

Why a Catholic University? Challenge Yourself, Change Our World!
by Msgr. Aloysius R. Callaghan

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“Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord.”

You may recall that St. Thomas, patron of all Catholic universities, spent his life meditating upon that law of the Lord, in which we find our blessedness, our happiness. A Dominican friar of the 13th Century, Thomas began his career as a professor in Paris in 1252 and would continue to teach for the remaining 21 years of his short life. During that short academic career he produced at least 72 works. These gave birth to a tradition that was to inspire intellectuals and universities for centuries to come. St. Thomas came to realize that the law of the Lord was the law of love. This law was written first on the human heart and most beautifully expressed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Thomas Aquinas ardently defended the notion that each person, because of his basic humanity, knows in his own conscience that love is always the better way, that truth is more precious than error, and that justice is to be promoted over injustice and evil.

The law of the Lord is written in the heart of man, and no darkness of error can fully take it away.

Every human being is on a journey. The great saint and doctor of the Church, Thomas Aquinas, realized this, and his whole life was a quest, a journey of faith, a reaching out to touch the divine. The poet Browning once wrote “a man’s reach must exceed his grasp or what’s a heaven for?” A Latin phrase so identified with Thomas Aquinas “*intellectus quaerens fidem*” (understanding seeking faith) best captures his unquenchable desire to really know God and love Him so as to serve Him.

A passage from St. Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians could be the very motto of this man of God in search of the divine. It can be said succinctly “quench not the Spirit.” St. Paul tells us that one’s thirst for God should never be slaked for it is the very means by which we are drawn to the divine.

St. Thomas Aquinas was a man who lived a life that was inspired and infused by his thirst for the divine, and that longing colored the way he experienced reality and the way he described it. He sought not only to accept the profound mystery of “God made man, the Incarnation,” but he made it his life’s calling to describe this mystery, to paint it with the beauty of words in a way that would enable others to accept, embrace, and experience its transforming reality.

In Christ, the very human search to find what is true and good is brought to completion. In Christ, the law of love, written in the human heart, becomes incarnate in the person of Jesus. Jesus Himself, becomes that new law, the new law of the Gospel, now written into the hearts of those who know and believe in Jesus Christ .

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Every Catholic institution builds upon this confidence in the human person’s desire to seek the truth and do what is good. But a Catholic university aims for much more than this; it seeks to inspire men and women to know more, to do more, and to love more because Christ is the fulfillment of the law of the Lord.

The Good News of Jesus Christ inspired every aspect of the life of St. Thomas, the teacher. This message, the Good News of Jesus Christ, should permeate, then, the entire life of a Catholic university. Inspired by Catholic intellectual tradition, a Catholic university educates all of its students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.

An authentic, truly catholic university is a community of faith based on the life of the Holy Spirit. Such a community is not a community unto itself; rather, inspired by the life of Christ Himself, it has the spirit of universal service to the world as its aim.

Catholic universities, then, are different in what they teach: they freely speak of the search for God, of Jesus Christ, His Church, of life in Christ and Catholic morality.

Catholic universities are different in how they teach: they use religious motivation for excellence in academic achievement and in personal conduct.

Catholic universities are different in what they achieve: academic excellence, to be sure, but more, an experience of Church and personal morality grounded in mission, the salvific mission of Jesus Himself.

In this way the Word becomes flesh again and again and we are touched by the divine in His wisdom and love in order to change our world. And the world is changed! The world is changed. **For “Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord.”**

The Rev. Msgr. Aloysius R. Callaghan, S.T.L., J.C.D., a Priest of the Diocese of Allentown, is Rector and Vice President of The Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity of the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

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