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## **The Pursuit of Truth to Make Men Free**

E.J. Drummond

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E. J. DRUMMOND, S.J., Ph. D.

*Academic Vice-President*

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

1955

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## Foreword

**D**URING the period, June, 1955 to June, 1956, Marquette University is sponsoring a year-long celebration of the 75th Anniversary of its founding in 1881. Through a series of academic, cultural, religious and social events, it proposes to demonstrate to those it serves, its own capabilities as a center of learning, so that men and women of today will come to recognize more fully their need for the University in their struggle for truth and freedom.

Because any attempt to appraise the position of a single university in the field of learning also involves the broader question of the role of learning itself in our society today, Marquette University has invited the

cooperation of scholars and educators throughout the world, as well as its alumni, students, benefactors and other friends.

They will join Marquette University in developing a deeper understanding of the role of "Learning," which the University describes as "The Pursuit of Truth to Make Men Free." This has been designated as the theme of its 75th Anniversary Celebration.

At a Preview dinner for members of the University faculty on June 1, 1955 the Rev. E. J. Drummond, S.J., Academic Vice-President, delivered the principal address, entitled, "The Pursuit of Truth to Make Men Free." His remarks were a significant contribution to a deeper understanding of the celebration theme.

They are published in this booklet for the benefit of all those who seek to understand Marquette University more fully and all those who would appreciate the full importance of learning in our society today.

R. A. K.

# The Pursuit of Truth to Make Men Free

**P**ERE MARQUETTE was born on June first 318 years ago, and Jesuit educational tradition is almost a century older. But the history of universities is older still, and before there were universities scholars had gathered around wise men in Athens and in Alexandria. These scholars, whether attracted by the wisdom of a single man or gathered into the early universities, were concerned with the pursuit of truth. If they did not profess that this pursuit was formally aimed at making men free, nevertheless they would have been, it appears to me, quite willing to accept that as one statement of their objectives.

Marquette University, which is just beginning her 75th Anniversary, is young as an institution; but she has a history and a

heritage that go beyond her own first days. When asked to describe her work, she has written down, "The pursuit of truth to make men free," and taken this as the theme for her anniversary year. It should deepen our appreciation of the great tradition of higher learning and our understanding of our specific characteristics if we examine something of the content of each of those words, "pursuit," "truth," "men," "free."

### *Pursuit*

A pursuit is a quest — therefore, eagerness; it is a quest by many — therefore, cooperative. It calls for patience and humility. We must be willing, as it has been said, to sit down humbly before a fact like a child. Carlyle, when told that Margaret Fuller had said she was willing to accept the universe, wryly remarked, "Gad, she'd better."

This pursuit implies the wish and the deed to practice a kind of celibacy so far as goals like wealth and power are concerned in order to devote oneself more fixedly to education, to a field within it. For the pursuit which marks the scholar is as warm-hearted as a lover's and as steady as a star. Where it has existed, schools have flourished; and where it has weakened and died, schools

have died no matter what alumni or legislatures say or do.

Men of wealth have helped to found universities; popes and kings and presidents have granted them special status and privileges. But ultimately it is the dedication to the pursuit of truth which creates the university; it is the scholar which makes the institution. And this is true whether we recall the royal foundations at Oxford and Cambridge or the Jesuit schools which dotted Europe during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In our own country where Americans have always tended to look on education as the eighth sacrament, there has been strong support from public funds for our state institutions, and private benefactors have assisted great institutions of learning. John Harvard and Ezra Cornell have given to Universities which bear their names; the Johnston family has more anonymously served Marquette. Our debt is great to the Johnstons and all our generous friends, but our debt is also great to the scholars and those who have pursued wisdom; in the classroom and out of it, men like Rigge, Burrowes, Spalding, Copus, McCormick have helped to build Marquette.

## *Truth*

What is this truth to which the scholar is committed, for which the university organizes its quest? In a sense it might seem to the outsider that the university dichotomizes reality and finds legal truth in buckram volumes, medical truth in test tubes, social truth in statistics. But it is not truth itself which is dichotomized; it is rather that the university professes no area of reality to be foreign to her search.

Truth itself, however, is more simple and profound than the proliferated questings which a large university may undertake. Truth is a relation between the knowing mind and the object. It is essentially involved with being; we know when we can say, "is." There is a relative side to our knowing, for not all our knowing is certain and all of it is limited and finite. Nevertheless, truth is concerned with absolutes, eventually and ultimately. So also must be our knowing or the pursuit of truth becomes a ghost chasing game.

Truth is a relation, and only I can know it for me. No human being can find truth and give it to me as you might feed a baby or pass out pamphlets or mimeographed

notes. Although we possess truth as individuals, it can hardly be pursued profitably and efficiently in complete isolation. One of the complaints of the scientist today about the restricted nature of information concerning nuclear physics is the loss of cooperative efforts in the pursuit of physical truth. In many areas of research teamwork has become almost a strict necessity. And on the part of the learners, the students, the community aspect of learning is just as important. Newman said that if he were building a university the first thing he would build would be the common room. *Vae solis* in the pursuit of truth.

A university can embrace many disciplines because there is an ultimate unity; there is only one truth. Truth cannot contradict itself or ultimately we have "is" arrayed against "is not." In that case there would only be a world of unintelligibility and of nothing. Nevertheless, man must seek truth in the way he can. That is why he seeks it through different disciplines and professions within a university and why we have faculties of law, of medicine, of theology, of arts, and the like.

And there are different orders of truth. There is the truth we know naturally, by our

own pure efforts, so to speak; and there is supernatural truth which we know only because God gave it directly. Yet there is still only a single truth; there is, if you will, only one revelation. Some facts God reveals indirectly by giving us this cosmos to know and our minds by which to know it. And there is His direct revelation which He made through His own special instruments — the Scriptures, the prophets, the Church.

It is not my purpose to become formally theological. But it is my purpose to emphasize that Marquette is a university which can concern itself with the whole range of intelligibility, the whole gamut of truth, the total of all that is. A technical school by its commitment does not profess to be able to undertake research in, nor communication of, the fine arts nor of law and medicine; it confines itself to the truth in the area of the pure and applied physical sciences. Some universities, because of their historical heritage, the fact or interpretation of positive law, or the development of their own institutional epistemology, have limited themselves to that "is" which can be known naturally. Theoretically, that limitation is satisfactory so long as it is understood that such institutions do not profess to commit themselves to the pursuit

of all possible truth in its fullest range. Practically, this limitation raises other problems which I do not wish to develop here and at this time. But I do say that at Marquette we can count it among our blessings that this University can pursue truth full circle and embrace all its 360 degrees.

### *Man*

The simple fact is that man, compared to the visible world around him, is unique. Sophocles sang about his singular qualities; literature, before and since *Antigone*, in dwelling on the glory and on the tragic side of man has but spelled out this fact of singularity. He is made to the image of God, for he can think and he can say, "I will."

He is not dwarfed when compared to giant reds seen through the telescope at Palomar nor lost in the maze discovered through the electron microscope. If he has existence like a stone, organic growth like a tree, sensitive awareness like a mule, he has more than just the ability to develop calluses on two rather than four of his extremities. He can get at reality and do something about it. He can possess something of what is with his mind, and he can possess something of

reality with his will; he can know, become wiser; he can want, desire, love.

Man is a microcosm. He is partly matter and partly spirit, but he is neither angel nor orangutan. He has his economic side, and though economics is a mighty motive in the acts of individuals and of society, there is no purely economic man. He is an individual with rights and responsibilities which he can neither forswear nor be deprived of; yet he is a social being and must live with other men. Man has a composite nature; in understanding his composite nature, he must recognize that there is a duality, that there is a natural and supernatural order, that his destiny is not completely explained in terms of the nitrogen cycle nor his days fully numbered by carbon 14.

Man cannot overlook nor deny any of his multi-faceted character and live his full life. He must be aware that his cultural and genetic roots thrust far back into history and his future arcs into eternity. And if he oversimplifies anything of his composite nature, he becomes an unrealist. That on the side of knowing and of truth. Neither can he overlook nor deny any of his multiplied reality without losing something of his freedom in his denial. If he ties up an arm or covers up

his eyes, he neither increases his knowledge nor his freedom.

Man is a microcosm, but what makes him essentially man is not his being an unfeathered biped dependent upon an inherited genetic structure which is complicated and qualified by policemen, cycles of supply and demand, billboards and commercials, osmotic pressure, and the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Man can think and man can will, even if these are not unlimited powers. Man can lay hold of truth with his mind, fumblingly, haltingly — yes — but, within limits, firmly and certainly. Furthermore, in part, man achieves his own destiny. If he keeps conformed to reality by his intelligence, he can choose to maintain that conformity by his will. The more he knows of reality, the more he freely chooses to conform to it, the more he really is a man.

A university can assist man to understand the complex composite that he is. It can develop more widely the known truth in the biological sciences, and in sociology, psychology, history. It can assist him to know more and more of himself and all reality through the humanities, through philosophy, and theology. By providing that knowledge for man, the university is providing a basis for

man to act with fuller freedom. What aids man to know the truth, what aids him in keeping himself free to commit himself to the whole of truth and reality, aids him in matters paramount.

### *Freedom*

Of course, there is always the problem of meddling. Meddling is halfway between mere kibitzing and real constraint. Men do not like meddling because they like to be free; they want to do things their own way, as they see them. You can make a man do something, but that does not mean you can make him like it. Nothing can make a man wish to do something he does not wish to do. This belongs to the essence of being a man and of being free.

Many of man's actions are automatic and many are only partly free. But we do have some free choices. We know in some things that we are acting quite freely, doing our own deciding. Moreover, we can see real alternatives, whether to do this or that — drink beer or scotch or go dry. All this is to say that man has the power of freedom. Today freedom is a good word; just as subversive and divisive are bad words. But freedom is more than a good word; it is a good thing. The more man

is really free, the more he is a man. Right here, however, some wrong notions can quite literally cramp man's proper style. Thus, according to some, the way to stay free is to keep from really committing yourself. Once you've decided, you've done it; you're no longer free to decide. Worse, because truth is so slippery, you're probably wrong besides. So the pursuit of truth becomes a game of musical chairs, and freedom is the power to sit on the edge of your seat and be ready to run.

One of our colleagues has lined up this question and its answer very well. "An open mind," he wrote, "is an excellent thing, like an open mouth. But mouths were made to close on food and minds on truth. We cannot be open minded about the multiplication table, nor should we be open minded about the one we love. Certainly when we choose to love we've lost the power of making that choice again. What of it? We have gained the beloved, and I take it that it is better to have than not to have. To commit ourselves, this is excellent."<sup>1</sup>

But we must make sure the commitment is right. We choose the good and by choosing make it our good. Nevertheless, it is not a

<sup>1</sup> *The Nature and Uses of Liberty*, by Gerard Smith, S.J., *New Scholasticism*, XXVI, 3, July, 1952, p. 3.

real good unless we have chosen reality. To know the truth will not make a man good, and a man can be good without being a learned man. Still a man cannot direct his desires fully toward reality and square himself with it unless he does know the truth. The more he knows of reality, other things being equal, the more he can exercise his freedom properly so that, seeing reality, he can choose it and make it his.

There is a delicate balance and inter-relationship between will and intellect, for they are powers born and rooted in the same person, the individual man. Man the knower will not know fully unless he loves and is attracted by and wants the truth, unless he pursues it. He cannot be a neutralist towards the truth and regard it coldly and sterily. Man, if he is to continue to be man and not something else, must always seek reality, intently, intelligently, and when he has found it, commit himself to it.

A university pursues truth so that men may be able to see reality in more and more accurate detail, so that men can understand economic reality and not be caught up in useless strife, senseless and selfish manipulation of trade — so that men can understand the laws of health and more and more be freed

from the inroads of disease — that more and more they may comprehend their individual and social natures, and neither regard society purely as their instrument and creation nor develop a society which looks on individual persons as its creatures or tools. So for all the rest, up to theology where the university scholar, the theologian, discusses the data of revelation in order that men may understand more and more of this reality and freely accept it.

The university in its concern with the further development of the known truth and with its communication must realize that it cannot be neutralist, not merely towards the truth, for that were to negate its very objective, but not neutralist towards the good. The university is made up of persons, the learner and the learned, and in these persons the powers of mind and will strongly influence each other; psychology and common observation make this clear. Moreover, even if a neutralism were possible psychologically, it would not be possible ontologically. Men decide their ultimate destiny and write their personal failure or success with their wills. No community of persons may be unconcerned about that.

Nevertheless, a university's first concern is

with truth. Not that a university believes knowledge of itself will make a man good; rather a university's commitment to develop and communicate what is known is the specific sign distinguishing its work and marking it off. Why this concern and commitment? Because knowledge befits man, because it is better than ignorance. More than that, because the work of a university properly done assists man to see more clearly that which is good, choose it more freely, and avoid being fooled into choosing something less than reality.

Marquette University, as she steadily and eagerly pursues the whole truth can help all its members, those inside the University as well as the communities it serves, to know and to be free. This is a great thing not only because it aids them to know and thus to maintain their freedom, the greatest human good, but because in assisting them to see reality steadily the University is ultimately aiding them to see and to accept freely the greatest good, the *Summum Bonum*, which is God.

