

THE CHURCH AND THE RISE OF UNIVERSITIES

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THE history of Europe is intimately linked with the history of the Catholic Church throughout the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era. Realising this, the enemies of the Church, have always attempted to decry the Middle Ages in order to cast discredit and disrepute on this Institution. They have unimously called the Middle Ages—the ages in which the light of Christianity and civilization shone with the greatest lustre—the Dark Ages. True it is, that they were ages of violence and greed, of anarchy and strife. But we must remember that society was then in an age of transition, hence necessarily violent and aggressive, and that the nations of Europe were still struggling into shape. What is more, “the Age of the greatest light is a Dark Age, in the sense, that the greatest light casts the darkest shadow, and so in the deep, well defined shadows of the Middle Ages,..... anti-Catholic historians have poked and searched, like beetles on a carcase” (1). They have busied themselves for centuries in raking up all the most unpleasant phases of this period, and in searching for the dark sides of its history.

They have failed, however, to appreciate the great medieval achievements, which have been, in fact, an inspiration ever since. For the Middle Ages were an era of faith, light and splendour. It was an era which saw the rise of those grand creations of Christian art and those wonderful productions of human skill which still adorn the great European cities. It was an era that gave rise to “the great national literatures that lie at the basis of all modern literature”, to the chivalry of medieval knighthood, to the trade-gilds, the forerunners of our modern trade unions, and to monasticism with its manifold contribution to civilization. The Middle Ages inspired a widespread appreciation of the things of the spirit and a real love of learning, of discipline and training of the mind, of the revival of philosophy and jurisprudence of antiquity; and of the soaring geniuses whose intellectual achievements have been an inspir-

(1) G. A. Mac Eoin: *The Monastic Inquisition*, C.T.S.I.

ation to many scholars. Consequently there arose and flourished the great European Universities, "the instrument by which the human mind has ever since been trained."

The Latin term, "universitas", as understood in the Middle Ages, was a legal term which derived its meaning from the "Corpus Iuris Civilis". It was originally employed to denote any community or association in its corporate capacity. When used in its modern sense, as denoting a body devoted to learning and education, it required the addition of other words in order to complete the definition—the most common mode of expression being "universitas magistrorum et scholarium". In course of time, probably towards the latter period of the 14th century the term began to be used by itself, with the exclusive meaning of a community of teachers and scholars whose corporate existence had been recognised and approved by civil or ecclesiastical authority or by both. But the more ancient and usual term by which the university was first designated in medieval times was "studium" and subsequently "studium generale". This did not originally and essentially imply that it was a centre of universal learning but only a centre of instruction for all. It was a school which admitted students from all parts, enjoyed special privileges and conferred a right to teach anywhere. Gradually, however, the terms "universitas" and "studium" came to be used promiscuously, to denote a centre of learning. Thus "Universitas Oxoniensis" and "Studium Oxoniense" were both applied to Oxford.

After the explanation of the terms by which the universities were designated we shall now pass on to study the origin and development of these institutions. We are not to suppose that the medieval universities sprang up "full-fledged and equipped out of a void". The universities had an ancestry, they had their forerunners. The Revival of Learning in the 12th and 13th Century, that remarkable movement in Europe in which the earliest universities had their origin, can be traced and linked to "the many hidden transmissions of ancient learning from studies pursued in quiet cells and monastic schools" (2). Consequently, in order to understand the conditions under which the earliest universities came into existence it is necessary to

(2) S. Cunningham: The Story of the Universities, C.T.S., p. 4.

give a glance over the main influences which served to modify both the theory and practice of education, especially from the 6th to the 12th century.

"Christianity", as Fr. C. Martindale puts it, "claims that it exists for the supernatural sanctification and salvation of humanity and issues only by way of consequence into a philosophy, a social order, or the development of the arts and sciences". He goes on to say: "By the laws of its own being, it came at once into contact with the general life of the civilized world, in the departments of social organization and of thought especially" (3). Thus from the first centuries of the Christian era we see the Church realising the importance of learning and hence playing her part as the guardian of knowledge. At first the so-called "Catechetical Schools" were opened where mature and learned men could meet, explain and discuss the truths of the Christian faith. In these institutions, which may well be called the first Christian "Studia", theology based on the interpretation of Sacred Scripture and ancient philosophy, was first formed and developed. But these schools, from their very nature, were for the few, so that many, especially those who felt themselves called to the priesthood, had to resort to the pagan schools to become acquainted with profane learning and had to seek out learned ecclesiastics or hermits for the study of theology. Others went to seek out learning in monasteries when these came into existence.

In the 6th century the Roman Empire succumbed to the barbarian hordes. Learning received a terrible blow and the pagan schools were entirely swept away, so that the need for schools made itself felt still more. But the Church proved herself equal to the task. The bishops felt the need of learning especially for their clergy, and urged by Popes and Councils began to open schools in their dioceses. The superiors of the monasteries did likewise, and so centres of learning were founded for monks and novices. Hence we have the parochial or episcopal schools under the direction of the bishop and monastic schools attached to the monasteries. The Church, it is true, set up these institutions for the training of priests and monks, but with the lapse of time she opened these centres of learning for all and introduced profane studies as well. From the episcopal school sprang up

(3) S. C. Martindale, S.J.: *Catholic Thought and Thinkers*, ch. ii.

the Cathedral-school: Grodegang, Bishop of Metz, exhorted his clergy to live in a community and founded a school to be directed by a priest dependent on him, the "magister scholae". Many bishops followed his example and the so-called cathedral-schools attached to the cathedrals sprang up. In these schools an elementary and a higher course of studies were introduced. The latter, according to the Roman method, embraced the "Trivium" and the "Quadrivium". Besides these elements of learning we have the study of Theology and Sacred Scripture. These cathedral-schools, moreover, admitted special courses for those who did not intend to embrace the priesthood.

Under the rule of the Merovingian dynasty learning declined throughout the Frankish empire, but in England through the efforts of Theodosius, Bede and Alcuin, a great revival of education and letters was effected. The influence of this revival extended in the 8th and 9th centuries to the continent, where Charlemagne, the ardent lover and generous patron of knowledge, advised and aided by Alcuin, effected a memorable reformation. This revival of learning affected the monastic and cathedral schools. Besides, imperial charters revealing the voice of Alcuin, ordained that schools be opened in those dioceses, monasteries and abbeys where no such institutions existed. Before the death of Alcuin (801) there were established cathedral schools throughout the empire and some of them, at least, contained the germ of the future universities.

The activity thus generated and the enthusiasm for learning which this revival kindled almost died out in the stormy period which marked the break-up of Charlemagne's Empire. So that it is, at least, questionable whether any real connexion can be found to have existed between the Carolingian revival and that remarkable movement in which the earliest universities had their origin. On the whole, however, it can be stated that the learning of which Alcuin was the indefatigable instigator, continued to survive and became the nucleus of the teaching in which the universities took their rise. "But", as J.B. Müllinger says, "in order adequately to explain the remarkable development and novel character which that teaching assumed in the course of the 12th and 13th centuries, it is necessary to take account of the operation of certain general causes to which the origin of the great majority of the earlier universities may

in common unhesitatingly be referred' (4). These causes are : (i) the introduction of new subjects, (ii) the adoption of new methods of teaching, (iii) the growing tendency to organization which marked the development of the European nations.

It will be useful to see more fully the working of these three causes leading to the rise of medieval universities. In the 12th and 13th centuries a revival of studies took place, in medicine at Salerno, in theology at Paris, and in law at Bologna. At Paris, the study of dialectics received an impetus from teachers like Roscellin and Abelard. The dialectical method, moreover, was applied to theology and chiefly through the work of Peter Lombard developed into scholasticism. Hence, a new basis was introduced for the exposition of doctrine and theology itself was cast into that systematic form which is seen in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, above all in the great "Summa Theologica". At Bologna the new movement affected the teaching, not of philosophy and theology but of civil and canon law. It became, in a comparatively short time, the chief centre of the teaching of law in all Europe. The school developing thus vigorously from within was further strengthened by the "Authentic Habita" issued in 1158, by the Emperor Frederick I, which granted privileges to the students who resorted to the schools of Italy for the purpose of study. It is highly probable, likewise, that Paris also enjoyed similar privileges and immunities from an early date. To these two factors of internal development and external advantage a third had to be added before Paris or Bologna could become universities: it was necessary to secure a corporate organization.

This organization developed from the scholastic associations that were springing up around the schools. They were scholastic guilds of teachers or students or of both, and formed on the analogy of the trade-guilds or the guilds of aliens which were being formed in most of the great cities of Europe. The aim of these guilds at first was little more than that of securing mutual protection, and so in the case of these associations, composed for the most part of foreign students. They were formed for the protection of the members from the extortion of the townsmen and the hindrances which characterized residence in a

(4) The Enc. Brit. (11th edition), art. "Universities" J. B. Mullinger, p. 749.

foreign sate in medieval times. The first stage of development was reached with respect to these student-bodies, when the chancellor of the cathedral, or some other authority, began to grant to other masters permission to open other schools than the cathedral school. Such licences to teach were granted by the Chancellor Scholasticus or some other dignitary of a cathedral church, in those places where the "Studia" were attached to the Cathedral Churches, as was the case in France. But in Italy where several "Studia" were founded and maintained by the communal authorities, it is probable that the gilds of teachers, when these came to be formed, were at first free to grant their own licenses, without any ecclesiastical or other supervision. But in all cases such permissions were of a purely local import.

Gradually, however, about the end of the 12th century, a few great "Studia" claimed in view of the standard and repute of **their teaching to be of more than merely local importance**. So that practically a professor of Paris or Bologna could teach anywhere; whilst these famous schools began to be known as "Studia generalia", i.e. schools which admitted students from all parts. Consequently, with this licence to teach at any centre of learning, a further stage in the development of these "Studia" was reached. Another development was undergone when it began to be recognised that without a papal or imperial licence no "Studium generale" could be formed possessing this right of conferring degrees to teach everywhere. The Emperor Frederick II had conferred by an authoritative bull upon his new school at Naples the prestige which the earlier "Studia" had acquired by their reputation for learning. In 1229, Gregory IX did the same for Toulouse, to combat the Albigensian heresy, and in 1233 added to its privileges a bull by which anyone who had been admitted to the doctorate in that university should have the right to teach anywhere. Other "Studia generalia" were subsequently founded by papal or imperial charters, so that in 1292 even the oldest universities of Paris or Bologna, found it desirable to acquire similar bulls from Nicholas IV. From this time, therefore, the notion began to prevail among the jurists that no "studium" could acquire this dignity without a papal or imperial charter.

As the Universities of Paris and Bologna were the earliest universities and exerted a great influence on the development

of the university system, some fuller account of their origin and early organization is necessary and useful. We begin with Paris and say that before the 13th century, to which, strictly speaking, belongs the rise of the universities, places of education already existed by the middle of the 12th century three schools were especially prominent: St. Victor's attached to the church of the canons regular; St. Genevieve conducted first by seculars then by canons regular; and Notre Dame, the school of the Cathedral on the "Island". These Paris studia had the most distinguished reputation for philosophy and theology. According to the view held by Thurot, the University of Paris was formed when the three above-mentioned schools were united. But the Dominican Denifle, an authority on the history of the universities, maintains that the cradle of the University of Paris was the Cathedral school of "Notre Dame" (5). It had its rise entirely out of the movement carried on by the teachers on the "Island", who taught in virtue of the license conferred by the Chancellor of the cathedral. This does not mean, however, that the cathedral school as an institution was elevated to the rank of a university by an imperial or papal charter. The initiative was taken by the professors who in virtue of the licence conferred by the Chancellor of Notre Dame and subject to his authority, taught either at the cathedral or in private dwellings on the "Island".

It was this licence of the Chancellor which empowered a candidate to commence the career of a professor, and to be recognised as such by his brethren in the profession. This community of teachers did not in itself suffice to constitute a university, but some time between the years 1150 and 1170, when these professors united into one teaching body, the University of Paris came formally into being. This "consortium magistrorum" included the professors of theology, law, medicine and arts. As the teachers of the same subject had special interests, they united into smaller groups within the entire body. The name "faculty" which originally designated a branch of knowledge, later came to mean the group of teachers engaged in teaching the same subject. Then followed the drafting of statutes for each faculty whereby its own internal affairs were regulated and distinguished from the sphere of action of

(5) Denifle, *Die Universitäten des Mittelalters*, 655 sqq. quoted in *The Cath. Enc.*, (special ed., 1912) Vol. 15, art. "Universities" E. Pace p.

other faculties. This organization must have been completed within the first half or perhaps first quarter of the 13th century, since Pope Gregory IX in the bull "Parens Scientiarum", of 1231, recognised the right of the several faculties to regulate and modify the constitution of the entire university.

The students, on their part, just as naturally grouped themselves into different bodies. They were of various nationalities and those from the same country must have realised the advantage, or rather the necessity, of forming associations. This was the origin of the "Nations", as they came to be called, which were probably organized early in the 13th century. They were student bodies formed for the purposes of administration and discipline, as compared with the "faculties" which were organized to deal with matters relating to the several sciences and the work of teaching. Each of these "nations" elected from among its members a master of arts as procurator (proctor), and the four procurators elected the rector, i.e. the head of the "nations", not originally, the head of the university. As, however, the faculty of arts was intimately linked with the nations and was the most numerous, the rector gradually became the head of that faculty. His authority extended later to the faculties of law and medicine and finally to the faculty of theology. The rector henceforward became the head of the university.

The first university of Bologna was not formed until the close of the 12th century. But for a long time before this date, Bologna was recognised as a great centre of learning. It had a flourishing school which specialized, so to say, in the study of law. Canon law was studied side by side with the civil code, so that it was not only the needs of the secular student that were here met, but the needs of the ecclesiastical student as well. We have satisfactory evidence that Bologna, up to the close of the 13th century, was generally recognised as the chief centre of the study of civil and canon law (1). But, though there was a flourishing school of study, it is to be noted that Bologna saw the rise of the first university towards the close of the 12th century.

(6) Denifle, *Die Universitäten...* i, 48, quoted in the *Enc. Brit.* Vol. I.c. p. 750.

Just as the union of the teachers of the school of Paris into one teaching body led to the rise of its university, so the origin of the university of Bologna may be traced to the formation of student guilds in that city. Towards the close of the 12th century, we see associations being established by foreign students for purposes of mutual support and protection. These associations were probably suggested by the precedent of those foreign guilds which, in the course of the 12th century, began to rise throughout Western Europe. Each association comprised a number of "nations", formulated its own statutes, and elected a rector who was assisted by a body of "consilarii". These student-bodies were known as "universitates", i.e. associations in its legal sense. Denifle considers that the "universities" were at one time certainly more than four in number. But by the middle of the 13th century they were reduced to two: "universitas citramontanorum" and "universitas ultramontanorum".

Neither the Bolognese students nor the doctors, being citizens of Bologna, belonged to a "university". Though the doctors were employed under contract and paid by the scholars and were subject, in many respects, to the statutes formulated by the student-bodies, they exercised control over strictly academic matters. The professors were the "rectores scholarum" to be distinguished from the "rectores scholarium" who were the heads of the "universities". To the former was reserved the right of conferring degrees, but in 1219 Pope Honorius III granted the exclusive right to confer the doctorate to the Archdeacon of Bologna, thus creating an office equivalent to that of the Chancellor of Paris. The professors also formed associations, the "collegia doctorum", which probably existed about or before the founding of the student-bodies. In course of time, the two above-mentioned "universities" were united into one body and this in its turn was drawn into closer relations with the college of professors, so that Clement V in 1310, could speak of a "universitas magistrorum et scholarium" at Bologna. It is about this time that the university of Bologna came formally into being, though it is only at the beginning of the 16th century that we find only one rector in the university.

————— (To be continued)