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**Speech of Prof. Andrew Gonzalez, FSC
President of the International Federation of Catholic Universities**

The Challenges Ahead for Church-Sponsored University of the 21st Century

Mr Chairman, Colleagues,

In speaking of the Church-sponsored university which I represent as President of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, a federation which numbers close to 190 members, I would like to focus on the viability of these institutions in the future in terms of balancing religious commitment and excellence in academics and research.

The great religious traditions of the world have sponsored across the centuries institutions in their respective communities whose main purpose was to provide opportunities for the intellect of man to understand his religious traditions including the notion of revelation in its various manifestations. When these institutions were set up, they had for purpose preservation of learning when threatened by social disruption. They were likewise the cradles of the modern professions of medicine and law, with theology antedating these professions.

The missionary thrust of the churches after the Medieval Period, during the time of the Renaissance, then the industrial revolution, and now modern society created new objectives for the university, initially faith seeking understanding, subsequently training for the professions and even defense of the sponsoring Church, then as centres of extension services and development. The unique feature of these Church-sponsored institutions at least in the period of colonial rule was that they became instruments in the hands of the colonial authorities as ways of pacifying the indigenous population, maintaining cultural and colonial ties with the mother country, providing a corps of civil servants for the bureaucracy, and for the Churches, as extended means of evangelization especially of those already baptized but not yet sufficiently rooted in the traditions of the faith.

In the light of the demands of the modern university and a pluralistic world in formerly monoreligious areas, and from contact with the outside world, the problem of balancing intellectual freedom which ensures creativity and the extension of research with the teaching authority of the sponsoring religious agency takes on new challenges.

Some educators have taken the stance that the two are incompatible and in effect have severed ties with the sponsoring Church authority, maintaining the tradition of religious knowledge through a School of Divinity which does not assume any moral authority over other schools of the university. Some others assert that one can have intellectual freedom, freedom of research and dissemination, while maintaining one's orthodox loyalty to a church that asserts its teaching authority. Others become conservative and in the process become second rate institutions more interested in proselytization than in academic and research pursuits.

This problem has become an acute one for religiously oriented universities that are trying to attain world-class excellence in research while maintaining their close ties to the church tradition to ensure the support of their churches and their objective taking care of their students as total persons and not just academic service beneficiaries of their institutions of higher learning.

Members of church do need guideposts for values and behaviour. The problem is how to maintain these guideposts without sacrificing intellectual inquiry, pluralism of debate, faith seeking understanding. Coping with this dilemma remains the problem of these institutions both at present and in the future. One can only essay some avenues of inquiry and consideration without ever really being able to solve the problem completely.

I propose that we begin with a set of statements which we all subscribe to; perhaps from these statements, lines of action will suggest themselves failing short of a well reasoned out and principled basis for untying the Gordian knot, which will take time to work out from experience and reflection.

The statements I would attempt to follow as guidelines are:

- ♦ the essence of higher education is the development of critical thinking, to examine every issue on criteria of validity;
- ♦ the specific mission of the university in society is to extend the frontiers of knowledge through research;
- ♦ for research to flourish in any institution of learning, there must be an atmosphere of intellectual freedom. Censorship and the ominous presence of guardians of tradition in knowledge are negative influences preventing creativity in thought from flourishing properly;
- ♦ however, scholars and researchers are not completely autonomous. They need benchmarks and standard to go by and they must practice their specializations according to the contemporary ethical standards of the profession and the standards of the community
- ♦ experience indicates that there are enough men and women of goodwill as much concerned about values, ethical issues, and faith development as the churches. Hence, in deciding on the religious character of the institution, it is probably better to rely on experts in each field rather than for the top church authorities to determine the criteria of maintaining the religious ties; the Churches have been unfortunately deficient in many cases in the natural sciences and rather than encourage them have stunted developments in these fields of endeavour. These developments turn out later on to have been positive ones with embarrassing results for the reactionary authority. Church authorities would do well, to maintain their credibility and influence, to be humble in seeking after truth in cooperation with members of the community and to train their own cadres of experts in all fields so that they can talk with modern scientists and scholars on the latter's terms.