

Fr. Arturo Sosa, S.J.  
Address to the University of Zagreb  
March 21, 2019

Mr. Prime Minister,  
Distinguished representatives of state and local government,  
Magnificence, Mr Rector,  
Honourable Members of the Senate and representatives of university authorities,  
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for welcoming me to your university, the oldest in south-eastern Europe, during the year in which we celebrate its 350th anniversary. I feel more like a family member than a guest. After all, I am here as Chancellor of the Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Sciences, which is part of the University of Zagreb.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the state authorities (prime minister, ministers ...), particularly the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and the Rector and Senate of the University of Zagreb. Their leadership made it possible for the Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Sciences, led by Jesuits, to return in 2016 to the University that was founded by Jesuits.

This event is particularly significant in our time, which is marked by the tension between secularism and religious and ideological fundamentalisms. In this moment the Catholic presence in the university takes on a new meaning.

By its very nature, the University is a pluralistic space wherein we find the conditions for dialogue and understanding of historical, personal and intellectual processes. It is a privileged space for exercising human freedom. It is a space of cooperation and exchange that does not exclude anyone and, at the same time, crosses all barriers.

By reintroducing into its structures the Jesuit Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Sciences, precisely at this time, the University of Zagreb showed its openness to pluralism in its own environment, where dialogue and cooperation in the search for truth are possible in full freedom.

## **Why do we Jesuits want to participate in university life?**

The links between the Society of Jesus and the university world date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the time when Ignatius Loyola and his first companions met at the University of Paris. One could say that the Society of Jesus was conceived in a university environment, although not originally in order to found universities. During the first years of the Society, Ignatius willingly sent young Jesuits to existing universities such as Coimbra and Padua, Louvain and Cologne. However, before long the Society started to create its own educational structures, which later became universities. Ignatius realized the great apostolic potential of education and did not hesitate to rank it above other “ordinary services”, bringing greater glory and service to God and, at the same time, promoting the more universal good. Ignatius inaugurated his commitment to higher education because the good that could be achieved through educational structures was more “universal”.

Ignatius and the first Jesuits saw in the letters and sciences a way to serve people and show the path to God. This vision of faith has never contradicted the service of the universal good that engages all those involved in the search for truth, regardless of their faith or religion. Therefore, in the Jesuit academic tradition, which has shaped many universities all over the world, there is no incompatibility between the aims of all universities and the Christian and Ignatian inspiration that is specific to us.

The University is a community committed to the unceasing search for truth, critically recognizing the provisional nature of our formulations. This task is also very dear to the Christian faith and to us Jesuits. We always want to understand better the world in which we live, in order to serve the more universal good.

Contemplating the world around us, we witness the scandal of increasing levels of inequality that generate violence, forced migrations, racial discrimination, grinding poverty, authoritarianisms and populisms that make false promises of social redemption. Sadly, we also witness the impossibility of stopping the deterioration of the environment, due to a lack of responsibility in the care of our Common Home.

This vision represents an epistemological challenge for our scientific work, which seeks to shed light on our reality, to discover the roots of injustice and to propose alternatives for economic and social transformation. The vision should also inform our teaching. From this way of seeing, this stance vis-à-vis reality, we embody the preferential option for the poor, by which the university becomes *a project of social transformation* to generate a full life.

The university does not exist for itself, but for society and for its transformation for the better. When the university is conceived as project of social transformation, it moves towards the margins of human history, where it finds those who are discarded by the dominant structures and powers. Such a university opens its doors and windows to the margins of society, welcoming a new breath of life that makes the efforts of social transformation a source of vibrancy and fulfilment.

As we contemplate the world today, we must also look toward tomorrow. Involvement in the university, as we understand it in the Jesuit tradition, should have a creative capacity, which is demonstrated above all in its ability to anticipate its time, to be several steps ahead.

This is particularly important in an era of globalisation and rapid changes accelerated by the digital culture. The University is a privileged place to discern trends and the possible effects of different currents of globalization, to promote those that produce a full life. We must discern where globalization through the standardization of cultures can put multiculturalism at risk, and where on the contrary it is able to multiply multicultural spaces and promote opportunities for interculturality. The university also seems to provide a privileged place to explore the spiritual experience of religion as a dimension of cultures, encouraging the overcoming of fundamentalism.

Educating people for world citizenship – which opposes the tendency to create a monocultural global space – means recognising diversity as a constitutive dimension of a full human life. In this sense, the Society considers accompanying the formation of all young people, but especially those who decide to serve in politics, to be one of the greatest contributions we can make to improve the situation of human societies around the world.

### **What can the Society of Jesus bring to the University of Zagreb?**

Of course, the first contribution of the Jesuits working at this University should be humble, committed participation in the common search for truth of *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*.

I hope that the Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Sciences – rooted in the centuries-old tradition of the Society, which by its very nature is multinational – will be a particular promoter of cooperation. The commitment to transform the world today is not only local or regional, but also global. These are complex and interdependent processes. We all want to have the best possible impact on our world, not only at the level of our local communities, but also at regional and global level.

I hope that through its participation in Jesuit higher education networks around the world, the Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Sciences will be able to share with the University as a whole the richness that comes from such a wide range of collaborative opportunities.

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In the statement on the vision and mission of the University, which I found on your website, you can read the commitment that all university activities enhance the development of personality and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

**To conclude**, I encourage you to provide society with professionals and researchers who persevere on the path to full humanization, with a clear testimony of their commitment to the happiness in the gift of self to others and to the common good. May your university persevere and grow more and more as an institution that generates dynamisms of lasting development and, still more, capable of training professionals with techniques and attitudes that promote and save lives.