

Education at ESADE and the Spiritual Aspect, in the Framework of Our Institutional Mission

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1. Preamble

[1] “ESADE is an independent, non-profit, university-level, Christian-inspired academic institution that was founded in Barcelona in 1958 by a group of businesspeople and the Society of Jesus.” Since its foundation, ESADE has taken an educational approach that considers individuals from a comprehensive (holistic) approach. Originally, this approach was Christian in its formulation.

[2] Later, taking into account the social context and the great plurality of society, the initial orientation was reformulated to transform ESADE into a well-defined shared academic project where different kinds of people – Christians, believers of other religions and non-believers, with different life stances – could contribute in a diverse environment, under conditions of equality, and “in a context of intercultural dialogue”.

[3] This project requires a shared anthropology that ascribes to each individual the capacity to develop his or her “human quality”. This quality can be considered as linked to a “spiritual” or inner aspect of the individual, and it can be reasonably interpreted either as linked to, or not linked to, transcendence.

[4] At present, this is an issue that, for various reasons, needs to be addressed explicitly, and which therefore requires an official institutional position.

[5] Spirituality, especially of the religious sort, is a fact of life for many millions of people, as well as a factor in the configuration of social reality at both the local and international scales. As such, it needs to be addressed explicitly in order to enable an understanding of our world and its evolution. Part of ESADE’s vocation is to “foster debate, with information and proposals about important issues that are of high priority for the future of society” – those debates in which the human development of society is at stake. As part of this vocation, ESADE also engages in an analysis of spirituality, in the hopes of fostering an academic debate that will generate critical knowledge and contribute to the development of a more human society, with “higher levels of justice and liberty”.

[6] The evolution of ESADE, with its significant internationalisation process, has made it possible for the plurality of beliefs and life stances of the institution’s students, alumni, faculty, and administrative and services staff to grow continually. We regard this fact as an asset and an opportunity that has enabled us to become a place of coexistence that practices a culture of active respect and shared personal growth, as opposed to mere tolerance – a development that has grown out of the very roots of the institution.

[7] Rigorous reflection on education for adults and professional practice, both in business and in law, convinces us that a high-quality educational proposal cannot be conceived without “approaching the educational process from a holistic, comprehensive perspective”, considering the various aspects of the individual and, indeed, cultivating the individual’s human quality in the broadest sense of the term.

[8] Due to the sensitive nature of these issues, and out of respect for the beliefs and privacy of

each individual, ESADE recognises that it cannot improvise its educational approach. The institution therefore offers the explicit and transparent reflection that follows.

2. The Commitments of ESADE's Mission and Raison e'Être

[9] ESADE's mission and raison d'Être, approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2003, provide the starting point for this document.

"ESADE's mission is to promote teaching and research in the areas 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 upholds people's dignity according to humanistic and Christian traditions, and in a context of intercultural dialogue."

"ESADE, as a university institution, is committed to the following raison d'Être:

- Educate highly professional and internationally focused individuals who are aware of their responsibilities as citizens and professionals. ESADE's approach to learning is a holistic one, which renders a service to individuals and society alike.
- Create and disseminate knowledge based on the critical analysis of existing information and on scientifically rigorous research of national and international importance.
- Foster debate, with information and proposals about important issues that are of high priority for the future of society, in order to independently contribute to the transformation of society towards higher levels of justice and liberty.

In pursuing these aims, ESADE will emphasise its founding values, which are based on Christian humanism and other cultural traditions. Human dignity is the core component of these values, given that ESADE is a member of the network of universities of the Society of Jesus.

ESADE is an open, plural, international and intercultural learning community, where people with differing cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking share the same raison d'Être."

3. The Scientific, Professional, Social and Human Education of Individuals

[10] The wording of ESADE's raison d'Être draws a distinction between human education, on the one hand, and scientific, professional and social education, on the other. The educational process is a whole, to be sure, but it is possible to differentiate specific aspects of it.

[11] Before addressing the central issue of this document, we believe it is necessary to provide context by stressing the importance of scientific and social education. Scientific and professional education enables individuals to acquire in-depth knowledge with intellectual rigor and a passion for research by means of the scientific method and the critical analysis of knowledge, with the objective of training "highly professional individuals".

[12] ESADE has always placed special emphasis on social education. We do this as a means of advancing a vision of commitment to our world, without turning a blind eye to the world's many inhumanities, and to contribute to the transformation of these realities. We therefore focus our work on those values and competencies that develop the service vocation, with emphasis both on intellectual aspects and on the individual's capacity to be moved by other people's situations. Our goal, in short, is to train individuals "fully aware of their responsibility in the development of a society that upholds people's dignity".

4. Human Education and the Spiritual Aspect

[13] "ESADE aims to educate highly professional individuals who are aware of their responsibilities as citizens both of their countries and of the world, sensitive to solidarity and social justice, and capable of committing themselves to community projects. For this reason, we

are committed to cultivating the 'human quality': a combination of knowledge, judgment, balance and depth that produces serene, consistent, trustworthy individuals capable of living in accordance with fundamental values". Human quality, in this sense, provides a solid base upon which to build high-quality professional competence and civic and social commitment.

[14] Because we consider the teaching process from a holistic, comprehensive perspective, it makes perfect sense to offer an ethical education – one that is not necessarily linked to recognition of the spiritual aspect or to transcendence, that fosters the human quality, and that promotes the values of citizenship, respect, solidarity, altruism and involvement in noble causes. In recognition of this perspective, ESADE's educational approach offers the possibility of cultivating the interior or "spiritual" aspect of the individual.

[15] The "spiritual aspect" of the individual is an expression that, in modern times, has been interpreted in various ways, but which has a commonly accepted core. "Spirituality" evokes, at once, both "inner life" and "self-knowledge". It evokes a decentring with regard to the egocentric self – a decentring that allows one to open up to others and love them. Spirituality also evokes the integration of various aspects of human experience. For many, it is also an opening to transcendence and to the religious experience.

[16] The most profound questions about the meaning of life appear at the spiritual level of the individual. When individuals cultivate their spiritual aspect, they gain access to a life experience in which freedom, the capacity to love freely, solidarity and a sense of justice take on a special meaning.

[17] The spiritual aspect of people has been expressly cultivated by religious traditions, and this has contributed greatly to the humanisation of societies. In our increasingly secular and plural world, there are many individuals steeped in the secular tradition who are open to, and wish to cultivate, their most profound aspect. The spiritual aspect, therefore, is formulated and experienced in the form of diverse languages and attitudes, both religious and non-religious.

5. *Religious Traditions at ESADE*

[18] An institution like ESADE, which aims to train people with human quality, cannot fail to recognise the contribution of religious traditions to the growth and maturation of humanity, in addition to the contribution of the secular humanistic traditions. Nor can we fail to recognise the risk of dehumanisation run by rigid or manipulated versions of these traditions, which are often promoted by outside interests.

[19] To clarify our institutional position, we must stress that, in addressing this issue, we do not intend to proselytise on behalf of any religious faith. Our intention is to help to improve the quality of the people who work or study at ESADE by giving them a chance to express themselves, by offering them ways to engage in dialogue on these issues, and to learn, if they wish, about the wisdom and experience accumulated by religious traditions over the course of history by developing their spiritual or inner aspect.

6. *ESADE: A Plural Space Open to the Spiritual Aspect*

[20] As a result of our understanding of the teaching process, which grows out of the educational tradition of the Society of Jesus, ESADE is structured as a plural space that is open to the spiritual aspect. Our goal in this regard is to offer our students, faculty, administrative and services staff, and alumni the possibility of cultivating their spiritual aspect, as well as the chance to engage in debate and learn more about these matters.

[21] This is the meaning of "openness to religious pluralism" – a pluralism that goes beyond "tolerance" to foster "active respect" for the various options, faith-based or otherwise, of the different traditions. Obviously, tolerance and active respect have certain limits: the humanistic approach, respect for human rights and ESADE's institutional documents. These limits are

intended to avoid fanatical or fundamentalist positions of all sorts, both secular and religious, in keeping with ESADE's values and *raison d'être*.

[22] In this admittedly plural and intercultural context – and in keeping with its mission, *raison d'être* and values – ESADE is committed to fostering reflection on the major problems facing humankind that are putting in danger the meaning of life; promoting, with this objective in mind, dialogue on spirituality and religion among Christians, believers of other religions, and non-believers alike; and finally, offering the brand of spirituality most closely related to the institution: that of the Society of Jesus.

[23] In conclusion, ESADE aims to offer a comprehensive education that enables people to develop their human quality. Therefore, in keeping with that set out above, this education must offer the possibility of cultivating one's "spiritual" or inner side, and it must incorporate the contributions of both religious and secular traditions. In the context of intercultural dialogue, naturally, this offer must be respectful of the diverse range of life options and, therefore, consistent with the plurality and openness that define coexistence at ESADE.