

Addresses and Conferences

Nairobi August 25, 2006

*Address on receiving an
Honorary doctorate from
Strathmore University*

Your Excellencies,
Honorable Authorities,
Faculty and Students of Strathmore
University.
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I feel honored and especially happy to be here participating with you in the Graduation Ceremony of Strathmore University. God granted me the grace of witnessing, at a very close range and over so many years, the development of Strathmore since it began.

When St. Josemaría Escrivá accepted, back in 1957, the invitation of Archbishop Gastone Mojaisky Perelli, then Apostolic Delegate resident in Mombasa, to start a university school in Nairobi, he was really responding to the universal scope that God had given Opus Dei from its inception.

The Work that God asked of St. Josemaría, on that 2nd October, 1928, when he founded Opus Dei, had not come to satisfy a particular need of the Church in any specific country or any historical moment. God wanted it to have, from the start, a universal, Catholic heart. He understood from the outset that the task of the faithful who were to

come to the Work—the vast majority of them lay people, men and women, of all social strata, and occupations, without any discrimination—was to place Christ at the summit of all human activities and professions, being themselves present in all the noble human endeavours, each one in his or her profession or place in life, the place where they were when Our Lord called them to His Work.

St. Josemaría was inspired by the spirit that Christ gave his disciples—go out to all nations. The Gospel was a message that affected not only the lives of the first Twelve, but was to be transmitted to the whole world. And he continuously manifested this universal spirit with deeds that were, at the same time, a declaration of his love for the Pope and the Holy Catholic Church.

It is a particularly happy coincidence, in which we see once again God's providential care for us, that we are holding this Graduation Ceremony precisely on the 48th anniversary of the arrival in Kenya of the first faithful of the Work. It actually happened in a historical period for Africa and for Kenya in particular. Full independence was only five years away and the country had a multi-ethnic transitional government in place. St. Josemaría was open to founding a university provided that the government gave a guarantee concerning its independence and autonomy.

However, it soon became clear that the project of establishing an institution of university level, open to students of all races, had to be modified. It was the founder himself who suggested establishing instead an "institute of higher learning" and a students' residence. And so, it was that Strathmore College began as an "A" Level College, a new type of special two-year school to serve as a bridge between secondary education and the university. The College would observe the secularity of Opus Dei, and adhere to four general guidelines: It would be interracial; it would be open to non-Catholic and non-Christians; it would not be classified as a mission school; and students had to pay at least a token amount.

The civil authorities were skeptical about the prospects of a college open to students of every race, tribe and religion. It was the first such experiment in East Africa. From the outset, nevertheless, it admitted Africans, Europeans and Indians; adherents of all religions, and members of different tribes. This reflected a guiding principle supplied by the founder of Opus Dei. The College adopted the emblematic motto "*Ut omnes unum sint*," "That all may be one." The original College, as you all probably know, developed afterwards like any other healthy organism, into The Strathmore University as we see it today, remaining always faithful to its Christian roots and its foundational spirit.

Acting on this newly opened avenue, the women of the Work established Kianda College, which contributed so much to the social ad-

vancement of women since its inception. In time it diversified giving rise to what was to become one of the best Secondary Schools in the Country.

It has been a very special grace the one God has granted me all along, in allowing me to witness this unique chain of events, this breaking of new ground, side by side with St. Josemaría and his first Successor, the servant of God, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. With joy, St. Josemaría would explain that Strathmore University arose after many years of prayer and hard work. He certainly did pray constantly for you and for your work. He prayed for all those who would come in the future, because he had his heart in the University. I want to say a special thank-you, asante sana kabisa!!, to all the men, women and institutions that have made possible the success of this enterprise.

Strathmore University not only pursues the highest level of academic excellence, but in keeping with the intention and spirit of its founder, it aims at providing an integral formation, one that focuses also on the human, moral and spiritual facets of every individual person. This all-encompassing approach is put into practice in the lives of all those who are, in one capacity or another, associated with the University. As St. Josemaría used to say, of a hundred souls, we are interested in the hundred.

Quoting the late Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, allow me to recall that "the university is a place of intense work, where scientific developments,

technical advances, and new ideas decisively influence the configuration of human society. This effort results in true progress when it respects and loves the nature and dignity of the human person, called to live in unity with all men and women and to journey toward God."

For this reason St. Josemaría drew attention to the fact that the effectiveness of a university Centre is due to a great extent to the dedication, the noble desires and efforts of all those who collaborate in the ordinary activities of the academic community: the faculty, the students, and all members of the staff, whether they work in administrative or any other specific job. For him there were no jobs of greater or lesser importance. The importance of a particular line of work depended on the love of God with which it is performed by the person concerned.

Allow me to call to mind some of the recommendations that he gave all those who play a role in the life of this University: Do everything with love of God and neighbour, and you will see that this family of the university will become like a leavening that makes the life of all people more wholesome. We have to act in such way that all may be able to say: this person is a Christian because he does not hate anyone, because he knows how to understand others, because he is not a fanatic, because he is the master of his own natural instincts, because he has feelings of peace, because he loves all without distinction.

With this perspective of human fraternity before our eyes, all those

who are part of the academic body are incorporated into a family, a ferment that influences in a powerful and positive manner the whole university environment itself, where personal freedom and responsibility are practiced along with a spirit of coexistence without discrimination of any type.

St. Josemaría used to tell us that there is no University in the strict sense in Schools where, along with the transmission of knowledge, a comprehensive formation of the young personality is lacking. It is not enough to provide the students with the necessary human, scientific and professional formation. This seems more than enough, but it is little when one looks at the university goals from a Christian point of view. It is necessary, therefore, to put into practice the constant teaching of our founder, namely, to renew the soul under the light of the Christian principles, and the need to make one's behavior consistent with those principles.

Those here present share this appreciation for university work. Precisely because I know your enthusiasm for your work, let me urge you to foster an even greater sense of responsibility in your tasks. The country and the world are in need of the example of your research and your teaching, which will encourage many others to undertake the effort to bring the truth to light, thus contributing to solve the great problems of our society and our times.

Nairobi, 25th August, 2006.