

Education at Esade and the Spiritual Dimension within the Framework of Its Institutional Mission

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Preamble

- 1

“Esade is an independent, Christian-inspired, non-profit, university-level academic institution founded in Barcelona in 1958 at the initiative of a group of entrepreneurs and the Society of Jesus.” Since its founding, Esade’s educational proposal has considered the individual from a holistic perspective, originally, with a Christian formulation.
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Subsequently, in view of the social context and the great plurality that exists within the institution, the initial orientation was reformulated to transform Esade into a well-defined and shared academic project, in which different people – Christians, adherents of other faiths, and non-believers with diverse life positions – could contribute plurally and on an equal basis “in a context of intercultural dialogue.”
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Such a project calls for a shared anthropology that attributes to individuals the ability to cultivate their “human quality.” This quality can be considered linked to a “spiritual” or inner dimension of the individual and can be reasonably understood with or without a connection to transcendence.
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Today, this is an issue that should be explicitly addressed for various reasons, which necessitates an institutional position on the matter.
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Spirituality, especially in religious formulations, is an aspect of the experience of many millions of people and a factor in the shaping of social reality, both locally and internationally, that must be explicitly dealt with in order to understand our world and its evolution. Part of Esade’s vocation is “to encourage debate, with information and proposals concerning relevant and priority issues for society’s future,” i.e., those debates in which society’s human development is at stake. In accordance with this same vocation, Esade must analyze the spiritual aspect, encouraging academic debate that yields critical knowledge and contributes to the construction of a more humane society with “higher levels of justice and freedom.”

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Esade's evolution, including a significant internationalization process, has made possible an ever greater plurality of beliefs and life positions among its students, alumni, faculty, and staff. This fact is an asset and an opportunity, allowing us to be a place of coexistence where a culture of active respect and shared personal growth – rather than mere tolerance – is practiced, something that goes back to the very roots of the institution.

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Rigorous reflection on adult education and practice of the profession, in both the business and legal fields, confirms that a quality training proposal is unthinkable “without approaching the educational process from a global and holistic perspective” that considers the various dimensions of the individual and, ultimately, the development of individual human quality in the broadest sense.

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Given their sensitive nature and the need to respect individual beliefs and privacy, in addressing these issues, Esade cannot improvise its educational proposal, but must engage in explicit and transparent prior reflection.

Esade's Commitment to Its Mission and Raison d'Être

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The starting point for this document is Esade's mission and *raison d'être*, approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2003.

“Esade's mission is to promote teaching and research in the fields of business management and law, in order to contribute to the scientific, social, and personal education of highly professional individuals fully aware of their responsibility in the development of a society that promotes human dignity in accordance with humanistic and Christian traditions and in a context of intercultural dialogue.”

“As a university-level academic institution, Esade is committed to this *raison d'être*:

- Educate individuals with the highest possible level of professional competence and a clear international profile, aware of their responsibilities as citizens and professionals. To this end, it takes a global and holistic approach to the teaching process, understanding it as a service to individuals and society.
- Create and disseminate knowledge based on the critical analysis of existing knowledge and highly rigorous scientific research of national and international importance.
- Encourage debate with information and proposals concerning relevant and priority issues for the future of society in order independently to contribute to social transformation and heightened levels of justice and freedom.
- It will pursue this commitment through its actions and own values, based on Christian humanism and other cultural traditions that have made upholding human dignity a central tenet. This is a foundational and core commitment, as the institution is part of the network of Jesuit university schools.
- For all these reasons, Esade aims to be an open, plural, international, and intercultural learning community, in which people of different backgrounds and ways of thinking share a common *raison d'être*.”

The Scientific, Professional, Social, and Personal Education of Individuals

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The very wording of the *raison d'être* differentiates between personal education and scientific, professional, and social education. While the educational process is certainly a whole, its specific dimensions can be distinguished.

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Before the central topic of this document can be addressed, and for further contextualization, it is worth noting the importance of scientific and social education. Scientific and professional education helps and enables individuals to acquire in-depth knowledge, with intellectual rigor and an embrace of research, through the scientific method and critical analysis of information, all with a view to training “highly professional individuals.”

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Esade has similarly always paid special attention to social education, in order to stake out a vision that is committed to our world, without silencing the inhumanity of many realities, and thus help to bring about its transformation. This requires placing greater emphasis on developing those values and competences that foster a spirit of service in people, working on both the intellectual dimension and the capacity to be personally moved by the realities of others. Ultimately, it is a matter of training people who are “fully aware of their responsibility in developing a society that promotes human dignity.”

Personal Education and the Spiritual Dimension

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“Esade aims to train highly professional individuals, aware of their responsibilities as citizens of their own country and of the world, sensitive to matters of solidarity and social justice, and capable of committing themselves to collective projects.” To this end, it seeks to foster “human quality,” a combination of knowledge, judgment, balance and depth that produces calm, coherent, reliable people capable of living up to and embodying basic values. Personal education, thus understood, is a solid basis that underpins and enhances the quality of both professional competence and civic and social commitment.

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To approach the teaching process from a global and holistic perspective, it makes perfect sense to provide ethical training – not necessarily linked to recognition of the spiritual dimension or transcendence – that fosters human quality and the values of civic-mindedness, respect, solidarity, selflessness, and involvement in worthy causes. Recognizing this, Esade also seeks to offer individuals the possibility of cultivating their inner or “spiritual” dimension as part of its educational project.

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An individual’s “spiritual dimension” is a term that today can be understood in various ways, albeit with a commonly accepted core. “Spirituality” spontaneously evokes innerness and self-discovery. It also evokes a decentering of the egocentric self that enables openness and esteem for others, which leads to a commitment to the other, especially to the weak and marginalized. Spirituality also evokes the integration of the various dimensions of the human experience. For many, it further means an openness to transcendence and the religious experience.

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The deepest questions about the meaning of life arise at an individual's spiritual level. Cultivating the spiritual dimension affords access to a life experience in which freedom, the ability to love freely, solidarity, and a sense of justice take on special importance.

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Religious traditions have expressly cultivated individuals' spiritual dimension, thereby greatly helping to humanize societies. In today's increasingly secularized and plural world, many people with secular backgrounds are open to and interested in cultivating their deepest dimension. This is why the spiritual dimension is currently formulated and experienced in a variety of languages and behaviors, religious and otherwise.

Religious Traditions at Esade

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An institution such as Esade, which seeks to train people with human quality, cannot ignore the contribution that both religious and secular humanistic traditions have made to humanity's growth and maturation. Nor can it disregard the risks of dehumanization that rigid and manipulated versions of these traditions, often driven by outside interests, can pose.

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To clarify this institutional position, it is crucial to stress that the aim of raising this issue is not to proselytize any particular religious denomination. Rather, the goal is to further enhance the quality of the people who study or work at Esade by offering them the possibility to express themselves and providing channels for dialogue on these issues and, if they wish, to learn about the accumulated wisdom and experience of religious traditions and, thus, develop their spiritual or inner dimension.

Esade: A Plural Space Open to the Spiritual Dimension

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Precisely because of our understanding of the training and teaching process, which is an outgrowth of the Jesuit educational tradition, Esade must be structured as a plural space open to the spiritual dimension, in order to offer students, faculty, staff, and alumni the possibility to develop their spiritual dimension and deepen their understanding of these issues.

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This means "openness to religious pluralism," a pluralism that goes beyond "tolerance" to become "active respect" for the various options, for both believers and non-believers, of different traditions. Obviously, pluralism and active respect have limits: a humanistic orientation, respect for human rights, and Esade's institutional documents. These limits must prevent fanatical or fundamentalist positions of any kind, whether secular or religious, in keeping with Esade's values and *raison d'être*.

22

In this admittedly plural and intercultural context, and in accordance with its mission, *raison d'être*, and values, Esade undertakes to encourage reflection on the major issues in which the meaning of life for humanity is at stake, by promoting dialogue on the spiritual dimension and religious aspect among Christians, adherents of other faiths, and non-believers alike, and, finally, by offering the spirituality most characteristic of it: that of the Society of Jesus.

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In conclusion, Esade's goal is to offer a holistic education that enables individuals to develop their human quality. Therefore, in accordance with what has been outlined above, this education must offer the possibility of cultivating the "spiritual" or inner dimension and must include the contributions of humanistic, religious, and secular traditions. This offer, to be provided in a context of intercultural dialogue, must naturally be respectful of the various life choices and, thus, consistent with the plurality and openness that define coexistence at Esade.

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