form communities with people who want to rethink their field of knowledge in the light of a model of person we would expect our students to be: something more than heartless experts, something more than those new barbarians Ortega y Gasset spoke of. In this way, if we do it well, we will serve the university institution as well as the evangelization of the world of culture and higher education.

This is our challenge. Thank you very much.