



The Holy See

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VISIT TO THE PONTIFICAL CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF CHILE

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Wednesday, 17 January 2018

[Multimedia]

*Grand Chancellor, Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati,
My Brothers Bishops,
President Dr Ignacio Sánchez,
Distinguished University Authorities,
Dear Professors, Administrators, University Personnel,
Dear Students,*

I am happy to be here with you at this House of Studies, which in its 130 years of life has rendered a priceless service to the country. I thank the President for his words of welcome on behalf of all, and for everything you do with such wisdom to administer the University and defend courageously the identity of the Catholic University. Thank you.

The history of this university is in some sense woven into the history of Chile. Thousands of men and women who were educated here have made significant contributions to the development of the nation. I would like especially to mention Saint Albert Hurtado, who began his studies here a century ago. His life is a clear testimony to how intelligence, academic excellence and professionalism, when joined to faith, justice and charity, far from weakening, attain a prophetic

power capable of opening horizons and pointing the way, especially for those on the margins of society, particularly in our day where a throwaway culture prevails.

In this regard, I would like to take up your words, dear President, when you said: “We have important challenges for our country that have to do with *peaceful coexistence as a nation* and the ability to *progress as a community*”.

Peaceful coexistence as a nation

To speak of challenges is to acknowledge that situations have reached the point where they need to be rethought. What was hitherto an element of unity and cohesion now calls for new responses. The accelerated pace and a sense of disorientation before new processes and changes in our societies call for a serene but urgent reflection that is neither naïve nor utopian, much less arbitrary. This has nothing to do with curbing the growth of knowledge, but rather with making the University a privileged space for “putting into practice the grammar of dialogue, which shapes encounter”.^[1] For “true wisdom [is] the fruit of reflection, dialogue and generous encounter between persons”.^[2]

Peaceful coexistence as a nation is possible, not least to the extent that we can generate educational processes that are also transformative, inclusive and meant to favour such coexistence. Educating for peaceful coexistence does not mean simply attaching values to the work of education, but rather establishing a dynamic of coexistence within the very system of education itself. It is not so much a question of content but of teaching how to think and reason in an integrated way. What was traditionally called *forma mentis*.

To achieve this, it is necessary to develop an “integrating literacy” capable of encompassing the processes of change now taking place in our societies.

This literacy process requires working simultaneously to integrate the different languages that constitute us as persons. That is to say, an education (literacy) that integrates and harmonizes intellect, affections and hands, that is to say, head, heart and action. This will offer students a growth that is harmonious not only at the personal level, but also at the level of society. We urgently need to create spaces where fragmentation is not the guiding principle, even for thinking. To do this, it is necessary to teach how to reflect on what we are feeling and doing; to feel what we are thinking and doing; to do what we are thinking and feeling. An interplay of capacities at the service of the person and society.

Literacy, based on the integration of the distinct languages that shape us, will engage students in their own educational process, a process that will prepare them to face the challenges of the near future. The “divorce” of fields of learning from languages, and illiteracy with regard to integrating the distinct dimensions of life, bring only fragmentation and social breakdown.

In this “liquid” society^[3] or “society of lightness”,^[4] as various thinkers have termed it, those points of reference that people use to build themselves individually and socially are disappearing. It seems that the new meeting place of today is the “cloud”, which is characterized by instability since everything evaporates and thus loses consistency.

Such lack of consistency may be one of the reasons for the loss of a consciousness of the importance of public life, which requires a minimum ability to transcend private interests (living longer and better) in order to build upon foundations that reveal that crucial dimension of our life which is “us”. Without that consciousness, but especially without that feeling and consequently without that experience, it is very difficult to build the nation. As a result, the only thing that appears to be important and valid is what pertains to the individual, and all else becomes irrelevant. A culture of this sort has lost its memory, lost the bonds that support it and make its life possible. Without the “us” of a people, of a family and of a nation, but also the “us” of the future, of our children and of tomorrow, without the “us” of a city that transcends “me” and is richer than individual interests, life will be not only increasingly fragmented, but also more conflictual and violent.

The university, in this context, is challenged to generate within its own precincts new processes that can overcome every fragmentation of knowledge and stimulate a true *universitas*.

Progressing as a community

Hence, the second key element for this House of Studies: the ability to progress as a community.

I was pleased to learn of the evangelizing outreach and the joyful vitality of your university chaplaincy, which is a sign of a young, lively Church that “goes forth”. The missions that take place each year in different parts of the country are an impressive and enriching reality. With these, you are able to broaden your outlook and encounter different situations that, along with regular events, keep you on the move. “Missionaries”, in the etymological sense of the word, are never equal to the mission; they learn to be sensitive to God’s pace through their encounter with all sorts of people who they either did not know, did not have daily contact with or were at a distance.

Such experiences cannot remain isolated from the life of the university. The classic methods of research are experiencing certain limits, more so when it is a question of a culture such as ours, which stimulates direct and immediate participation by all. Present-day culture demands new forms that are more inclusive of all those who make up social and hence educational realities. We see, then, the importance of broadening the concept of the educating community.

The challenge for the community is to not isolate itself from modes of knowledge, or, for that matter, to develop a body of knowledge with minimal concern about those for whom it is intended.

It is vital that the acquisition of knowledge lead to an interplay between the university classroom and the wisdom of the peoples who make up this richly blessed land. That wisdom is full of intuitions and perceptions that cannot be overlooked when we think of Chile. An enriching synergy will thus come about between scientific rigour and popular insight; the close interplay of these two parts will prevent a divorce between reason and action, between thinking and feeling, between knowing and living, between profession and service. Knowledge must always sense that it is at the service of life, and must confront it directly in order to keep progressing. Hence, the educational community cannot be reduced to classrooms and libraries but must progress continually towards participation. This dialogue can only take place on the basis of an *episteme* capable of “thinking in the plural”, that is, conscious of the interdisciplinary and interdependent nature of learning. “In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed”.^[5]

The educational community can enjoy an endless number of possibilities and potentialities if it allows itself to be enriched and challenged by all who are part of the educational enterprise. This requires an increased concern for quality and integration. For the service that the university offers must always aim for quality and excellence in the service of national coexistence. We could say that the university becomes a laboratory for the future of the country, insofar as it succeeds in embodying the life and progress of the people, and can overcome every antagonistic and elitist approach to learning.

An ancient cabalistic tradition says that evil originates in the rift produced in the human being by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Knowledge thus gained the upper hand over creation, subjecting it to its own designs and desires.^[6] This will always be a subtle temptation in every academic setting: to reduce creation to certain interpretative models that deprive it of the very Mystery that has moved whole generations to seek what is just, good, beautiful and true. Whenever a “professor”, by virtue of his wisdom, becomes a “teacher”, he is then truly capable of awakening wonderment in our students. Wonderment at the world and at an entire universe waiting to be discovered!

In our day, the mission entrusted to you is prophetic. You are challenged to generate processes that enlighten contemporary culture by proposing a renewed humanism that eschews any form of reductionism. This prophetic role demanded of us prompts us to seek out ever new spaces for dialogue rather than confrontation, spaces of encounter rather than division, paths of friendly disagreement that allow for respectful differences between persons joined in a sincere effort to advance as a community towards a renewed national coexistence.

If you ask for this, I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit will guide your steps, so that this House will continue to bear fruit for the good of the Chilean people and for the glory of God.

I thank you once again for this meeting, and please I ask you to remember to pray for me.

[1] *Address to the Plenary of the Congregation for Catholic Education* (9 February 2017).

[2] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, 47.

[3] Cf. ZYGMUNT BAUMAN, *Modernidad líquida*, 1999.

[4] Cf. GILLES LIPOVETSKY, *De la ligereza*, 2016.

[5] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, 146.

[6] Cf. GERSHOM SCHOLEM, *La mystique juive*, Paris, 1985, 86.