

Universidad Francisco de Vitoria (Spain)

OUR MISSION TODAY

Often we cannot see the forest for the trees, as the saying goes. Asked to describe what a university is, the average person will likely note various “trees”: A university is an institution that prepares students for their future professional lives; it is a place for scientific research; it promotes excellence in the many disciplines and even fosters social progress. Few people, however, have a grasp of the “forest,” that is, a full view of the nature of this centuries-old institution, which includes all these worthy aspects and more.

This mission statement is an effort to articulate our own idea of the nature of a university. Recognizing that beneath every human project lie distinct anthropological commitments – for example, certain ideas about humanity, the significance of personhood, and the destiny of our earthly endeavors – we intend here to reflect on our identity as a Catholic university. To clarify our mission is a matter of intellectual and moral integrity, but it is also an urgent necessity. For anyone who fails to understand the fundamental principles of an institution and its practices may easily be dominated by the fashionable but fleeting trends and values of the day, and incapable of questioning and challenging these in any meaningful way.

In the first part of this mission statement, we expound on our understanding of the nature of a university – both what it is and what it should be. In the second part, we detail the kinds of rational inquiry that allow us to grasp reality as a whole, and in so doing we address the need to be thoughtful about which substantive and methodological approaches best promote the ideal of a university. Finally, the third part of this document describes the concrete, practical effects of these theoretical principles, in terms of both students’ personal formation and the development of the university community, with due consideration of the roles that both students and the university play in society in general.

I. AIMING FOR “SOMETHING MORE”

A university is commonly valued because it serves an important social function. It forms professionals – the men and women who drive the economy, politics, culture, communications, public health, education, law enforcement, and so on – without whom society could not function. These professionals mold the social structures whereby we confront the ever new challenges that history brings our way.

Indeed, a university is expected to produce such worthy professionals, and to be sure, this is no small task. Still, we must ask: *Is that all?* Or are there other reasons why universities have existed for nearly a millennium? Why has this institution survived, and evolved, the way it has? Could it be that the university satisfies some deeper personal and social needs as well?

Put differently, we may ask: Is a university's role to be something more than a professional school? It is easy to answer "yes," but the question remains: *What is that "something more"?*

Much has been written about the crisis facing universities. The crisis is not so much about finances or budgets, which are always stretched thin, or about difficulties associating and communicating with the nonacademic world. Rather, the crisis is about ends and purposes. Accepting that professional education is a secondary goal, we need to go deeper to examine and articulate into the primary reasons for establishing a university. Any institution must explain its value and justify its existence, both to itself and to society in general.

Turning to History

At UFV we draw important insights from the history of the institution of the university. The first universities – at Paris, Bologna, Oxford, Salamanca, Coimbra – came into being when schools for clergy opened their doors, so that knowledge could be fostered and spread more broadly. The development of the arts and sciences led to higher and higher standards of professional life, but also made it possible for greater numbers to appreciate more deeply the truths of their faith that are central to their lives and destiny (*fides quaerens intellectum*). This deeper grasp of truth was the "something more" that the earliest universities pursued.

Over the centuries, society has changed, ideas have evolved, the sciences have greatly developed, and, along with the rest, the university as an institution has been transformed. Nevertheless, throughout this journey the following has remained true:

Born from the heart of the Church, a Catholic University is located in that course of tradition which may be traced back to the very origin of the University as an institution. It has always been recognized as an incomparable centre of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity. By vocation, the *Universitas magistrorum et scholarium* is dedicated to research, to teaching and to the education of students who freely associate with their teachers in a common love of knowledge. With every other University it shares that *gaudium de veritate*, so precious to Saint Augustine, which is that joy of searching for, discovering and communicating truth in every field of knowledge. A Catholic University's privileged task is "to unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth."—John Paul II (1990), no. 1

Moreover, it also continues to be true that:

[w]ithout in any way neglecting the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic University is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God. The present age is in urgent need of this kind of disinterested service, namely of *proclaiming the meaning of truth*, that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished. By means of a kind of universal humanism a Catholic University is completely dedicated to the research of all aspects of truth in their essential connection with the supreme Truth, who is God.—John Paul II (1990), no. 4

In light of this teaching of Saint John Paul II, we may describe a number of aspects of our vision. First, as a university we do not seek purely abstract truth; rather,

we seek knowledge about the world, about humanity, and about God. The truth must have a concrete face, so to speak, in order to be engaging and transformative. Second, as a university we seek knowledge that is much more than a sterile understanding of things, and we are committed to the hope that the knowledge we shall find will be the source of well-being and *gaudium*, a joy that truly humanizes us. Third, our curriculum is driven by a sense of urgency to contribute to the framework of sense and meaning in our historical era. Finally, we affirm that the search for knowledge is essentially the search for the truth and love for which we are all made. In this regard the words of Benedict XVI are instructive: “We cannot make progress in knowledge of anything without being driven by love – and we cannot love something in which we find no reason to love.”

Recognizing the “something more” of a university, and placing it at the core of our own identity, UFV affirms two fundamental principles:

- a *Anthropological neutrality does not exist.* Any human collectivity organized for a certain end, particularly when that end is education, will have its own idea of what a human being essentially is, and accordingly a set of values, a sense of purpose, codes of conduct, and so on – all of which impact and oblige each member of the community. Even if individuals in leadership positions do not reflect on or disseminate these anthropological premises, the premises and their implications remain, at least latent but often potent, in the institution. An understanding of human nature, whether explicitly articulated or merely implicit, necessarily conditions every educational activity in a profound way.
- b *Epistemological neutrality does not exist.* The view that any piece of knowledge is “neutral” bespeaks a superficial understanding of what is being learned and known. In its fullness, knowledge is not neutral but attractive; it draws us toward itself and guides our choices and actions in specific ways. Perhaps especially the sciences operate in this fashion: They clarify for us the ways things are, and the ways things are not. Anyone who undertakes to demonstrate a proposition implicitly proves that there is both an real trust and belief in the possibility of gaining knowledge, and an attendant denial of the claim that reality is absurd and unknowable. If there were no objective truth in things, then the entire scientific project would be nullified, useless, hopeless. If there were no objective truth in things, then any and all propositions would be equally valid – and equally worthless. When *anything* makes sense and can be true, *nothing* makes sense and can be true. But it cannot be the case that things are devoid of objective truth, and that anything is true, and that nothing is true. That is an absurdity.

Precisely because a university is more than a professional school, it is not possible for us to avoid the issue of truth. We cannot fence off or disregard the larger and deeper metaphysical questions about the reality of things. A university should not limit its goals to promoting knowledge that is useful and the techniques for acquiring it. Much less should it be unconcerned about how technical knowledge relates to human nature or whether certain methods for advancing knowledge should be permissible or

impermissible. For our part, we are mindful that the ultimate goal of technical knowledge is the fulfillment of humanity – as articulated by, among others, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, 1982 [1939]: 54 – and that any individual’s professional life is but an opening and a context for the far grander pursuit of personal human flourishing.

A Community of Seekers

“The university,” as Pérez-Díaz reminds us, 2010: 9-10, “is established from its origins upon the experience of a community of seekers of the truth.” The experience of a university is one of collegiality among teachers and learners in diverse subjects and disciplines.

A Catholic university shares with other models the *gaudium de veritate* – the joy of seeking for, finding, and transmitting truth – and it will always accommodate students who themselves are open to this disposition. What makes this community possible is not uniformity of thought, but the sense of being on a common intellectual path, searching honestly and humbly according to the shared ethics of truth-seeking. This sense of mission is shared across the sciences and the humanities, and by believers and nonbelievers alike.

UFV aspires to be an authentic community, rooted in a Christian anthropology and epistemological realism. We understand that, as a matter of intellectual honesty and communal integration, we have a duty to explain what motivates our actions and approach.

We ask: Are human beings made to be anything more than good, productive professionals? Which name describes humankind better, *homo faber* or a *homo quaerens*?

At UFV we answer the latter, *homo quaerens*. There is certainly more than one way to express the notion that human beings are seekers of truth and love, who naturally desire to embrace others in love and truth, to become builders of communities and civilization. In the terms of intellectual history, our view has strong affinities with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, and coalesces with a dialogic-personalistic approach. We do not attempt to synthesize any particular schools of thought, however. Rather, we lay out the foundations of our own vision on a biblical-anthropological framework which affirms that the human individual is a unique and dependent being, whose true self lies deep in *the heart*, where each of us meets with God the Creator.

Each human being is a seeker engaging in a personal, life-long project. Each is a person with a mind and heart, intelligence and will, affections, decisions, and a unique history unfolding alongside fellow human beings. This is what a person is. Who cannot recognize in himself or herself the need to know where this life is headed, or the natural desire to understand the world and those whom we live amongst, as the need *to love and be loved*?

Our educational project as a university begins by recognizing the human being as one who naturally desires and seeks for truth, goodness, and beauty, and by inviting others to teach and to learn how to discover a world that is attractive and that

humanizes us. In this way, each of the many and varied elements of academic learning – contemplating a poem, deriving a mathematical theorem, analyzing a chemical reaction or musical composition, and so on – becomes a precious means for discovering a fundamental truth, namely, that any fragment of reality leads us to the ultimate Truth, He who gives unity and meaningfulness to everything in the world.

Each person's free will has the power to resist the demands and the consequences of finding the truth – especially when those consequences affect our own lives. And so we need to be mutually supportive along the way, through honest and trusting discussions and sincere friendship. To engage reason on one's own, in isolation, can be an impersonal and even dehumanizing activity; but through the bonds of friendship, education occurs more fruitfully in the naturally interpersonal context.

Human beings are not angels or purely spiritual beings living outside of the dimensions of time and space, apart from others in society. Rather, each of us discerns a profound calling to live and love with others and with God. Still, we are sometimes drawn away from that calling. For we are free beings, and not immune to existential conflict within ourselves. To ignore this conflict when it is present is to deceive oneself. At such times of tension we are faced with a difficult choice: either opt in favor of grace, or don't. And if we don't, frustration in our lives will inevitably overcome us.

A university that promotes the spirit of seeking truth and love in every discipline, every extracurricular activity, and every personal relationship provides an engaging, life-enriching experience for its students. They are able to grow in the depth of their own beliefs and in self-awareness of their life choices. They become more creative in problem-solving, more attuned to cultural issues, and more thoughtful about the world in which they live. They become better people who are better prepared for their careers and for their lives in general. With all this in view, UVF sees each student as its most important assignment.

UVF aspires to present to society men and women who are more than competent, well-trained professionals. As Benedict XVI stated, “[I]f we as Church just give the people bare knowledge, abilities, technical skills, instruments, we are giving them too little.” (Munich, 2006-b) Above all, we want UVF alumni to be men and women who always seek the truth and what is best, whether at work, at home, or in the community. To this end, UVF strives to be a vibrant community that, notwithstanding its academic diversity, remains single-minded in its emphasis on the common intellectual journey, ever mindful of the caution that truth, goodness, and beauty are accessible only to those who approach them humbly and with respect. (Ratzinger, 1991: 203) In this way, we understand that, important though they are, the components of religious ministry or sacramental life are not themselves sufficient to make a university Catholic. There is another essential element: reason must always be applied, as part of a lifestyle carried out *from the heart*, in order to find the truth in every classroom and to remain open to what is joyful and humanizing in that truth.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS PATH

The desire in our hearts for “something more” pertains to all the aspects of our lives, not just to the university experience. Each of us desires and hopes for a job that is more than simply a way to earn a living, a family that is more than simply a group of people who live under the same roof, and so on. At UFV, we ask what it is that believers can contribute to the achievement of this “something more.” Beyond participating in the sacraments, beyond studying philosophy and theology, what else can we do? At UFV we believe there are a host of ways that we can work toward this “something more,” and the articulation of these ways is an important part of our mission.

The scientific mode of intellectual life is the predominant mode at contemporary universities, with its emphasis on empirical demonstration as the best means for advancing knowledge and promoting the well-being of society. Thus any university deserving of the name is highly attentive to its research and teaching in the sciences. But with this emphasis on the sciences, which themselves are worthy and good pursuits, universities run the risk of adopting a dangerous ideological perspective, scientism. This ideology takes a narrow view of reality, much to the disservice of humanity and truth. When science is taken as the exclusive means for grasping objective truth, the rest of our human endeavors are reduced to matters of subjectivity, personal preference, or relative cultural conditions – and thus they are no longer matters worthy of open and reasonable public discourse, as Benedict XVI reminded us at Ratisbon University (2006-b).

We should be clear: We do not argue against *science*, but against the ideology of *scientism*. For when science is taken as the exclusive path toward certain knowledge, as it is under the ideology of scientism, the perennial questions that are vital to mankind are dismissed out of hand. The larger questions about reality, about the meaning of life, about the very possibility of knowledge – all these fall under the purview not of science but of the liberal arts, philosophy and theology chief among them. The scientific mode of intellectual life needs to be understood as falling within a broader epistemological perspective, one that respects human beings not simply as *objects* for study and analysis but also as personal *subjects*. Historically speaking, this broader perspective is what universities presupposed at their very beginnings. Today, any institution departing from this perspective would seem to do so for ideological or politically correct reasons, and at the risk of losing its identity as a university.

In the end, an authentic university – which is what every Catholic institution of high-learning aspires to be – develops and maintains a sensitivity for the truth that dwells in the heart of each member of the community, in order to resist the temptation to identify truth with mere utility. (Benedict XVI, 2008-b) The mark of an authentic university will thus be a faculty committed to inquiring about and engaging students with the deepest questions of reality and meaning. Moreover, an authentic university will promote research that not only contributes to new knowledge but also reflects on the proper scope and limits of each discipline.

a) How to broaden the perspective of rationality

In order to foster an acute sensitivity for truth, it is necessary to reject the view that empirical and mathematical criteria are the sole basis of knowledge. Indeed, the definition of what is *rational* must extend beyond these criteria. In the full picture of knowledge, the human person must return to the center of the field of inquiry, and all the existential questions concerning the activities of humankind, including scientific pursuits, must be taken seriously. In truth, science is but the answer *man* gives to the puzzling amazement that spontaneously emerges from the experience of his intellectual faculties, and so it is proper to take a humanistic approach to even the most technical of disciplines. All human activities, engagements, and inquiries appeal to both the mind and the heart, which is why we must maintain an open and honest approach to the truth.

The Question of Anthropology

Each course taught at a university presupposes, to varying degrees of significance, certain anthropological premises, whether implicit or explicit. A vision of humanity, moreover, has profound effects on the contents of a curriculum. In the context of any course of study we may ask: What notion of the human being colors the material that is being taught? A being who is solitary and individualistic, or one who is communal and interpersonal? Limited in time and place, or open to transcendence? Deterministically disposed by genetic makeup or historico-cultural factors, or capable of freedom? Above all, we may ask: What kind of man in the world and what kind of society are fostered by these premises?

A university graduate who is technically and scientifically competent, but who lacks the self-perspective gained by considering the anthropological questions seriously, is clearly missing the “something more” that a university owes its students. At UVF we believe that a biblically based personal anthropology is an integral component of an education that seeks to promote communication among the disciplines, particularly the sciences and philosophy and theology.

The Question of Epistemology

Each course taught at a university presupposes a certain epistemological premises, whether explicit or implicit. That epistemology, moreover, necessarily conditions the content and manner of teaching, inasmuch as it pronounces on the foundational questions of truth and the possibility of its attainment.

Any teacher should confront these basic questions: Is there truth in what I teach? What are the limits of my discipline and method? As a matter of intellectual honesty, and pursuant to the ideals of a university, these questions should be taken up by all faculty members, whether their emphasis is teaching or research. At UVF we believe that a renewed epistemological realism – one both capable of explaining that reality can be objectively known and ever mindful of the interpersonal context from which knowledge is drawn – is essential to the mission of a university.

The Question of Ethics

The anthropological and epistemological questions cannot be divorced from the question of how we should act, whether in our theoretical or practical research, or even in our everyday, nonacademic lives. Whether implicit or explicit, there is an ethical dimension to each discipline, to the extent that each has certain goals as well as technological, cultural, social, and personal implications. Important ethical questions to ask include: What is the ultimate purpose of this endeavor, and where does it lead? Is this manner of doing things right or wrong? Does it elevate or debase my own dignity or that of others? Does it bring about a society that is more just and hospitable to dignity?

At UVF we believe that both the personalistic and the biblical approaches to anthropology provide essential contributions in the field of ethics.

The Question of Purpose

All members of the university community, students and faculty alike, ought to consider thoughtfully in their hearts and minds the very purpose of academic life. Important questions of purpose include: Is what I am teaching or learning something worthwhile? How do these things contribute to a meaningful life? Why do I participate in academia? What does it do for me and for the rest of society?

When an instructor is able to convey to his or her students not just certain academic content but also a genuine and clear sense of the reasons for participating in the intellectual enterprise, students are engaged more fully in their own lives. Such an instructor does far more than just facilitate the process of acquiring certain knowledge and skills. An institution that encourages students and faculty to be mindful of the reasons for teaching and learning is a community devoted to uncovering the vast and rich possibilities of human existence.

In this regard, philosophy and theology play a special role. These disciplines enable us to take a broader view, and to grasp the centrality of what is *human* among all the various courses of study and research at a university. With respect to the sciences in particular, philosophy and theology restore a consciousness of and reverence for the human person as the foundational being who engages in scientific inquiry and who ought always to be the primary beneficiary of scientific discovery and advancement. Philosophy and theology supply a perspective on the “something more” that the sciences alone cannot provide, and thus they are essential for grasping the deeper purpose of a university. (Benedict XVI, 2008-b) These disciplines make it possible for a university education to attain to a deeper wisdom, rooted in an awareness of the broader human significance of the intellectual enterprise.

b) Synthesis of knowledge broadens reason

Scientific inquiry requires specialization, as each practitioner sets out to study and uncover a particular aspect or dimension of the universe. Each of the sciences has its own methods and goals suited to its own domain. Notwithstanding the fragmentation

of knowledge that may be the consequence of specialization, it is the duty of a university to counteract this tendency. The disparate conclusions and findings of specialized disciplines need to be synthesized, so that an appreciation of “something more” than mere utility emerges.

Any such synthesis must go beyond the mere collecting of knowledge from different disciplines. Indeed, it must strive for a *unifying principle*, something deeper which underlies a *complete* picture of knowledge. Taking such a principle as its goal will determine much about a university’s research priorities.

Epistemologically speaking, when scientific inquiry happens alongside engagement with philosophy and theology, its findings and conclusions will not appear as irreducible and disparate vis-à-vis the humanities. Rather, these findings and conclusions will have the opportunity to be integrated with the perspective of the humanities, and what would otherwise remain fragmented knowledge has the chance to be assembled into a unified whole.

Anthropologically speaking, the synthesis of knowledge is achieved in the hearts of those who seek it. Just as “fragmented knowledge” really means “fragmented human understanding,” likewise there is no disembodied knowledge but rather *persons* who know. As John Paul II insightfully noted (1998: no. 83), the synthesis of knowledge can be understood as a process whereby we move from knowledge of a *phenomenon* to knowledge of its *foundations*.

To strive to synthesize knowledge in this manner is thus to strive for a “new science” that transcends the narrowness and limitations of the individual disciplines, and thereby resists the ideology of scientism. From this broadened vantage point, the scientific disciplines can each be nurtured, and in turn they can nurture philosophy and theology as well by supplying new data and experience for their reflection.

As the process of synthesis unfolds, the goal remains a view of one harmonic body of truth, not an unwieldy and complex scaffold of theories. The integration of knowledge proceeds according to sound and rigorous methods that respect the domain of each discipline and the aspects of truth available therein. Thus, as the uncovering and accumulation of new knowledge occurs, synthesis can continue to occur fruitfully, for logically truth contains within itself no contradictions.

c) The confluence of faith and reason

At the core of a Catholic university is the indispensable dialogue between faith and reason. For there is no dimension of reality worthy of being investigation which cannot be illuminated by this dialogue.

The *homo quaerens* naturally seeks truth, beginning with the essential unity of personal experience, which channels through one’s reason, heart, mind, intelligence, free will, memory, and affections. Since a human being is an essential unity, the answer to one’s most profound aspiration cannot be fragmentary. Consider this passage from Saint John Paul II:

The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning, as the principle of non-contradiction makes clear. Revelation renders this unity certain, showing that the God of

creation is also the God of salvation history. It is the one and the same God who establishes and guarantees the intelligibility and reasonableness of the natural order of things upon which scientists confidently depend, and who reveals himself as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.—John Paul II, 1998: no. 34

A university inspired by the Christian faith rejects dichotomies of truth and other schemes that place in opposition different truths pertaining to different cognitive activities or levels of understanding. Differences need not imply contradiction. Within each discipline and subdiscipline, each adapts methods appropriate to its own specific aspect or dimension of reality, such that across the disciplines the partial knowledge of each may *converge*, not *diverge*.

Faith and reason do not nullify or exclude one another; rather, they are complementary and mutually enriching. As Benedict XVI remarked at Ratisbon University (2006-b), for religion to seek to dispense with science is a pathology, and in like manner so is the rejection of faith by reason. When fideism disdains science, and rationalism scorns faith, both commit serious errors.

Belief does not oppose reason, but transcends it, and this transcendence is itself reasonable and called for by Judeo-Christian revelation. At UFV it is our conviction that faith fortifies rationality, and that “only faith and reason together can save mankind.”—Benedict XVI, 2009: no. 74

From the Christian perspective, philosophy and theology, which approach the questions of the ultimate purpose and meaning of life, serve humanity as a *ministry of the truth*. They offer a critical perspective on the truth that is found in faith—the purest knowledge which alone is capable of changing lives.

III. MODUS OPERANDI

a) Methodology

The purpose-seeking attitude underlying our university life includes a number of methodological principles:

Begin with the human being and the sciences.

If the academic experience is to be truly integrated, and not taken as mere intellectual recreation, it cannot be viewed as something artificially superimposed on – or isolable from – the concrete reality of human experience. For this reason, at UFV we desire an educational method takes as its starting points both the current state of affairs in the theoretical and practical sciences, as well as the person as he or she really is, immersed in the current culture. In the long run this dual focus places proper emphasis on students and their educational development, as well as on the value of contemporary scientific inquiry.

Look for the truth in each person's search for meaning and purpose.

People today typically do not spend much time discussing their personal searches for meaning and purpose, much less in philosophical or theological terms. But encouraging this sort of reflection and conversation is a duty that follows from the anthropological vision we adhere to at UFV. Often the answers to these questions of meaning and purpose are unthinkingly adopted through the assumptions and paradigms we receive from the prevailing culture. That culture tends to emphasize subjectivity, moreover, and it is therefore necessary for us to learn how to discern the truth dwelling deep within those individuals who personally reflect on their search for meaning and purpose. In this way we follow the advice of the apostle Paul who said, “*Test everything, hold fast to what is good*” (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22).

Raise and try to answer questions in a nonthreatening way.

The questions of meaning and purpose must first be raised, implicitly or explicitly, in order for fruitful dialogue to begin. As long as one has no personal stake in these issues, any discussion of them will fall on deaf or uninterested ears. It is useless and perhaps even harmful to attempt to talk about deeper existential questions before students are ready. It is necessary, and should not be difficult, to pique the natural human curiosity about these questions, whether by pointing out the deeper matters that science itself is silent on, or by other testimonies that uncover these issues in more direct and personal ways.

Aware that our formative vision goes against the grain of the prevailing culture, we recognize that it is essential to emphasize how and why the deeper existential questions are relevant to the educational experience. It is also necessary to be self-conscious and self-critical of one's own positions in order to avoid misunderstandings when trying to dialogue with others who hold different views, and to identify when problematic cultural or methodological biases might be in play. The criterion of reason can never be abandoned: Both religion and science fail when they try to justify their claims but dispense with reason.

Talk to the whole person.

In order to broaden the perspective of reason it is necessary to examine integrally all the dimensions of humanity, including free will, affectivity, and even the concrete, bodily reality of persons. Because the ultimate questions of meaning and purpose pertain not exclusively to reason but to the whole human being, it is proper for ourselves to account for and speak to the “sensible intelligence” – as philosopher Zubiri says – as well as the “intelligent affectivity” present in all of us. Furthermore, we need to engage others in questions about human community, searching for an appreciation of what is transcendent across the cultural, societal, and historic aspects of our human experience. Only by these means will our own personal formation become integrated and capable of having an impact on others whom we encounter.

Don't shy away from controversial questions.

Posing a question is quite different from imposing a point of view. For any imposition is an attempt to coerce or otherwise burden an individual's free will. At UFV we seek to affirm our own positions by first articulating the sense of beauty present in them. This beauty is something we have discovered freely through our own personal experiences, and in turn something which we wish to share generously with others. Dialogue is not about superficial niceties that we all can agree on, but about substantive and sometimes controversial ideas, and it ought to be conducted in a spirit of intellectual honesty and forthrightness. Dialogue in this sense is also of utmost importance, for sooner or later the strategy of avoiding conflict by ignoring difficult issues necessarily backfires.

Given the conviction that what unites us all as knowledge-seeking human beings is far stronger than what divides us, we believe that an essential condition for open and candid dialogue is an attitude of humility. All persons deserve respect and should be listened to, even when their views are in conflict with our own.

Reveal the natural attractiveness of ultimate truths.

Many of the important truths that we humans can grasp are not matters of scientific or empirical demonstration, for the realities they address are not themselves physical but of a transcendent order. Thus the first steps in conveying these truths to other seekers are the natural experiences of wonder and amazement. Such experiences are an invitation to respond freely with further reflection, which deep down uncovers the splendor of truth, the attraction of goodness, the seduction of beauty.

Recognize that truth-seeking is a long-term project.

If our vision were one that could not be lived out by real people and with concrete, human effects, then it would be useless and uninteresting. We are aware that the truth-seeking attitude we seek to cultivate is not short-term affair. Indeed, truth-seeking should continue beyond one's time at a university. It should be a life-long commitment that one fulfills in community with others. From a Christian perspective, we know that the hopeful desires of our hearts are never satisfied in an instant, but only over the course of a lifetime of journeying farther and deeper into the truth.

b) Coaching

The journey of learning that we propose can be arduous and slow-going at times, and we recognize that it is better not to go it alone. We need the companionship of others along the way, and we thus affirm the profound sense of community that is at the heart of our vocation as a university.

Coaching through a variety of methods is an important element of the learning process. It derives from a number of the premises of anthropological realism, including the principles that knowledge is something that pertains to the whole person, not just the specifically intellectual faculties; that the discovery and transmission of knowledge

requires communal inquiry and engagement; and that knowledge can transform lives when it engages individuals' free will and orders it toward their ultimate end.

It is impossible to develop one's personality in isolation; rather, this can be done only in community with others, and even more so with the grace of God. Given this conviction, we view each student as our primary assignment and, in turn, students should come to view themselves in this way as well.

Coaching should be undertaken as a duty that flows from *intellectual love for others*. All learning and knowledge should be oriented toward some higher end, serving the whole person and not merely the intellectual faculties. Humans long for truth deeply, in our hearts, and this desire is at the root of all our motivations, our whole being. For this reason students should be led to cultivate an appreciation of knowledge as far more than merely professionally useful. They should discover that truth is not something made, but rather something found or uncovered, which no single person completely possesses. They should become reverently aware of the fact that knowing the truth is never a sterile event, but rather the most authentic experience of embracing what reality is, who we are as persons and community, and Who God is.

c) *Integral Formation*

One of the main points we intend to emphasize here is that our entire approach to academic life and learning is informed by the principle of what we call *integral formation*. This formation seeks to develop of the whole person in all of his or her dimensions – intelligence, free will, affectivity and emotions, memory, and bodily sensibilities. We believe this approach is essential for achieving the personal transformation whereby individuals become capable of making prudent decisions through the mature exercise of their free will.—Benedict XVI, 2006-a

However, we shouldn't settle for merely affirming the necessity of integral formation. The stakes are too high for us simply to pay lip service to this goal. In all aspects and through all the stages of students' university experience, we must actively seek to educate and integrate the whole person, on and off campus. In this way the university experience becomes vastly more than an intellectual exercise. It is not possible to foster a genuine community of truth-seekers without this integral approach to learning and education, which is the keynote of our university.

d) *A Cultural Laboratory and a New Humanism*

UFV aspires to be a vital space for a renewed dialogue about Christian religion and culture, a meeting place for believers and nonbelievers alike, for the sake of the greater good of society. If values that privilege the dignity of the human person in community prevail in our culture, the culture will be hospitable to genuine human development. But if individualistic values prevail, closing us off from one another and overemphasizing sensual and instinctive forces, the culture will be dehumanizing.

Society confronted with myriad pressing and urgent needs. But these needs should also be considered within a larger context of meaning and purpose. If a university does not frame the concerns of the day in this way, who will?

In order to promote a new humanism, the current culture will benefit from the beacons of light that are religion and a university that models itself as “cultural laboratory,” that is, a setting where faculty and students engage together to address the most important questions for human social development.

We desire to be an intergenerational university community, in which wisdom from past generations is received and offered to future ones, fully aware that while some questions are pertinent only to specific places and times, other questions are universal, are perennial. Absent the milieu of generous and humanizing intergenerational conversation and solidarity, a culture may easily become inward-gazing, impoverished, sterile, unengaged in the discovery of the ever renewed beauty of life and the wisdom necessary to appreciate it. Each generation needs to forge its own path toward these things, and to this end Christian faith makes a unique humanizing and civilizing contribution. “For all that we have that is most our own and most intimate is staked on faith: our heart, our mind, our freedom, in a deeply personal relationship with the Lord at work within us.”—Benedict XVI, 2006-c

It is important for our life as a community, through our research and our dialogue with society in general, to address the vital questions of our time, both as they are given to us, with all their particularity and contingency, but also seeking to grasp their deeper roots and causes, and especially attuned to their ethical dimensions and implications. As a Catholic university we aspire to manifest the truth of the Church as a teacher of humanity, both through the faith and on the basis of its lived experience across millennia. Moreover, in the words of John Paul II, “If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.”—John Paul II, 1990: no. 32

e) Dialogue for Reaching Out to Others and Pluralism

Because we are driven by a genuine interest in humanity, we reject the claim that any and all ideas about human nature and its destiny are equally valid. This sort of relativism is all too familiar, but what it amounts to is a relinquishing of reason. While the *plurality* of interpretations concerning human nature is a fact which derives from human free will, the attitude of *pluralism*, which refuses to judge the superiority or inferiority of any particular interpretation, is an ideological sham. Indeed, all people deserve respect, but this does not mean that their ideas should not be scrutinized in order to determine their truth or falsity. Mature and reasonable persons ought to be able to discuss their differing views honestly and respectfully.

Sometimes dialogue can be tense. Seeking truth, goodness, and beauty is not always easy. Even so, it is intellectually dishonest to try to smooth over or hide genuine differences, and it is foolhardy or try to resolve them by imposing our views on others. It

is our moral duty to undertake the difficult task of engaging in honest and respectful dialogue with others.

Thus learning the art of dialogue with courage, humility, and righteous intentions is of utmost importance. It is a difficult art to master, indeed, but one that is indispensable to building the kind of community we hope to achieve.

Anyone who today believes that it is possible to impose Christian beliefs through coercive psychological or social means is sorely mistaken. This will never happen in our university, precisely because of our adherence to the Gospel and anthropological realism. We know that to impose the faith on others is contrary to the Gospel, and this is a foundational principle of the community of seekers that we aspire to be.

f) Doubling Down on the Gospel Preaching Mission

To conclude this articulation of our broad methodological intuitions, we affirm our responsibility to preach the Gospel. In his keynote address to Catholic educators gathered in Washington, Benedict XVI (2008-a) insisted that

every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4). . . . [T]hose who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord's disciples, the Church.

Likewise, we strive to make UFV a place for encountering the living God. We are passionate about this goal and work to achieve it in every aspect of our communal life. Our university is made up of many people seeking to live their Christian faith: each at different places on this journey, but all sinners who recognize Christ as our redeemer, and who wish to lead lives fortified by Him and nurtured in His Church. But we are not all of one mind. Among us some may have doubts and reservations about certain doctrinal matters or other aspects of Church teaching. Some may even be atheist or agnostic.

But united as a community in our search for truth, our university lives out in a meaningful way the faith of the Church. The Church affirms that proclaiming the truth is an act of love that promotes the common good, and that

[t]he dynamic between personal encounter, knowledge and Christian witness is integral to the *diakonia* of truth which the Church exercises in the midst of humanity. God's revelation offers every generation the opportunity to discover the ultimate truth about its own life and the goal of history. This task is never easy; it involves the entire Christian community and motivates each generation of Christian educators to ensure that the power of God's truth permeates every dimension of the institutions they serve. — Benedict XVI, 2008-a

In this way, Christian educators have a duty to propose what they believe in a spirit of loving respect for others, always with the care needed to avoid appearances of ideology and coercion." For as Benedict XVI wrote,

Christian charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies. It is not a means of changing the world ideologically, and it is not at the service of worldly stratagems, but it is a way of making present here and now the love which man always needs. —Benedict XVI, 2005: no. 31

There are several important reasons why a university community of believers and nonbelievers together can and should exist and even thrive. First, believers and nonbelievers confront the same fundamental questions about our human existence and destiny, and even those who do not believe in God still necessarily search for and often find some sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Second, believing in Christ and His mission is not a discrete, finite task that we accomplish once and for all; rather, the mystery *semper maius* is something that we never fully comprehend or exhaust, but strive to grasp more deeply throughout our lives and in encounters with others. Third, while some Christians have struggled to understand this point, the truth is that the Gospel excludes no one. When we dialogue with others in a spirit of intellectual honesty and respect, we mature in our own knowledge and personal convictions. Being able to engage with others in this way is what makes a university community truly alive, and truly formative. Finally, what ultimately motivates a community of truth-seekers is a spirit of love, which is something accessible to believers and nonbelievers alike.

In the well-said words of another Christian seeker:

Whoever reads this, there where a certainty is shared, come forward with me; there where doubt is shared, come look with me; there where error is recognized, come to my field; and where mine is recognized, call me to the truth. Thus we will walk together on the path of love of Whom it is said: always be in search of His face (*Psalms* 104:4)—St. Augustine in *De Trinitate* I:3:5

Effectively preaching the Gospel requires us to “double down”:

a) When discussing matters of faith or the moral doctrine of the Church, we must always be mindful to do so in a way that helps those who already accept what the Church teaches may deepen their convictions and love – so that they may avoid thinking of these matters in formulaic and routine ways, falsely living as if the mystery of Christ is something one learns once and for all. We must strive always to show how Christ constantly engages the deepest desires of our hearts, and how and why our faith illuminates ever new paths for encountering Him.

b) Beyond the context of explicitly religious matters, we must always speak to the profound thirst for purpose and meaning that dwells in the each human heart, making us all seekers, persons undergoing a process of formation. In this way, whatever the setting, whether in the classroom or extracurricular activities, we should see ourselves always as meeting with and engaging the very humanity of others.

How exactly are we to execute this dual strategy to proclaim the faith both explicitly and implicitly? What sort of curriculum and activities are we to propose and develop in order to achieve this end? Prescribing a specific plan is not easy, but fortunately it is not necessary either. Instead, we should focus on fostering the art of discerning and acting on genuine opportunities to address the *homo quaerens* in all of us. Appealing to the wisdom of the classic principle of “renewed passion, renewed methods, renewed expressions,” we should constantly be open to and seeking new ways for preaching the Gospel effectively to both believers and nonbelievers.

CONCLUSION

We began this mission statement by explaining our aim: to flesh out our idea of a university, and to describe the concrete steps we believe best realize that idea.

With that aim in mind, in the first part of this statement, we proposed that the “something more” which properly characterizes a university community can be found by turning to history. History shows that at its origins, the institution of the university came into being for the purpose of shedding light and discovering knowledge that would promote the genuine well-being of humankind. Cultivating this sense of purpose has always been, and remains today, an urgent task.

In the second part of this statement, we detailed the critical need to broaden the perspective of rationality beyond the assumptions of modern science. Scientific inquiry is noble and worthy, and as a university community we promote it wholeheartedly. At the same time, we recognize that science alone is incapable of addressing many of the questions of meaning and purpose that matter most.

Finally, in the third part of this statement, we described a practical methodology for translating the idea of a university into a concrete, living community. Briefly put, that methodology requires that we rid ourselves of unexamined prejudices, preconceived notions, and the “politically correct” or expedient commonplaces that we may frequently find in academia. More important, it requires that we recover the communal sense of humanity as a race of truth-seekers.

The journey to realize our idea of a university may be a long one. It may require the work of many generations. Even so, with deeply rooted enthusiasm we can do no more than present this idea – this ideal – in hopes that it represents the best path for genuine human development and flourishing.

In our vision, a university makes possible St. Paul’s pronouncement, *Vince in bono malum* (Romans 12:21). We conclude now by appealing to these words of Benedict XVI, which summarize our vision of how a university contributes to good of the world:

Above all, that of which we are in need at this moment in history are men who, through an enlightened and lived faith, render God credible in this world. The negative testimony of Christians who speak about God and live against him, has darkened God’s image and opened the door to disbelief. We need men who have their gaze directed to God, to understand true humanity. We need men whose intellects are enlightened by the light of God, and whose hearts God opens, so that their intellects can speak to the intellects of others, and so that their hearts are able to open up to the hearts of others.

Only through men who have been touched by God, can God come near to men. We need men like Benedict of Norcia, who at a time of dissipation and decadence, plunged into the most profound solitude, succeeding, after all the purifications he had to suffer, to ascend again to the light, to return and to found Montecasino, the city on the mountain that, with so many ruins, gathered together the forces from which a new world was formed. —Joseph Ratzinger, 2005

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