

## THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY AS A COMMUNITY OF WISDOM AND SERVICE

Address to the Sogang University Community, Seoul, South Korea

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I am very happy to be with you this afternoon. Some years ago, when I was still living and working in Japan, I had a sabbatical and spent almost a year here in Sogang University. I have good memories of my time here, and so it is a pleasure to return to you, as a former member of the Sogang University community! Many things have changed in the years since I was last here, but after more than fifty years of existence, Sogang continues to be an excellent, highly respected university in Korea and in Asia. I wish to congratulate and thank you for all your hard work and commitment, which have all made Sogang what it is today.

Most of you know that, since last year, we have a new Pope in Rome, who happens to be a Jesuit! Pope Francis has recently written an important document entitled *Evangelii Gaudium*: The Joy of the Gospel. Pope Francis himself radiates this joy, and this is surely one of the reasons why so many people have been flocking to Rome to see the new Pope. Vatican Radio tells us that over *6.6 million* people have attended events led by Pope Francis at the Vatican since his election less than a year ago in March 2013! People are attracted and even moved by the deep joy that they see in the Pope, as he kisses babies, embraces the sick, reaches out to the poor. He is not ashamed to pose for a “selfie” with teenagers visiting St. Peter’s or to carry a sheep on his shoulders when he visits a Roman parish, and always with a smile that is not artificial or for publicity purposes, but strikes one as sincere, spontaneous, and coming from a source deep within himself. And his joy is, in a way, the simple but deep message he wants to share with the world: that we human beings are created for joy, and that the Gospel gives us a wisdom that leads to deep and lasting joy.

I begin with joy, because I want to ask you to reflect on a question: Would you say that South Korea today is a joyful country; that Koreans in general, especially our young people, are happy people? Would you say that Sogang University is a happy university? Let me explain why I am asking these questions.

After the civil war in the 1950’s, South Korea was a poor country. Fr. John Sin, the Provincial of Korea told me that, at that time, so many babies died soon after childbirth, that parents often did not register their children for a birth certificate until those children reached the age of one. (This is what happened to Fr. Sin himself!) Thousands of Koreans left Korea to search for jobs in more prosperous countries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century: migrating to Japan, China, Russia; from 1965, to the United States; in the 1970’s, to West Germany and the Gulf countries.

How different the situation is today. When Korean Jesuits ride a taxi in Rome, the Italian taxi driver immediately shows off his Samsung phone. During the opening ceremony of our Magis program during the World Youth Day in Brazil last July, thousands of young pilgrims from all over the world danced to the No. 1 song in the world, the Korean “Gangnam Style.”

Instead of Koreans migrating to other countries, now Korea attracts migrant workers, from China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Bangladesh: in 2011, there were 590,000 migrant workers in Korea. In short, Korea has become, in a short span of time, one of the richest countries in the world, with a powerful global economic and cultural influence.

Korea has become an affluent country, but has it become a happy, joyful country? We read that Korea has become one of the world's leading exporters of cars and electronic goods; that its unemployment rates are among the lowest in the world; that South Korean students are among the best performing in the world. Yet, in a recent study, Korea is at the bottom of the list in one area: percentage of students who report being happy in school. Furthermore, all of you are already probably aware that South Korea now has been called "the suicide capital of the developed world," by some journalists. While most developed countries have reduced their suicide rates, in the past twenty years, Korea's suicide rate has increased, so that it is more than twice the rate of the United States, and more than double of the average of 34 other OECD countries. Academics, probably some among you, have studied the complex reasons for this sad reality, and I am sure many of you are deeply concerned about this development.

Why is it that an increase in wealth of Korea has not automatically meant an increase in the happiness of her people? Some studies would even argue that the new prosperity, which is partially the result of an aggressive competitiveness, might be partially responsible for what is happening. This is the context in which I wish to speak about the mission of Sogang University as a Jesuit University.

And my main message will be quite simple. *If Sogang University is a Jesuit and a Catholic University, then it must be, in a special way, a servant and a witness of the joy of the Gospel*—for its students, its faculty and staff, and for Korea and the world beyond. I am very aware that a university has a distinct identity; that is it not a parish or a seminary. But if a university is a Jesuit university, then, its teaching, research and outreach must somehow be linked to, aimed at spreading the joy of the Gospel—a joy that this suffering and violent world desperately needs. And Sogang can only do this if, besides being an excellent university according to the standards of the rating agencies, it is also and perhaps primarily a *community of wisdom and service*. I would like to say a few words on each of those three words: first, wisdom, next service, finally community.

## 1

First, a word about wisdom. It is interesting that in many languages, there are different words for "knowledge" and "wisdom." One can have much knowledge without possessing wisdom; in fact, one of the characteristics of our contemporary world is that we are flooded with knowledge, with instant information, easily accessible through all our modern means of communication—and yet, very few have wisdom. Similarly, most languages have different words for "intelligent" and "wise." We all know some people who are very intelligent, very bright, who may possess multiple doctorates—but who are not wise! What then is wisdom? What makes it different from knowledge?

I spoke about the joy of the Gospel, but in fact, when one looks at all the great religions of the world, for example Buddhism or Taoism, you might say that they are all about what one scholar called the “search for *unconditioned happiness*.” The world gives us all sorts of formulas for *conditioned* happiness: a happiness that depends on certain external conditions. I can only be happy IF I have the most fashionable clothes, the latest phone, a bigger salary. I can only be happy if I win these awards; if my scholarly articles get positive reviews; if I attain this position of power and prestige; if my university is recognized as the best university in the rankings.

The trouble with conditioned happiness is that it is dependent on constantly changing externals, so I can never *remain* happy. That is what consumerism exploits in us: the secret of consumerism is its power to create perpetual dissatisfaction in us. Even though I may have just acquired the newest gadget, the companies will, in a few months, create a new one to make me feel that what I have is not enough. And in order to get more, I need to compete more, to move higher than others, to put others down, to acquire more for myself. So my search for conditioned happiness ends up becoming a way of creating and increasing unhappiness in others.

By way of contrast, what the great religions offer is a path, a journey towards unconditioned happiness. And this path is what I would call wisdom. In different ways, the great religions teach us to see in depth, to see the truth beyond the many illusions and deceptive messages around us. They help us see what is truly most important, and to love and desire the things that will make us more deeply and joyfully human. Almost all of them invite us to a certain detachment, a certain inner freedom; and all of them seek to transform us, to move us from self-absorption into compassion, the valuing of others and not just myself, the desire to serve, to respond to the suffering of the world with kindness and healing. What the Christian Gospel offers, in addition, is the message that Wisdom is, in fact, a Person, and that joy comes from entering into friendship with Him who loves us infinitely and unconditionally.

The unhappiness in our world today is a result of the foolishness and in fact, the deceptions and lies that we constantly bombard with. The promises of conditioned happiness that seem so attractive to young people (and not just young people!), in the end, cannot deliver the real thing, and only end up making people unsatisfied, exhausted, empty, hopeless, angry and bitter.

A university like Sogang is a place where thousands of young people are prepared for their future lives. They are trained for and given knowledge for their future professions. Most universities are satisfied with what is, after all, a very worthy goal: to prepare the young well so that society can be served with excellent professionals, competent and successful businessmen, politicians, journalists, engineers, media practitioners, scientists, doctors, and so on. But if all we are transmitting to our students is knowledge and information; if we are not also transmitting, in some way, wisdom, or at least the seeds of wisdom, then we will be sending out into the world unhappy professionals who will sink the world deeper into its present unhappiness created by unbridled competition, greed, the hunger for power and position.

The transmission of wisdom is not an easy thing. It is easier, in some ways, to fill the minds of our young people with information and professional training. Handing on the wisdom that makes for true joy requires many different and mutually supportive strategies. For example,

certain disciplines like philosophy and theology, religious studies, literature and the humanities, are particularly helpful: what place do these disciplines have in the curriculum and training of our students, and what institutional support do these disciplines receive from the university?

But wisdom cannot be taught simply through the intellect. The transmission of wisdom requires personal accompaniment, patient journeying with our young people, what in the Ignatian tradition we call *cura personalis*, the personal care for each student. What are the ways in which our students are personally accompanied while they are part of the Sogang community; what offices and programs ensure that each young man or woman in Sogang is cared for and helped to grow in wisdom in and through the concreteness of his or her struggles? Furthermore, wisdom comes through practice, particularly, the practice of compassion and service. In what ways are we giving opportunities for our students to experience a world of need and suffering beyond the safe walls of the university, and for them to experience the deep joy of reaching out and making a difference for the good in the lives of others?

## 2

My first point was to emphasize that a Jesuit university is a place where wisdom, in addition to knowledge, is transmitted and promoted. I move now to the word *service*, since I have already begun to touch on this in my first point. And with this word, I would like to reflect a bit on *research* in a Jesuit university. I know you are aware that there are many contemporary debates as to whether a university should prioritize teaching or research. I will not enter into those debates, although I presume that teaching and research are not incompatible, and that one of the great values of universities is that they are places where, through deep study and research, the search for knowledge and truth is pursued and new knowledge is produced.

The question I simply wish to raise is this: who is served by this production of knowledge? The Society of Jesus has a unique term for the work of research, a term I believe should characterize the research of any Jesuit university. That term is "*learned ministry*". Both words are important. "Learned" means that a "rigorous exercise of the intellect is required": good research involves "learning and intelligence, imagination and ingenuity, solid studies and rigorous analysis." (GC 34). Thus far, any excellent university would agree. But the Society of Jesus adds the word "ministry," which comes from a Latin word that simply means "service." In other words, research is not simply for its own sake, or worse, for the sake of the glory of the researcher and his or her tenure, or for increasing the international ranking of a university! Research is in the service "of the faith, of the Church, of the human family and the created world that God wants to draw more and more into the realm of his Kingdom of life and love. It is always research that is aimed at making a difference in people's lives, rather than simply a recondite conversation among members of a closed elite group." (*Fr. General's address in Mexico*). Put more simply, perhaps we might say that research as ministry or service aims at contributing to an increase of joy and hope in our world, especially among the poor and suffering.

This service orientation of research, raises at least two concerns. First, what should the research agenda of the university be? Recognizing the diverse gifts and interests of its faculty, are there certain areas or fields of research that a Jesuit university should not neglect to study,

pursue and promote? For example, in his Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities entitled *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Blessed Pope John Paul II insisted that, “among its research activities,” a Catholic University should engage in and promote the “study of *serious contemporary problems* in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.” (No. 32) I’m sure you could add other urgent and important areas of research connected to serious contemporary challenges in Korea and Northeast Asia today.

A second area of concern is how research is shared and how the University promotes the transition from research to life, from study to action and advocacy. John Paul II, in the same document I quoted earlier, also said, “If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.” (No. 32) In other words, if research is a ministry, a service, then a Jesuit university should be concerned that the findings of its researchers not simply get buried in learned journals, but that somehow, in various ways, this knowledge is shared so that it makes a contribution to finding a solution to serious problems or concerns of a country or society.

One might then reflect: in what ways does scholarly research at Sogang make a positive and effective contribution, not only to more deeply understanding some of the serious challenges of Korea and Asia today, but also to finding solutions for those problems? How strongly does the University, as a Jesuit university, create and promote spaces for continuing discussion, sharing, dialogue and discernment among the members of the University community and with others in Korean society? How can the University, precisely as a community of learned scholars, help build a bridge between some of the ethical and moral concerns of the Church and the realities of Korean and Asian society?

### 3

Finally, I come to the word “community.” I have suggested that Sogang, as a Jesuit university, should be a place where wisdom is transmitted, and where research is a form of service to the world and to the Church. The final point I wish to develop is that, in order to hand on wisdom and render service credibly and effectively, Sogang University needs to be a community.

Perhaps the easiest way to understand the word “community” is to differentiate between a crowd and a community. What is a crowd? One might say that a crowd—a group of people waiting for the subway train; a line in a supermarket—is simply a group of people bound by time and space. They are people who happen to be together for a short period of time in the same place. They are there beside each other, but there is nothing more that binds than together beyond time and space.

A community, on the other hand, is a group of people, who may be separated physically, and yet remain united, because they are bound by common values and meanings, common hopes and dreams, and by mutual concern and responsibility. A family, like the families of many migrants here in Korea, might be divided geographically; but if husband and wife, children and siblings, somehow share the same values, the same dreams, and continue to be concerned for one another, they remain a community.

A community is as strong as the strength of its shared values and hopes. If people live and work side by side with one another, but do not care for one another, or are suspicious of one another, or do not trust one another; if they do not share a vision or a dream, then they are more a crowd than a community. This means that communities require constant care, constant communication and dialogue to remain strong. Communities that were once strong can become weak when people begin disagreeing openly or in hidden ways on fundamental values. On the other hand, communities can be rebuilt and renewed endlessly, when, through dialogue, openness, perhaps forgiveness, different points of view are reconciled, and a new common vision is discovered again.

The tragedy of our world, of course, is that there is so much unhappiness because more and more, communities are becoming crowds. Individualism, egoism, competition are driving once strong, supportive communities apart. People who are different in race and religion cannot live together. Differences in values between an older and a younger generation result in misunderstandings and conflicts. The strong force of competition means that we sometimes look at each other, not as fellow human beings, but as rivals, potential enemies we need to bring down so that we can move up. And I'm sure you are all too aware that universities are not spared these dynamics of division, isolation, intrigue and rivalry, perhaps even Sogang University.

That is why, in the recent 35<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, the Society insisted that, today, "community is mission." In a world of profound unhappiness because of war, enmity, and isolation, any effort to build community becomes a witness of the power of the Gospel to transform human relationships and bring peace. And, although GC 35 was speaking about Jesuit communities primarily, I believe that this phrase—community as mission—should apply also to Jesuit universities. We cannot pursue our mission of wisdom and service if we are not united as a community.

There is much to say on this theme, but I will simply suggest points that might be worth considering. First, community is built on *mutual trust and respect*, attitudes that are not automatic, but require, at least at the start, conscious decisions. At the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius writes: "It is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it as false." I am convinced that this is one of the most important principles for building any community: the willingness to begin with trust and respect for the other and his or her opinions, rather than with critique or suspicion. Communities cannot be built without this attitude. If we always begin looking for mistakes or suspecting hidden agendas on the part of others in our university, we will never be able to build a community.

Second, since what binds community together are shared values, meanings, and dreams, it follows that there must *constant, honest, and open conversation and dialogue* among all, if a community is to be kept alive. Occasions and opportunities have to be created to foster this interchange that fosters the creation of a common spirit. It is impossible to have complete agreement on all matters in a community, especially in a university where the members are so gifted intellectually that they always see other points of view. But if we are not able to speak honestly and listen receptively to each other; if we only have different interest and lobby groups coexisting without trusting and respectful dialogue, or worse, undermining each other, there can be no community.

Third, in a Jesuit university, part of community-building is the promotion and strengthening of *collaboration*. Today, the Society of Jesus does not “run” our institutions the way it may have done in the past when a Jesuit community was directly in charge of a school, providing leadership and governance. But this is not a loss or a negative reality. One of our happy rediscoveries in the Church and in the Society of Jesus is that the mission of God, the will of God to bring joy and hope to the world, goes far beyond Jesuits and even the Church, and is shared by many lay people and even those of other beliefs. Therefore, instead of being preoccupied with control, we should be thinking in terms of collaboration, working together with all who have a heart for the dream and mission of God.

We might therefore reflect: to what extent are there attitudes of mutual trust and respect in the University, and what can be done to strengthen these attitudes? What are the existing venues of conversation and dialogue on important matters in the University, and what can be done to develop more occasions and spaces, more courage to speak and more willingness to listen to each other? Finally, what can be done to foster collaboration, a common sense of and commitment to the mission of God and the joyful willingness to work with each other towards fulfilling that mission?

### **Conclusion**

Some concluding thoughts. Today, many writers and academics speak of a crisis in university education all over the world. Universities, some critics say, have become primarily market-driven, places where young people are simply trained to work, to earn well, to fill their place in the economy. Even research has become market-driven, serving only the needs of industry and business. Competition, the search for higher rankings, for the sake of even more economic gain, has become the driving force for some institutions. This cannot be, however, the spirit of a Jesuit university. A Jesuit university cannot aim to be the best solely according to the criteria of the ranking agencies or the market. A Jesuit University cannot simply follow the rules of the game set by others who do not share our values and our dream.

Today, there are over 200 institutions of higher education that identify themselves as “Jesuit” institutions. Sogang is part of this family, a sister of universities like the Gregorian in Rome, Georgetown in Washington, D.C., the Javeriana in Bogota, Sanata Dharma in Indonesia and Sophia in Tokyo. I hope my coming here today to Sogang helps in a small way to make you feel once again “at home” and joyful to be in this family of higher education institutions with a distinct character, mission and message.

I thought I would end with this thought. In a sense, the Society of Jesus began in a university. St. Ignatius Loyola, during his studies at the best university in the world at that time, the University of Paris, had two very different roommates: an ambitious, proud nobleman named Francis Xavier, and a shy, insecure son of peasants, Peter Faber. These three students and roommates, now all saints (including Peter Faber who was canonized by Pope Francis only last December 17!), were the first companions and friends in the Lord who later became the Society of Jesus. Xavier and Faber, who were already sharing lodgings, did not realize that when they welcomed the older Ignatius, their lives would be changed. Ignatius helped his new friends discover their truest and best selves, in their relationship with Christ. In this history of the first three companions, we see precisely what can happen in a university. Not only is the intellect trained, but, through friendships, hearts can be transformed, dreams reshaped, lives reoriented, and in the process, the world changed.

The transmission of wisdom along with knowledge; research in the service of a searching, suffering world; and life and work together as a community of respect, dialogue and collaboration: these are three wishes and hopes I shared with you for Sogang University as a Jesuit University. As I said at the start, I thank you for all you do to make Sogang the excellent university it is known by so many to be. May we continue to dream, celebrate and work together, so that, in this country and in our world, Sogang, as a community of service and wisdom, may also be a servant and witness of the joy of the Gospel for a Korea and an Asia that continue to search for true and lasting joy, for meaning and hope, for life in its fullness, for the greater glory of God.