

*Address by the Chancellor Delegate Msgr. Albert Pampillon at the Graduation Ceremony of Strathmore University, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2005*

Your Excellencies

Honourable Authorities

Illustrious Faculty of Strathmore University

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we are joyful witnesses to a new step in the life of Strathmore, witnesses to a dream that has come true. Saint Josemaria used to say “Dream and your dreams will fall short.”<sup>1</sup> Many graduation and prize-giving ceremonies have taken place before this one. However, in today’s we enjoy the privilege of awarding university degrees for the first time. We give thanks to God for what has been accomplished since the Founder of Opus Dei dreamt about this university for the first time almost half-a-century ago. He was then dreaming about his children setting up a faculty of engineering as the first step to what should have developed into a full university.<sup>2</sup> In her short history, Strathmore, like any other living institution, has developed in an organic manner, in an orderly fashion. Gradually and faithful to her Christian roots Strathmore University—an impossible dream in 1957—has now become a reality. So much has been done and at the same time so much has still to be done.

The story life of Strathmore has been guided—and will be hopefully guided—by a **constant and consistent growth**. Benedict XVI, then Cardinal Ratzinger, wrote that “a body remains identical precisely by being continually renewed in the process of living.”<sup>3</sup> Actually, “genuine identity with the origin is only to be found where there is also the living continuity that develops in and thus preserves it.”<sup>4</sup>

The life of a university is an ongoing process of development—new areas of research unfold, new teaching methods are applied and new people keep on widening their scope of understanding. In planning the future we have to be keen on protecting at all times the true character of Strathmore University, what we might dare call the institutional Christian identity of Strathmore University.

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<sup>1</sup> Salvador Bernal, *Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei* (Scepter 1977), p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Letter of St. Josemaría Escrivá to the Apostolic Delegate in Mombasa Msgr. Gastone Mojaiski (4<sup>th</sup> November 1957)* in Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *El Fundador del Opus Dei III* (Rialp 2003) p. 381-382.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (St Paul 1988) p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

The birth and growth of new faculties, schools and departments must be directed by that very same primeval spirit. Only then will many other dreams fall short and the never-ending development go on little by little—one step at a time—and without delay. The pace of expansion is always dictated on the one hand by the urgency of researching in every area of knowledge and on the other hand by the availability of human resources, of people able and ready to integrate within the University. That is why any new enterprise has to be born small. Saint Josemaría reminds us: “Don't forget that, on earth, every big thing has had a small beginning. What is born big is monstrous and dies.”<sup>5</sup>

What are the aspirations of a University? As part of his episcopal ministry John Paul II wanted “to remind scholars of their duty to serve the truth and thus to promote the common good”<sup>6</sup> with “the conviction that scholarship, in its many different manifestations, is a priceless treasure for a nation.”<sup>7</sup> Those two responsibilities of scholars and therefore of a University—**serving the truth and promoting the common good**—should be our guiding lights in the building up of society.

John Paul II also said that “the vocation of every university is the service of truth: to discover it and to transmit it to others.” This reflects the very vocation of man who is “called to discover the truth, ever more completely, about himself and about the world that surrounds him.”<sup>8</sup> Commenting on these words our Chancellor explained: “To affirm that the university exists to serve the truth, means to opt for a revolution that may appear slow, but which is, in the last resort, the only one that is effective and profound.”<sup>9</sup> You may want to know that Bishop Echevarría was speaking on that occasion as Chancellor of the University of Navarre at a ceremony of awarding honorary doctorates to three eminent scholars, Cardinal Ratzinger being one of them.

If serving the truth is revolutionary, a choice for a radical change, then embracing it is obviously a demanding task. Truthfulness and honesty are necessarily the enjoyable results of struggle and conditions for any lasting success. Only the truth makes anyone really free (cf. *Jn* 8:32). We have to fight decisively and play our role in setting up an upright social order and a lifestyle based on integrity. As Saint Josemaría put it: “Don't be afraid of the truth, even though the truth may mean your death.”<sup>10</sup> Addressing a gathering like today's he said: “The university knows that the required scientific objectivity justly rejects all ideological neutrality, all ambiguity, all conformism, all cowardice.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Way* 821

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way* (Paulines Africa 2004), p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Address: Jagellonian University of Krakow, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1997*, n.4.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop Javier Echevarría, *Address: University of Navarre, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1998*.

<sup>10</sup> *The Way* 34.

The love for truth commits the scientist's entire life and work and sustains the courage of his honesty in the face of potential uncomfortable situations, since this committed integrity is not always looked upon favourably by public opinion."<sup>11</sup>

Indeed a life at the service of truth is opposed nowadays by a number of attitudes. Among others we may underline **relativism and consumerism**, as the most widespread forces contesting love for the truth at the beginning of the twenty first century. Strathmore University has always shown particular interest in Ethics and in the ethical factor present in any subject. Both relativism and consumerism have to be addressed in the academic forum by putting them side by side with the truth about the human person and of the use of things.

By denying the existence of natural law and natural rights, relativism does not accept any objective reference for good and evil. Such relativism ends up in utter legal positivism that assigns to the human legislator the absolute power of determining what is good and what is evil at all levels. Regarding personal behaviour, relativism ends up considering pleasure and material profit the main—if not the only—reference for ethical standards.

In several occasions already, Pope Benedict XVI has expressed his concern for the damaging effects of relativism: "Today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of educating is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. And under the semblance of freedom it becomes a prison for each one, for it separates people from one another, locking each person into his or her own 'ego'."<sup>12</sup>

In fact, last year in a letter addressed to those working in universities, our Chancellor reminded us of the need to be "committed to finding, deepening and spreading the truth," and also be "stimulated by a healthy desire to collaborate in building up a body of knowledge that supersedes fragmentation and relativism."<sup>13</sup>

Consumerism—practical materialism—identifies *having* with *being*, enjoying the use of material goods with being good. In consumerist terms, wellbeing depends exclusively on what you have or you are able to have. A person is not better than others unless he is better off—has more—than others. Consumerism, certainly, breeds spiritual indifference and unsatisfying self-centeredness. Preparing the World Youth Day celebrated last week, John Paul II encouraged

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<sup>11</sup> St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Address: University of Navarre, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1974*.

<sup>12</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address: Rome, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2005*.

<sup>13</sup> Bishop Javier Echevarría, *Letter 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2004*.

young people to reject the seduction of wealth and consumerism which so frequently leave behind a tragic spiritual vacuum.<sup>14</sup>

“In the present context,”—wrote Bishop Echevarría—“one of the most dangerous enemies of holiness is a disordered eagerness to possess and enjoy earthly goods, with the consequent blindness for the things above, which is brought on by such attachment (Cf. *Col* 3:2). The goods of the earth then lose their condition of being a way towards heaven, becoming a hindrance instead.

This is the effect of the tendency towards consumerism, which is causing havoc among all kinds of people, not only in the wealthy countries (...) No doubt, circumstances of society, economics and culture alter with the passage of time and vary from place to place. That is why, as we mature in our spirit of discernment, we keep our eye on what is truly important, and reject the glitter produced by the deceptive glamour of a civilisation of well-being, which measures everything by economic and material standards.”<sup>15</sup>

Before ending these remarks, I wish to clarify a point or two on the nature and status of Strathmore University. Experience shows that at times a reference to institutional Christian identity allows for misunderstandings. Strathmore University is a **private university** owned by Strathmore Trustees. The Prelature of Opus Dei was asked by the Trustees, and agreed through a memorandum of understanding, to provide priestly attention and doctrinal guidance in order to guarantee the moral uprightness of the activities that take place in the University. Also for the sake of continuity and stability in the spiritual care and Christian orientation of Strathmore University, the Prelate of Opus Dei accepted—after being asked by the Trustees—to be the Chancellor as an honorary recognition of the role of the Prelature in the University. Therefore, Bishop Javier Echevarría does not have executive powers in the running of the University.

Consequently, Strathmore University is not and cannot be called a catholic university, since the latter term is reserved by the Catholic Church to undertakings that depend officially on the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In fact, the Code of Canon Law establishes that “no university, even if it is in fact catholic, may bear the title 'catholic university' except by the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority.”<sup>16</sup>

We pray that Strathmore University keeps on being not only at the service of the truth but also continues to show the greatest respect for freedom of consciences,

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Message for 2005 World Youth Day*, 5 (6<sup>th</sup> August 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Bishop Javier Echevarría, *Letter 28<sup>th</sup> November 2002*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Can. 808.

exercises authority as a service, cares for the family, trains people in community service and contributes to a just social order.

Thank you very much.

May God bless you all!

*Msgr. Albert Pampillon — Chancellor Delegate*

*Nairobi, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2005*