Freedom and Responsibility in the University

Rev. Jesus Diaz, O.P.*

"The freedom we speak of, the freedom to which the university and the various elements within it are entitled, is not, and cannot be, an absolute freedom. To think so would be to admit that this freedom is the highest good. It has its limits, firstly, in that the university exists for the common good. . .and in that the various elements within the university have rights of their own," according to this educator.

To the man of the 20th century, education has become as basic a necessity as food, clothing, and shelter. The individual seeking advancement in contemporary society must inevitably invest in education as a fourth imperative for survival, trusting that a good education will be the greatest equalizer to level off disparities in power, position, and wealth.

Because things are so today, institutions of learning have become important to all—to parents, alumni, the government, politicians, businessmen, the clergy, the peasants, the youth and the aged. Attention is focused on them, their purposes are examined, their function scrutinized, their troubles magnified, sometimes to the point where their very existtence and usefulness are threatened. Everyone has something to say about what a school, college, or university should be or should not be doing, so that there is sometimes real danger that the voices within the institutions themselves may be drowned in the noise.

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As Silliman University pauses today to mark the anniversary of its foundation, it is appropriate that we all take this opportunity to look once more at the purposes for which institutions of this nature were established, and to examine their mission in our present era particularly insofar as some of its foremost characteristics are affected by the changing times. I have been granted the signal honor to address you on this particular occasion and shall devote myself to the serious consideration of some of their issues.

University Mission and Freedom

The mission of the institution of higher learning, the university, is the preservation, dissemination, and extension of knowledge within the context of the community which it serves—considering specifically the needs of that community during the present and for the future. In order to accomplish this mission, the university must enjoy a considerable measure of freedom and responsibility, and must provide for those within the academic community that same freedom and responsibility. A university that is inhibited in the search of the means with which to fulfill its mission, a university that is restricted or controlled in the manner in which it seeks to fulfill its purpose, is seriously hampered from the attainment of its objectives. How frequently has this issue been raised in the past, in terms of the relationship between the universities and government, and in the present, in terms of the financial support and subsidy which many universities in the world receive from government. How jealously, indeed, have the universities guarded that freedom of action that should be theirs, and how emphatic they have been in stressing their own responsibilities in their communities.

But in the same manner as the university itself must have freedom and must exercise responsibility, it must provide for those within it—for the administration of the university, for its faculty, and for its students—that same freedom to seek for knowledge and truth and that same opportunity for the exercise of responsibility through which alone true maturity can come. It is to these aspects of freedom and responsibility that we hope to address ourselves this morning—as it affects the administration of the university, the faculty, and the student body that has come to the university for the formation of its mind and personality with a view toward achieving leadership in the community in the years ahead.

The freedom we speak of, the freedom to which the university and the various elements within it are entitled, is not, and cannot be, an absolute freedom. To think so would be to admit that this freedom is the highest good, and not even its staunchest defenders would go so far as to say this. It has its limits, firstly, in that the university exists for the common good, the society which it serves, not for its own good, or even for the particular good of any of the elements within it. It has its limits, furthermore, in that the various elements within the university have rights of their own, and the freedom of one must be limited by the extent of the rights of others, and cannot be exercised except as abuse the moment it infringes upon those rights.

We might venture to go one step further, to say that true freedom can be exercised only with an enlightened mind. The greatest enemy of true freedom is ignorance because it denies man the ability to know his goals and the capacity to understand and evaluate the means that will lead him to those goals. Freedom cannot be exercised properly while there is ignorance, and what is done through ignorance in the name of freedom is not free, and its curtailment constitutes no frustration of the rights of those who exercise it. This is expressed in other terms by the definition approved by the Board of Trustees of the Lyceum of the Philippines, to wit: "Academic freedom presupposes that the teacher be competent to ascertain the truth, that he possesses a high sense of intellectual responsibility, and that in the exercise of academic freedom, he has no other motive than the propagation and triumph of truth."

The exercise of freedom, it must be clear, cannot be undertaken without corresponding responsibilities. This responsibility must grow out of, and can only grow out of, a situation in which freedom is genuinely expressed. This responsibility, as Prof. Charles Neff of the University of Hawaii points out, is always a product of freedom, never the cause of it. He says: "Responsibility actually consists of two distinct reactions: the act of responding to something and the assumption of an obligation." In the exercise of freedom there is, at the same time, an assumption of responsibility for the exercise of that freedom, and an obligation to use it properly, within its natural limits, and with the utmost respect for the rights of others who might be affected by that exercise. The priviledge of freedom carries with it the burden of responsibility. One is of no meaning without the other. One cannot be exercised without the acceptance of the other.

Specifications

Today, we are confronted with the problem of pursuing one particular goal: truth. In specific terms, here and now, we are confronted with the problem of academic freedom and responsibility.

The problem really is not of goals. The goal would be that which is the good of the mind—truth. We cannot move away from the direction that reason propels our will to — truth. The problem is one of means. How do we attain truth within the university campus?

In 1940 the American Association of University Professors made the following declaration, and I quote:

> "Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.
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> Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning. It carries with it duties correlative with rights.
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> Tenure is a means to certain ends, specifically: (1) Freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society.

Academic Freedom

> (a) The teacher is entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of his other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution.
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> (b) The teacher is entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing his subject, but he should be careful not to introduce into his teaching controversial matter which has no relation to his subject. Limitation of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment.

(c) The college or university teacher is a citizen, a member of a learned profession, and an officer of an educational institution. When he speaks or writes as a citizen, he should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but his special position in the community imposes special obligations. As a man of learning and an education officer, he should remember that the public may judge his profession and his institution by his utterances. Hence he should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that he is not an institutional spokesman."

On the other hand, the American Federation of Teachers assert that academic freedom is "the liberty to develop knowledge and communicate it within an institution of learning without interference from administration officials, political and ecclesiastical authorities, and others. Academic freedom, unlike those civil and religious liberties which apply to all citizens, concerns a special group: faculties and students they teach. . ."

Prof. Arthur Lovejoy puts it in this manner: Academic freedom is "the freedom of the teacher or research worker in higher institutions of learning to investigate and discuss the problems of his science, and to express his conclusions whether through publication or in the instruction of students, without interference from political or ecclesiastical authority, or from the administrative officials of the institution in which he is employed."

From the viewpoint of a Catholic institution, Fr. Edward F. Stanford, O.S.A., has this to say: "Catholic colleges recognize that the desire for freedom is innate in man because the Creator endowed him with freedom of the will, which exempts him from any absolute necessity in choice or in action. But this priceless gift brings with it the responsibility to see that neither the rights of God nor of other men are infringed. Since man is not an isolated being, there is at least a moral necessity to limit his freedom which free men possess. In common with all other kinds of freedom, it cannot be absolute.

"Consequently, a Catholic college has no difficulty in recognizing the importance of protecting the freedom of the teacher in teaching and the freedom of the student in learning. It does expect, however, that a teacher freely discussing his subject will 'be careful not to introduce into his teaching controversial matter which has no relation to his subject.'

Neither does a college question that a faculty member give up his right as a citizen, and that when he speaks or writes as a citizen, he should be free from institutional prescription. It does expect, however, that when a faculty member speaks or writes as a citizen, he will remember that 'the public may judge his profession and his institution by his utterance. Hence, he should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, (and) should show respect for the opinions of others.' Again, when he is dealing with controversial matters, he is expected to make it clear that he speaks or writes 'not as an institutional spokesman' but only in his capacity as a private citizen.

"It is generally recognized that a church-related college, because of its religious objectives, may require certain limitations on freedom that might not apply to a different kind of institution—for example, a state university. Ordinarily we would take it for granted that one who freely accepts appointment to the staff of a Catholic college will have the prudence and courtesy not to attack or go contrary to the ideals for which the college stands. Experienced educators advice, however, the 'limitations of academic freedom because of religious and other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of appointment.'

"It would seem to be prudent, therefore, that a Catholic college should include in its teaching agreement and faculty handbook some such brief statement as the following:

> Members of the faculty enjoy full academic freedom but they are not free, of course, to advocate and disseminate doctrines that are subversive of American political freedom and government or of the aims and purposes of this College, a Catholic institution, committed to the upholding of Christian faith and morality."

The Encyclopedia Britannica has this to say: "Academic freedom embraces freedom in teaching and learning. . . It is that freedom of members of the academic community, assembled in universities and colleges, which underlies the effective performance of their functions. In modern understanding, it embraces intellectual freedom, which is necessary to the acquisition and exchange of knowledge and to inquire into the unknown, and creative activity in those arts which are practiced in colleges and universities or in which training is offered: It includes also certain personal freedoms in relation to conduct outside of their institutions, which are deemed essential to faculty members and students as such."

Applications

How would these concepts of academic freedom and responsibility apply to specific problems in the university today?

First, let us take the faculty.

1) **Policy-Making:** Needless to say, the faculty should be empowered to actively participate in policy-formation, especially in the area of academic matters. Through qualified representatives of the most distinguished and experienced professors in the campus, the administration should seek faculty advice and direction on curricula-planning, selection of textbooks and references, programs of studies, research subjects and systems, instruction methods and long-term academic investment areas related to capital expenditure.

In practical terms, this will mean active faculty representation on the Academic Senate, the Budget Committee, Development Committee, Research Committee, and Publications Committee.

2) **Administration:** The modern university is gradually allowing some of its more administratively-competent teachers to professionalize in this area and to devote more time to administrative work than to teaching. For even as the university is making revolutionary advances in the area of knowledge, I believe one area of special weakness is the area of management. Many universities have found to their dismay that simply recruiting professional businessmen or professional managers from outside the university does not work out well in the long run. For the university cannot be judged simply in terms of profitable balance sheets or income statements. There are so many qualities—factors that judge the merit of a university and it appears to me that the best managers for educational institutions will have to come firstly from the ranks of our professors—not from the outside business world.

3) **Instruction and Research:** No restraints should be placed on the freedom of the teacher to instruct and to research in his area of specialization in the manner he deems best and most effective. However, it will be prudent to formally state in writing—either in the faculty handbook or in the contract or by way of a memorandum—that the teacher is likewise obliged not to be irresponsible by allowing irrelevant and subversive matters to be circulated in the classroom—in other words, that while the university will protect the right of the teacher to academic freedom, the teacher is accountable for ideas and statements

which are against our democratic processes of government and against the philosophy which mark the foundations of a given institution.

4) **Publications:** In like manner, the right of the teacher to publicize his works, assuming they meet all normal tenets for academic scholarship and value, should be guaranteed by the university. However, on controversial matters which go beyond classroom materials, the teacher should clearly state that he makes pronouncements in his capacity as a private citizen and not as a spokesman of the institution. For practical purposes, it may be worthwhile for the teacher to consult administrative officials not really so as to obtain approval but as to become clear on the demarcation lines of private as against official communication.

5) **Community Services:** The teacher has every right to participate in community or extension services so long as these extra-curricular activities are pertinent to academic life and do not tend to diminish the instructional merits of the professor and students. Again, for practical purposes, it may be worthwhile for the professor to concentrate his extra-curricular activities upon official university projects which often are plentiful in the modern university.

6) **Economic Self-sufficiency:** To maintain his efficiency and profundity in academic excellence, it is normal for the teacher to expect reasonable economic incentives from the university. Questions of tenure, salary, fringe benefits and incentives for research and professional growth, are relevant and pertinent to the teacher's future and well-being. Of course the teacher must also be aware that these depend on the stability of the university as a whole and on its capacity to meet demands for education on the part of the community, and its ability to balance increasing costs of education with growing complaints of high tuition fees on the part of parents and students.

But even as freedom should be guaranteed teachers, the same rights should be made available to students. Let us be specific:

1) **Self-Government:** Working within regulations established by the university, students have a right to self-government. This is necessary not only to arouse self-initiative and citizenship-training but to inculcate in them sound principles of social cooperation and respect for law and order, and proper authority. Needless to say, the objectives and program of student governments should conform with general principles of the university toward serving the common good. The rights of others within the university should be respected.

In practical terms, this will mean that certain regulations should govern the elections and appointments of students to student governments and student organizations such as fraternities and sororities, as a matter of principle, should see to it that their particular purposes and programs are in conformity with overall purposes and objectives of the institution. To openly deviate or contradict university goals cannot be seen as an expression of freedom but as a violation of a trust since the students are never forced to enrol in a certain institution but voluntarily do so on their own.

2) **Publications:** Working within regulations established by the university, students have a right to free publication. Here, technical matters will have to be clarified in the light of the proposed Magna Carta for Students. If the university is the publisher, it is, therefore, liable for that which is printed. Necessarily, this means that the University will have a right to approve editorial materials. If, on the other hand, the students become the publisher, some very tight questions will have to be asked and answered: for example, will this mean that the students can publish anything they want and use the campus as a market for circulation? Who will collect fees? Should subscription be optional? Should there be a limit to student publications? Whatever the answers, I think certain fundamentals will have to be agreed upon by all, and these are:

A) No matter who the publisher, the staff has an obligation to serve the common good, not particular interests. They must, therefore, respect the rights of others.

B) Journalism tenets require that they write in a manner which is accurate, fair, objective, and thorough, and not in a style which is deceitful, partisan, and impulsively emotional.

C) All parties have the right to be heard and reports should not be based on innuendo or rumors.

If these tenets are broken, then the university will have the right to redress or to seek adjustments for the common good. Even society itself demands punishment for those who unreasonably break the boundaries of decency and truth in the name of unlimited freedom.

3) **Learning:** Students have the right to demand the best of their professors. As a matter of fact, all good teachers need and look for these

types of students. But corollary to this right, students have an obligation to study well, to study hard, to be diligent and industrious, and to be curious in a pertinent manner in their field of specialization.

4) **Expression and Assembly:** Students have a right to freedom of expression and assembly but these should not be exercised at the expense of the rights of others. For example, should a minority group of articulate student demonstrators be allowed to use a crowded sector as a forum, disturbing a larger group of students who refuse to join their strike and are interested instead in studying? Should there not be an official place within the campus for needs such as these so that non-striking students will not be disturbed by the noise and speech-making which are ordinary elements of demonstrations? What sanctions can the university adopt to prevent damage of school property such as chairs, buildings, windows, and the like? At what point of a student strike should the police be called in?

These are difficult questions to answer. For the most, these questions can be answered only at the moments of crises. But we should remember that in all matters pertaining to expression and assembly, the common good should be the primordial reference point, both by students and administrators.

Conclusion

These then are the major issues involved in the question of academic freedom and responsibility. Both are integrated and wedded: one cannot be exercised without the other.

In the days ahead, when we can expect more problems of confrontations and difficulties, let us not forget the warnings of Madame Roland: "Liberty, how many crimes have been committed in thy name!"