

Peace and progress start with education.

Youth / Virtues

Fuente: CNA

Speaking to Chilean university students and academics Wednesday, Pope Francis said Catholic educational institutions play a prophetic role in helping future generations tackle problems with an integrated, inclusive approach.

"In our day, the mission entrusted to you is prophetic," the Pope said Jan. 17 to a crowd of some 2,400 students and academics at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in Santiago. "You are challenged to generate processes that enlighten contemporary culture by proposing a renewed humanism that eschews every form of reductionism."

This prophetic role on the part of Catholic universities is a key motive in seeking out "ever new spaces for dialogue rather than confrontation," he said.

These spaces, he added, must be occasions "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."

The meeting marks the last event for the day, and is part of his Jan. 15-18 visit to Chile, after which he will visit Peru Jan. 18-21.

In his speech, the Pope said Chilean Saint Alberto Hurtado, SJ, who studied at the university, is a prime example of 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."

He then noted how the rector of the university, Dr Ignacio Sánchez, had said there are "important challenges" in Chile which deal with "peaceful coexistence as a nation and the ability to progress as a community."

On the topic of peaceful coexistence as a nation, Pope Francis said even speaking of challenges is a sign that certain situations "need to be rethought."

"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," he said.

Peace as a nation is possible to the extent that educational processes are transformative, inclusive, and favor coexistence, the Pope maintained.

This doesn't mean simply attaching values to educational work, but rather implies means "establishing a dynamic of coexistence internal to 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."

For this "mental formation" to happen, Francis said an "integrating literacy" is needed which can help students process the rapid changes happening in society.

This literacy, he said, must integrate know how to integrate and harmonize the various "languages" which "constitute us as persons": the "intellect (the head), affections (the heart) and activity (the hands)."

Following this approach will allow students to grow not only on a personal level, but also at the level of society, he said, which is important since "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."

The Pope noted the importance of the unity of knowledge against the fragmentation of fields, saying, "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."

He noted that in our "liquid" society, borrowing a phrase from the late Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, "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," he said.

The Pope said that “This 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,” he said.

“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.”

On progressing as a community, the Pope pointed to the university's chaplaincy program, which he said is a sign of “a young, lively Church that 'goes forth'.”

This same mentality has to be present in universities, he said, noting that classic forms of research are now “experiencing certain limits,” which means modern-day culture requires new forms that are more inclusive “of all those who make up social and hence educational realities.”

A great challenge for the university's community, then, “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.”

Rather, “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,” Francis said, adding that education has to extend beyond the classroom and to “be continually challenged to participation.”

Francis then pointed to the need for an education that emphasizes both quality and integration, saying the service that universities offer must always aim for excellence when it comes to national coexistence.

“In this way, 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.”

The Pope warned against a kind of knowledge that seeks to subject nature to its own “designs and desires,” citing a warning against this from the 20th century kabbalist Gershom Scholem. He said that “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” will “will always be a subtle temptation in every academic setting.”

“Whenever a 'professor', by virtue of his wisdom, becomes a 'teacher', he is then capable of awakening wonderment in our students,” Pope Francis said. “Wonderment at the world and at an entire universe waiting to be discovered!”

The mission entrusted to the university, then, is prophetic, he said, and closed his speech asking the Holy Spirit to guide the steps of everyone present, so that the university is able continue “to bear fruit for the good of the Chilean people and for the glory of God.”