

that assumes there is only one legitimate option for members of Opus Dei. Loving freedom means loving pluralism.

In the media you mention, there are hypotheses and conspiracy theories that mention people by name who, nevertheless, are not members of Opus Dei. I'm sure they all are fine Catholics, but [these outlets] simply manipulate the truth to try to involve an institution of the Church in political matters.

At the same time, I would like there to be a better understanding of the laity's freedom in political, social, and cultural matters. In public matters, every Christian has the responsibility to form their conscience according to the social doctrine of the Church, to know well the proposals of the party candidates, to reflect on the best option for the common good, and to decide freely. This is why the work of spiritual accompaniment in Opus Dei avoids interfering with their legitimate earthly options. Respecting the autonomy of a layperson (whether part of Opus Dei or not) who participates in politics is a key point: their rights and wrongs are their own responsibility, not that of the Church. To ascribe to Opus Dei or to the Church as a whole, the cultural, political, economic, or social initiatives of the faithful is clericalism.

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## Speeches

### On the Christian Enrichment of Educational Institutions, Universidad de los Andes, Santiago de Chile (July 26, 2024)

#### *Introduction*

I will speak about a topic that you are very familiar with: the Christian identity of the university. Of course, the concept of Christian identity is a broad concept, with diverse manifestations. But all of them are of great im-

portance, not only, so to speak, because they are Christian, but especially insofar as they refer to the university.

The first idea that I think it is good to remind you of, although you are no doubt already familiar with it, is that this union between the university and Christianity is not an artificial union. It is enough to remember that universities were born historically from Christianity. All of them, because deep down, the desire to know, the desire to deepen our knowledge of the world, of people, of reality, is in the end Christian. This desire is not only Christian, but it is deeply so; and it leads naturally, when it develops for fully, to the knowledge of God.

Thus the Christian dimension has a privileged position in human knowledge and, for this very reason, in university knowledge.

#### *Personal Christian identity*

To begin our reflections on this topic, I suggest thinking about the Christian identity of the university as a corporation, as an institution; but at the same time thinking about the personal Christian identity of those who work in the university. This institutional identity will be reflected, as we will briefly recall, in a series of organizational measures that, if they were not informed by the Christian identity of the persons there, would remain artificial and ineffective. For in the end, the primacy of the person is always the most important reality.

This does not mean that everyone in the university has to be a Christian. But it does mean that, for the institution to have a Christian inspiration, at least a nucleus of personal Christian life is needed to enliven the Christian organizational structure – a nucleus of Christian life without which the institutional structure would remain, in the end, quite dead.

Thus a personal Christian presence is needed and, at the same time, a Christian openness towards those who, without being Christians, or as non-practicing Christians, cooperate with their work in the university. In this sense, the Christian university is also open to non-Christians, thanks to the Christian institutional identity based on the personal reality of the Christians who give it life.

This personal Christian identity is necessary for many people, as a nucleus that radiates a Christian sense of life, and has a multitude of aspects. It can be seen as the Christian life of each person, which leads to identification with Christ. Identifying ourselves with Christ has an enormous richness, because it leads to human fullness: Christ, perfect God, is the perfect man.

As far as a university is concerned, we could look at some dimensions of the human fullness that Christianity implies. Christ as perfect man, most especially, is seen in self-giving to others. That is to say, the personal Christian dimension entails, in the university as in any other place, authentic self-giving to others, service to others.

Service and concern for others also has a dimension that is projected onto the institutional level, and that forms part (let us call it that) of the spirit of the institution. That is to say, it is part of the atmosphere, of the spirit in which the activities are carried out; it is a Christian spirit precisely because of the dimension of self-giving to others, of service, of concern for others, of the struggle against individualism.

The university is the *universitas studiorum* according to the classical notion. Cardinal Ratzinger said that the concept of a university is the opposite of simply adding on degrees or institutes, because it requires a true unity, which comes from the concern for one another. Enclosing oneself in one's own concerns does not reflect the spirit of a true university; nor being concerned only about one's own institute or faculty, since at different levels collaboration is always required, a feeling of being part of the unity that a true university spirit entails, a positive interest in working with others, an openness to others.

Sometimes it is easy to think that one's own research has little to do with others, because it is so specialized. One could say, "How is my field related to engineering or philosophy?" Actually, it is always closely linked, especially in what refers to persons, who are always closely related to one another.

### *Institutional Christian identity*

We will look now at some specific aspects of institutional Christian identity. One of these aspects is striving for professional excellence, which undoubtedly depends on each person, but is also a characteristic of the institution as such. That is to say, the effort for professional excellence depends on

the training of each person, of each professor, but also of each employee in non-academic tasks, in what corresponds to them.

### *Professional excellence*

What does professional excellence have to do with Christianity? I have already mentioned this in a more general context: Christ is perfect man and perfect God, and therefore the Christian dimension demands professional excellence, which is not simply a human question of excellence, of human virtues, of human quality; it is also a Christian reality. St. Josemaría so often preached the call to sanctify work, which implies as a necessary requirement love of work well done. For the supernatural – the Christian – and the human are not two separate spheres. The Christian is the human elevated to the divine order, to the supernatural order.

Therefore, a requirement for Christian identity is the human perfection of a job well done. There would be no Christian identity without a positive effort to achieve professional excellence.

### *Primacy of the person*

Another perhaps less obvious aspect of the university is the primacy of the person. In a university it may seem that the primacy corresponds to the whole, to the assurance that everything works well. But no: the primacy belongs to the person. Always to the person.

Perhaps you remember the classic saying (which can be understood properly and can also be misunderstood) that the individual has priority over the species, over the whole, in the case of mankind. The individual is worth more than the whole of humanity. It seems an absurd statement, but it has a true meaning. Because what is really of value is each person, and the whole is of value because it is made up of persons, one by one. Each person added together is the great value of humanity. And this has universal practical consequences; for example, that you cannot kill an innocent person to save the whole. Someone might say: “If I can save the lives of a thousand persons by killing one, it is worthwhile.” But no, we cannot kill one person to save many.

How does this apply to the university world? The same as in all human spheres: we have to take care of each and every person. Professors have to be aware, as far as possible, of the value of each student. Each person must be

taken care of. And this is true at all levels of university activity. What is most valuable is each person, unique and unrepeatable, and caring for each person is how the whole is truly cared for. In this way, the university community is built up more solidly.

### *The institutional presence of the Church*

The Christian identity of the university also presupposes the “institutional” presence of the Church. That is to say, there has to be a priestly presence in some way, with chaplains who care for those who freely desire it. This is something that is offered, not imposed. It is also good, as far as possible, and to some extent it always is, to try to ensure that the chaplaincy is not a world set apart. It could happen that on one side there is the university academic world, and set apart are a few priests for whoever wants to come to them. If there is no other choice, it will be done this way, but as far as possible it is better that the chaplaincy also has a university function properly speaking. That is to say, that there be classes of Christian doctrine, theology, Christian anthropology, and that the chaplaincy has not only a task of pastoral care, but can also offer an academic dimension of the Christian faith, with classes of one kind or another.

### *Harmony between faith and reason*

Another aspect of institutional Christian identity is what we could call the harmony between faith and reason in every area of teaching.

This harmony is a very broad concept. For example, a mathematician might say: “What does the harmony between faith and reason have to do with my subject matter?” Faith is a light that illuminates everything we do. That person may say: “Faith doesn’t tell me how to solve mathematical problems.” And that is true. But faith also influences the attitude with which mathematics is approached. And mathematics, like any other subject, is also a manifestation of the divine Intellect.

All that is rational in the world proceeds from the mind of God. Not that a teacher, every time he or she explains a theorem, has to emphasize its relation to the mind of God the Creator. But if the teaching of mathematics is deeply incorporated into the intellect of a person with faith, the awareness will arise in a natural and spontaneous way that God is in all creation, and it is He who sustains reality itself. This is where the capacity that we all have to

present things in one way or another comes into play. There will be people with more imagination, who will be able to shed light on a matter in a more accessible way. The fact that the presence of God illuminates all the sciences is a reality that is not always easy to make present, but it can be present as a concern, as a desired goal, and at least we would like to be able to explain it. There are subjects that lend themselves very well to this effort, while in others this transcendental dimension is more difficult to highlight.

I recall now a prestigious professor of mathematics who transmitted an atheistic vision of the world through mathematics. So in the opposite sense, a Christian vision of the world can also be transmitted, even through mathematics. How? Let the mathematicians consider how to do it. In short, the Christian dimension may be much more present than we might imagine, as are, unfortunately, other viewpoints such as those of Marxism or positivism. I don't know if this is true in this country. But in many places it is, in many fields of knowledge. Christianity can and must also be present, without forcing things in any way, because all creation is sustained by the power of God. It is always possible to set forth a Christian vision at all levels of knowledge.

Certainly, there are complex academic questions, such as those raised by biology, especially when the dignity of the human person is involved. It is there that the vision of faith has much to say. There are borderline issues in which prudence needs to be exercised and, if necessary, advice sought, especially in biomedical questions and medical ethics, and in other related topics.

### *Freedom*

Another essential reality in university life is freedom. Love for freedom is characteristic of the Christian spirit. Many of you remember St. Josemaría telling us that this was part of the human legacy he wanted to leave for his children in the Work: love for freedom.

Love for freedom is of great importance in the university precisely because it is an essentially Christian virtue. In this sense, we need to respect everything that is open to opinion, not only as though we had no choice but to do so, but as a positive richness, so as never to impose as a truth or necessity what is not such.

Certainly there are many things open to opinion that one can defend strongly, because one is convinced of their truth, as in scientific, social and

cultural matters. Teachers explain ideas open to opinion from the perspective of their own academic field; they can defend them with ardor, but always respecting the limit of what is neither evident nor absolutely necessary, that is to say, respecting the freedom to think and express contrary options. Sometimes this may not seem easy to do. But if one respects the freedom of the students, it is easy to strongly defend ideas open to opinion of which one is convinced, but making clear that this is one's own opinion.

The freedom to live and act within the university must also be respected, that is to say, fostering an atmosphere of freedom. Of course, this will be done in the light of guidelines that students and professors, even those who are not Christians, must respect: certain bedrock ideas, certain principles, written or not, that constitute the essential identity of the institution.

In every human society there are a minimum of rules that must be followed. It is also important to teach people that freedom is not at odds with rules and obligations. We all have obligations, whether we want to or not. For example, we have an obligation to respect traffic laws: we have to stop at a red light. Life is full of rules, and the university is no exception. They are rules of coexistence, of good functioning, of good manners, etc., both for teachers and students, for directors and administrators, because otherwise life would be chaotic.

But the important thing is to live with freedom. And not only in what we are not obliged to do, but also to live freely what is obligatory. This is the key to being free: to teach people how to live freely what is obligatory. And is this possible? Yes it is possible, and deep down it is necessary for human fulfillment, because otherwise we would always feel constrained by rules and laws of all kinds.

In everything that is obligatory in the university for its proper functioning, both professors and students have to accept these things and live them freely.

And how is it possible to live freely what is obligatory? It is easy to say this, but it requires a real effort. It is possible to live freely what is obligatory if one does so out of love, because love is the force of freedom. To such an extent that, in a way, love is identified with freedom. And can we love what is obligatory? We can love it. It is evident that we can love what is obligatory,

and we can love it when we see the good that it brings about. Because what we love is the good. And when we discover the good of obeying the red light, a good that is worthy of love, we stop freely. And so with everything. We must see the good of the norm in order to love the norm; and by loving the norm, we are free. This must be taught, transmitted, lived: transmitting it, first of all, to the teachers, and also to the students. We need to teach people that we are free also when we obey.

Freedom is a deeply Christian good. Even Hegel recognized this when he said that freedom is Christian from its origin. For it is Christianity that brought true freedom to the world. Before Christianity there was no true freedom. But this too is open to opinion.

### *Authority as service*

Another important and truly Christian aspect is the sense of authority as service. True authority at all levels, when it is well lived, is exercised as an authentic service. And this fact has an important dimension, which is that university positions (rectors, deans, department directors, etc.), besides having a limited term, are a service and are exercised as a service. And hence one leaves them with the same availability with which one took them up.

For a professor to want to be a dean forever would not be something appropriate, since this service takes time away from one's own work, which is research and teaching. One may have to dedicate time to being the rector, to being the dean, to being the department director, because there is no other choice. One does it with pleasure, but what one would most like to do is one's own research, teaching, publications, academics in short. A rector is essential, as are deans, but these are simply services, and they must be understood as such. Thank God, this is the case, and that's why the changes in appointments are accepted quite naturally. People say: "thank God I am no longer dean, because now I can dedicate myself to what interests me the most." But up to then one has put one's whole heart and effort into being rector, dean or whatever is required.

### *Collegiality*

Collegiality in university governance is another relevant aspect. What does this have to do with the university's Christian identity? It has a lot to do with it, because collegiality in the government of the university, which in



practice can take place in quite different ways, through one system or another, is what prevents tyranny. Whoever is in charge, whether of the entire university, a department or an institute, cannot be a tyrant who makes decisions on their own exclusive account.

St. Josemaría, referring to the Work in general, but then applying it to all the apostolic endeavors in which the Work provides a spiritual impetus, said: “I have killed any tyrant as a traitor; I don’t allow tyrants or dictators.” There are none in the Work, nor are there any in this university, of course, thank God. We should be thankful that authority is never tyrannical here. And there will be different ways of living collegiality, that is, of counting on the opinion of others: that it is never just one person who makes the decisions. Even if, for reasons of efficiency, one has to decide personally, there must always be a consensus, one must always listen to others. Knowing how to listen. Listening is not only the physical act of hearing; you have to really hear what others think. And not just hearing: we must listen, pay attention, be willing to learn from what others tell us.

### *Justice*

Another very important aspect is justice. Christian identity also demands, as part of human fulfillment, the virtue of justice, which in turn is elevated by charity. Justice is manifested in dealing with people, in concern for people, and in the struggle against personal selfishness. And it must also have institutional dimensions. Something that might seem secondary but is not: salaries, what people are paid. There must be justice: salaries must be proportionate to the work being done. Sometimes we do not have enough means, and expenses have to be cut, yes; but expenses are cut at all levels, when necessary. We must always strive for true distributive justice in this matter.

But justice is not enough, even if it is necessary; there must also be charity. There may be times when justice is painful: for example, when someone has to be fired or told that their contract is not being renewed. As in any human institution, these things can happen. Then justice and charity, both, must be practiced.

We have to care for those who have to be dismissed when there is no other choice. This needs to be done, as far as possible, with the utmost gentleness, because of the Christian spirit, the Christian identity of the university.

We cannot treat anyone badly if we want to be Christians, even if sometimes painful decisions have to be made. Painful decisions can always be made while sowing affection, the charity that is affection: this is also respecting the primacy of the person, of which we spoke earlier in another context.

### *The public dimension of Christian identity*

Finally, Christian identity must have a public dimension, not confessional in this specific case, but public: the personal and institutional aspects of such a public entity as a university, in terms of its Christian identity, will have some public manifestations. This has to be noticed, for example, in the brochures that are distributed. In some way it has to be perceived in the publications and public activities that take place in the university. If a symposium is held, for example on some aspect of mathematics, there doesn't necessarily have to be an explicit statement of Christianity; but in one way or another, in many of its activities the Christian identity will emerge spontaneously.

On each of these points, as is easy to see, much more could be said. But these are things that on the one hand you already know, and, thanks be to God, that you practice. But it is good to always keep in mind that we are Christians. And from those in the university who are not Christians, we demand a minimum of respect; and above all we treat them, their way of being and their way of thinking, with respect.

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## **Messages**

### Message of July 15, 2024

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

As I mentioned, at the end of last month the second meeting of experts from the Holy See and the Work took place, to study (as the Pope asked us) possible changes to the Statutes of the Prelature. The next meeting is sched-