

To Club or Not to Club, That Is the Question Debating the Meaning of Catholic Identity for Universities in Today's World

Paulina Guzik

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland

This case study presents the dilemma faced by a French university with Christian identity regarding a students' request to officially approve a club for the LGBTQ+ community: which would be the most prudent response considering all matters involved? The case is disguised: it combines elements taken from very similar cases impacting today more than a few Catholic universities around the globe. Part A describes this university: history, principles and values, academic and financial information, relations with its stakeholders, etc. This part also describes its religious context and some relevant statistics regarding the LGTBQ+ community. Finally, a series of opinions regarding the issue and how to answer the students' request presented in the form of an open discussion at the university's steering committee provides different arguments in favor or against the approval. Part B offers some guidelines useful to take a prudent response considering all matters involved: legal, ethical, governance, and communicative. These guidelines are divided in three chapters: what should be the framework for such a discussion, strategic recommendations, and practical suggestions. Their aim is to provide a sort of a blueprint for university heads and administrators, to design a tailor-made response fitting the identity and stakeholders' map of their own university.

Keywords: Crisis management, crisis communications, university, university management, issues management, Christian identity, gender issues

Part A—The Problem

In June 2022, Professor Rosemary Mercier had just returned to her desk, which was located in a nice corner office in the headquarters of Sophia University, a building constructed just before the World War II in the Neogothic style so popular in Southern France at the beginning of the 20th century. Her meeting with representatives of the Sophia Students' Pride Association (SSPA) had not gone as expected.

Mercier was hoping that some concessions made by the provost in 2021 would have been appreciated by the SSPA, or at least been sufficient to cold down the debate. Instead, the conversation was even hotter than it had been at the meeting held at the end of the last academic year.

The words of Andrea Huber, president of the SSPA (who was also a member of Sophia University's Council, having been elected by the students) still resounded in Mercier's ears:

We want an LGBTQ+¹ club, and we want it for the beginning of the next academic term. We have been asking for it for years, and we don't understand why it has taken so long to accept our request. Almost every university in the country

Paulina Guzik, Ph.D., Communications Researcher and Lecturer at Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland.

¹ From among several acronyms used in both the media and academia, this case study chose LGBTQ+ to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning people, with the "+" referring to anyone who is not heterosexual and cisgender.

has one, as do many other Catholic universities worldwide.

Mercier was not a newcomer to the situation. For the last 10 years, she had been involved in discussions between student representatives and the university board regarding the same issue. In 2012, she had been appointed by the provost, probably because she was one of the youngest faculty members as well as the most popular professor at the School of Economics (and probably also because she was a woman, although nobody on the provost's executive committee would dare to mention it). Her calm character, openness, empathy, negotiation skills, and friendly spirit of service helped her become first an indispensable committee member, and then since 2019, the committee chair, and the vice provost for students.

Mercier had to provide a summary for the provost of how the meeting went, comment on the document, and three requests that the students had asked her to pass on to him, and most difficult of all, put together a proposal. This was particularly challenging because Mercier was certain that the concessions made last year had not closed the issue, and the risks associated with it were high.

What suggestions should Mercier put forward to the executive committee? Moreover, whatever the decision might be, what communications plan would be effective with regard to each university stakeholder? After all, it was clear not all of them would agree...

Sophia University

Founded in 1924 by Archbishop Raphaël Martin, Sophia University² was a private academic center with 13,700 students, 1,250 faculty members, and 3,400 staff. It had begun with just three schools, namely law, liberal arts, and theology, but it had evolved into a medium-sized university with 15 schools and research centers.

The students at Sophia University mainly came from France and nearby Switzerland (74%). The remaining students came from other French-speaking countries (12%) or had studied for the baccalaureate at one of the thousands of *Lycées Français* spread across the world and then decided to also pursue a higher education degree in French (14%).

The university had a well-deserved reputation. Indeed, Sophia University relished its good positioning in the QS World University Rankings, Shanghai, and other university rankings, which consistently placed it among the top 50 European universities and in the 500-1,000 range worldwide.

Sophia University also enjoyed solid goodwill among those outside its campus. More than 19,000 former students had joined the Alumni Association and—in exchange of a small monthly donation to support the university—participated in weekly activities of all kinds, including cultural, artistic, philanthropic, and religious activities. In addition, many individuals, companies, and non-profit institutions belonged to the *Association des benefacteurs de Sophia*.

The networking platform was the main reason why local government and politicians sought to maintain good relations with the university, although two other elements contributed to its strong bonds with local authorities: first, the intense participation of faculty and students in public social projects involving education and health, and second, a subsidized program run by the school of political science to improve the managerial skills of public leaders.

² This French university should not be confused with Sophia University in Japan, which was founded by the Jesuits in 1913, nor with the Istituto Universitario Sophia, created by the Focolari Movement in 2007.

Finally, Sophia University enjoyed friendly relations with the other universities in the city, two of which were state-owned and three private; was an active partner of *France Universit  s* (the coalition of French higher education institutions), of *l'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie*, of *Campus France* (the French agency for the promotion of higher education), and of other organizations; and participated in several research projects involving national and international institutions.

Mission and Vision: Sophia University's Identity

Sophia University's Catholic identity was a source of pride for faculty members, staff, and to a certain extent, the student body. Christian values such as orientation toward the person, respect, and tolerance inspired campus life at all levels. A generous scholarship program eased a very inclusive setting, helping talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with disabilities to cover their fees and living expenses.

Conflicts were usually solved through the spirit of collaboration, public protests were scarce, boycotts were unheard of, and the crime rate was 20 times lower than at the two public universities in the city. In addition, Church ownership had conspicuously helped to reduce the politization experienced by other academic institutions in recent decades.

Sophia University was characterized by a serene and joyful environment, in which it was possible to study, become prepared for professional life, and develop cultural, artistic, and athletic skills. It was a peaceful atmosphere much appreciated by faculty, staff, students, and students' parents.

Yet, all this did not mean that every employee of Sophia University was a practicing Catholic. They used to be... a couple decades ago, but not anymore. Religious practice rates were higher than the average in French cities, although a relevant percentage of people did not practice much, and some employees were divorced and remarried. In addition, a few faculty members were Lutheran, Jewish, Muslim, or nothing at all.

To ensure that the Christian ethos continued to inspire the university, prior to signing their contracts, new hires had to accept not only the standard ethical commitments and the need to undergo a criminal background check, but also some specific rules. They had to agree with and support the university's mission and vision; avoid teaching, publishing, or publicly standing for anything that contradicted Catholic values; and avoid any scandal in their personal lives.

In terms of the students, only a minority chose Sophia University because of its Catholic milieu. For the rest, it was a combination of family traditions (it was quite common for students' parents to be Sophia alumni), the good location (the city was a major European city, it had a modern lifestyle and good infrastructures, and it was well communicated), the rankings, and the reasonable fees. With regard to the latter, Sophia University could not compete with the almost-free public universities, although its fees were lower than those of other private universities in the region, which were run as profitable companies for upper-class students.

These factors attracted a very diverse group of students every year, who could be roughly divided into three groups of approximately similar sizes: practicing Catholics,³ non-practicing Catholics and other Christians, and members of other religions or no religion at all. For the latter two groups, the main reasons to study at Sophia University were the rankings, the moderate fees, and/or the scholarship program. The effectiveness of the university's Career Development Department, the department in charge of helping students to find a job after

³ According to the standard French sociological research categorization, being a practicing believer involved attending at least one religious service every month.

graduation, was also highly relevant: 74% of students landed a job less than three months after graduating.

Sophia University's chaplaincy services were quite active. The fact that a third of students were practicing Catholics meant that the university's rate of practicing Catholics was three times higher than the French average. In addition to two daily masses held on campus, the chaplains organized religious activities in every school, such as catechism⁴ classes for students seeking baptism, confirmation, or marriage (especially at the SBS) as well as spiritual retreats. Despite a full agenda of activities, the chaplains' main role was spiritual accompaniment: there was always a priest available for guidance, hearing confessions, or just chatting with over a coffee... or a beer.

The university also promoted many solidarity projects both locally and abroad, and its volunteer association, which was founded almost 30 years previously, had increased its activities after the insistence of Pope Francis on reaching out to the poor and the discarded.

Governance

The university had a board of directors appointed by the archbishop, who served as the grand chancellor. Most members of the board were prominent figures in town: retired judges, business leaders, lawyers, a famous artist, and a popular writer. Whenever he was able, the archbishop attended the meetings; when this was not possible, the general vicar (the archbishop's deputy in the archdiocese⁵) represented him. When provosts left office, they automatically became members of the board. In 2022, the board's chair was Robert Lest, former chief executive officer of P&G Southern Europe (and former classmate of the archbishop).

The board's main responsibility was to ensure that Sophia University lasted forever and remained true to its original Catholic ethos. To achieve this, the board mainly focused on economic sustainability, the quality of the education provided, and ensuring faithfulness to the university's Catholic identity. The other responsibilities of the board involved appointing the provost and other members of the university's executive committee, confirming deans and other key roles, providing accountability for the organization, ensuring that all legal and ethical standards were followed, and ensuring that the university's assets and resources were properly managed. The board also actively participated in fundraising activities.

While the board only met four times a year, the executive committee ran the university on a daily basis. Nine committee members gathered every Friday for (at least) a couple of hours: the provost; the three vice provosts (for faculty, students, and alumni); the directors of finance, human resources (HR), operations, and communications; and the secretary general in charge of legal issues and relations with the board. When needed, ad-hoc commissions and taskforces were created to study particular issues and submit proposals to the committee.

In 2022, the provost was Professor Thérèse Chateaubriand, a well-known professor of mineralogy, whose research on magmatic systems had been published in Q1 publications. Her four-year mandate was about to expire, her achievements in terms of leading the university had been remarkable, and the renewal of her role for a second term was on the agenda for the next board meeting.

⁴ In the Christian tradition, a catechism represented a compendium of the Church's doctrine on dogma (what to believe), sacraments (how to worship), morals (how to live), and spiritual life (how to pray). The main catechism, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, was approved by Pope John Paul II in 1992 and published in many languages.

⁵ A Catholic diocese referred to a geographical area assigned to a given bishop (although, properly speaking, the bishop oversaw those Catholics who lived in the area). Comprised of three or more dioceses and entrusted to an archbishop, an archdiocese was the head diocese of an ecclesiastical province. For instance, the archdiocese of Lyon was the head of the ecclesiastical province that included the dioceses of Annecy, Belley-Ars, Grenoble, and four more.

Finally, there was the university council, which comprised the executive committee plus the deans of the 15 schools and two representatives each from among the faculty, staff, and students, who were democratically elected by their peers. The council met every month to discuss matters related to teaching and research, hirings and promotions, and campus life. The general chaplain also attended its meetings but had no vote during decision-making processes.

Most of the university authorities were academics, with the exception of the vice rector for alumni (a professional fundraiser), the secretary general (a lawyer), and the directors of finance, operations, and communications (professionals in their fields).

International Liaisons

Although Sophia University operated as a completely independent body, it belonged to an international network of Catholic universities located in Francophone countries, two more of which were in France; one each in Belgium, Canada, Haiti, and Switzerland; and a few more in Africa.

The network was established just after World War II. At the end of the war, three former Sophia University chaplains became missionaries in Africa, and a few years later, they were appointed bishops. For them, it felt natural to call on their alma mater for help. The provost at the time (after a suggestion from the archbishop) accepted doctoral students from Africa, who later became professors, went back to their home countries, and started their own Catholic universities.

Soon, other European, American, and African dioceses with no connection to Sophia University asked for its support in starting new universities or new schools, and its generosity and sharing philosophy allowed a network of sister universities to flourish (although, properly speaking, Sophia University was to them more a mother than a sister).

The provosts of these universities met once a year at Easter in a rotating city to discuss new initiatives that took advantage of the financial benefits provided by the European Union for international projects involving faculty training, scientific research, and publishing. Within the network, all the sister universities were equal, although for historical and emotional reasons, Sophia University occupied a special place among them, a sort of a “prima inter pares” (“first among equals”) position connected to a duty to be “exemplary”. Whatever the Sophia University provost said during the annual meeting or in emailing exchanges had unique authority.

University Finances

Although Sophia University was a non-profit institution that was fully owned by the archdiocese through a trust, its finances were completely independent. The archbishop who founded the university almost a century ago had demanded that the academic authorities be fully responsible for the running of it.

I gave you the land and the first building but from now on you are on your own. No funds will ever come from the archdiocese’s budget. I cannot take any money from my priests’ salaries and pension fund, from building new churches or from supporting our missionaries abroad. It is your university; you should figure out how to pay for it.

All the subsequent archbishops had been consistent in following this approach. If, at the end of the academic year, the results were positive, the profits were reinvested in personnel, facilities, and research projects; if not, either they borrowed money or made cuts to make ends meet (although Church law mandated that they could not sell property).

Over the years, what had previously been an empty and barren piece of land with just one obsolete building on it had grown to have 12 blocks, nice sports facilities, and an auditorium with a capacity of 1,500 people, which was often borrowed by the city hall and other local institutions for their artistic and cultural events.

The annual budget for the academic year 2021-2022 forecasted €260 million in income and €245.7 million in expenses. Students were charged €3,790 in tuition fees for the academic year. However, Sophia University disbursed a great deal of financial aid in an effort to attract top applicants. For example, at the undergraduate level, 29% of students were awarded a scholarship, whereas at the graduate level, financial aid was generally more merit-based than need-based and could take many forms, including fellowships, traineeships, research assistantships, and loans.

Fees accounted for only 66% of Sophia University's income. The rest came from alumni donations (18%), which covered the scholarships, and the sponsorship program (16%), through which national and local companies supported research projects, the construction of new buildings, and facilities maintenance.

The university's centers were not equal in economic terms. In 2021, the center with the highest budget was the Medical School and hospital (€ 170 million). The remaining 90 million corresponded to the other 13 schools in roughly similar amounts.

Students Demand a LGBTQ+ Club

While there were many different associations active on campus, the university clubs played a pivotal role in students' life outside the classroom. They were created several decades ago to channel those professional interests considered key for students' future careers (e.g., fintech, innovation, start-ups and entrepreneurs, energy, retail and luxury, venture capital, healthcare) or to represent different regions (e.g., the Asia Club, the Africa Club). All the clubs were industry-related, with three exceptions: one for undergraduate students (Sophia's Women Club) and the Family and Partners Club for postgraduate students.

Sophia University knew of, accepted, and promoted the clubs as an integral part of students' experience on campus. Consequently, the university granted them special status, rendering them more institutional than other student associations such as sports, theater, music, gastronomy, and dance groups.

The clubs were self-organized bodies, not supervised by the university management, that could organize activities involving university facilities; use the Sophia University logo on their flyers; invite relevant guest speakers to talk to club members and friends; organize trips to global business hubs such as London, Milan, or Silicon Valley; and arrange networking events with leading companies. The university covered 50% of their expenses, and they had their own microsite on the university's official website, where they could inform and advertise their activities.

At the beginning of every June, the vice provost for students received several requests to establish clubs and decided which ones would be operative in the following academic year. According to the "campus rules" (a document about university life available on Sophia University's website), such requests needed to include proof that a relevant number of students supported a proposal, explain the professional interest to be pursued through the club, and express a commitment to respect the law and public order.

The first request to create an LGBTQ+ club arrived at the vice provost's office in 2009. The executive committee gave a negative answer almost immediately, as there were insufficient signatures in support of the request and the explanation of motives ("a place to express our identity on campus") did not fit any of the goals for clubs listed in the campus rules.

Whether due to these insufficiencies in the request or because at that time only state-owned French universities had granted similar requests to their LGBTQ+ students, those Sophia University students who had signed the petition did not take the denial of their request badly. They continued to gather in pubs, Starbucks, and other spaces not owned by the university as well as in private residences. They also organized rallies, festivals, and Pride-related events off campus.

Many social and legal changes had occurred in the decade prior to 2022. For example, after intense awareness-raising campaigns, LGBTQ+ rights had been accepted by all the political parties represented in the *Assemblée Nationale* (the French parliament's lower chamber). Moreover, in 2013, same-sex marriage was approved, and in 2020, an anti-discrimination act, including discrimination based on sexual orientation, became law. By 2022, France was considered a LGBTQ+-friendly country, less friendly than Germany and Spain perhaps, but more than the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Italy (at least according to statistics).

In addition, while the numbers of LGBTQ+ communities had only grown a little by 2022, 85% of French people under the age of 25 considered LGBTQ+ rights to be as fundamental for democracy as freedom of speech. Therefore, LGBTQ+ clubs were the rule rather than the exception on most French campuses.

This was also the case in other Catholic universities in France and abroad. The first Catholic university to introduce an LGBTQ+ club (in 1990) was Fordham University, although the big change occurred when Georgetown (also run by the Jesuits) created “the LGBTQ Resource Center, serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning individuals” in 2008.⁶

Quite soon, all Jesuit colleges and other Catholic universities worldwide started to follow Georgetown's lead (Hughes, 2020), particularly in the United States (e.g., College of the Holy Cross⁷, Notre Dame University⁸, University of St. Thomas⁹) and Europe, although there were also exceptions.¹⁰ By 2022, several Catholic colleges had introduced either a self-organized club or a specific center committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students, and some were even highly placed in “gay-friendly” university rankings (Avery, 2021).

LGBTQ+ and Christian Denominations

The LGBTQ+ community had never considered the Catholic Church to be one of its allies. For centuries, all Christian denominations (together with Judaism and Islam) had shared a negative perception of homosexuality, accepting the statement in the book of Genesis that homosexual acts were “acts of grave depravity”¹¹ and so intrinsically disordered. This statement was confirmed in the letters of St. Paul.¹²

⁶ “LGBTQ Resource Center,” Georgetown University, accessed June 27, 2022.

⁷ “LGBTQIA+ Community,” College of the Holy Cross, accessed June 27, 2022.

⁸ According to the website of the University of Notre Dame, “the University Counseling Center (UCC) seeks to affirm and advocate for LGBTQ+ students by providing a safe and welcoming space in which members of these communities can be continually supported throughout their time at the University of Notre Dame and beyond.” See “LGBTQ+ Students,” University Counseling Center, University of Notre Dame, accessed June 27, 2022.

⁹ “Supporting Our LGBTQIA+ Community,” University of St. Thomas, accessed June 27, 2022.

¹⁰ For example, Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium held a club, while CEU and University of Navarre in Spain, and the Cattolica di Milano in Italy didn't have one.

¹¹ Gen. 1: 91-29.

¹² “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Cor. 6:9-10 New Revised Standard Version. See also Rom. 1:18-27.

The influence of secularism, social trends, and liberal thinking in relation to Christian and Jewish denominations after World War II, and particularly following the sexual revolution of the 1960s, meant that most denominations in Europe (Presbyterians, Lutherans, reformed churches in Denmark, France, Iceland, Norway, Swiss, Sweden, etc.) as well as the mainstream Protestant churches in the United States and Canada changed their views on homosexuality, recognizing homosexuality as a natural occurrence and even blessing same-sex unions and considering them marriages. In their last meeting in 2022, the Anglican Communion bishops only agreed to disagree (Morgan, 2022). Even, the Evangelical churches are divided, with their positions on homosexuality ranging from liberal to moderate or fundamentalist¹³ (Sandeem, 1970). Some Evangelical denominations have adopted neutral positions, leaving the choice to local churches.

At the beginning of the third millennium, only the Catholic and Orthodox churches (together with a handful of Southern Baptists and other Christian denominations, and orthodox Judaism universities such as Yeshiva University in New York) had maintained their original position, generally based on rather strong and explicit biblical texts and on a consistent anthropology in which sexual identity was deeply rooted in every person's soul, psyche, and body; sexual activity only made sense as a physical expression of total commitment; and sex was only acceptable (and even sacred) between a man and a woman who were married to each other and open to generating life (Ivereigh, 2019).¹⁴

Pope John Paul II had summarized the Catholic position in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, when he stated that homosexual acts “are contrary to natural law (...). Under no circumstances can they be approved”. At the same time, homosexuals “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.”¹⁵

Nevertheless, in the second decade of the 21st century, things seemed to have also evolved in the Catholic milieu. Pope Francis often insisted with words and gestures on the importance of acceptance and inclusion, and he urged Church authorities and institutions to do the same. Yet, Pope Francis maintained the traditional Catholic doctrine on homosexuality, which created some confusion among LGBTQ+ communities.¹⁶

Another sign of this new Catholic sensibility regarding the issue was found in some new theological contributions (Martin & Tallon, 2022) and a few statements from important Catholic authorities, for example, statements that “the Church's position viewing homosexual relationships is wrong, and the time has come to revise this position”¹⁷; “Homosexuality is not a sin. It corresponds to a Christian attitude when two people, regardless of gender, stand up for each other, in joy and sorrow”; and “[the Catechism must be changed because]

¹³ Although “fundamentalist” was generally considered a pejorative term or even an insult, the original meaning of the term, as in “Christian fundamentalism”, referred to a religious movement that began among Anglo-Saxon protestants during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a reaction to the increasing liberalization and modernization of Protestant theology, which was considered to have devaluated what had long been considered the bedrock truths of Christianity. Conservative Christian groups made a list of the fundamental truths that absolutely needed to be recognized if someone wanted to be truly considered a Christian, namely biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth of Christ, the penitential death of Christ and his resurrection, and the reality of miracles.

¹⁴ Even if Western culture's view of sexuality (as a legitimate activity between consenting individuals) was considered completely at odds with the Christian approach, some observers noticed that the controversy regarding homosexuality was much more heated than that associated with other topics also considered wrong by the Church, such as sex between single people or even adultery.

¹⁵ “Chastity and homosexuality,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, accessed June 27, 2022, 2357–2359; See also “Homosexuality,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed June 27, 2022.

¹⁶ “Seven Quotes That Make Pope Francis Complicated for LGBTQ People,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed June 27, 2022.

¹⁷ Cardinal Jean Claude Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg, and President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), KNA, February 1, 2022.

it is not written in stone”¹⁸. Some European bishop conferences or dioceses do bless same-sex unions¹⁹ (Heneghan, 2022); and a newly appointed cardinal commented that “the Church should apologize to the LGBTQ+ community.”²⁰

It was hard to say whether such statements were the cause or the consequence of a global change of mind among Catholics. The fact was, in many Catholic circles, there was a sense that they were in a fluid situation and that the issue, along with other topics related to sexuality, was completely open to discussion (Allen, 2022).

Statistical Data

Data from several polls and surveys regarding homosexuality that were conducted in the decade leading up to 2022 revealed five relevant trends:

(1) The number of people who accepted homosexuality grew every year in most countries (Poushter & Kent, 2020).

(2) The percentage of supporters of gay rights was higher among the younger generation (18-34 years old)²¹ (Pew Research Center, 2019).

(3) Opinions on homosexuality and sexual identity were somehow linked to religious beliefs, for instance, in Europe the number of agnostics or those with no religious affiliation who supported gay rights was similar to the number of non-practicing Christians but higher than the number of Church-attending Christians²² (Connaughton, 2020; Lipka & Tevington, 2022).

(4) Catholics in many countries were generally as accepting of homosexuality as their non-Catholic compatriots. In general terms, Catholics adjusted their views to those of the rest of the society in which they lived²³ (Diamant, 2020).

(5) Religious practice was relevant. Even if the majority of Catholics declared that they considered homosexuality to be an acceptable moral option, only 31% of practicing Catholics agreed with that opinion.

In the case of Catholics in particular, their acceptance of homosexuality varied around the world. A global survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2019 found that in the Americas, the majority of Catholics in several countries believed society should be accepting of homosexuality. That was certainly true in Canada, where almost nine in ten Catholics (87%) expressed this view, as well as in Argentina (80%), the United States (76%), Mexico (72%), and Brazil (71%). The other countries in which most Catholics stated that society should

¹⁸ Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich and Member of the Council of Cardinals advising Pope Francis, *Stern*, March 31, 2022.

¹⁹ Tom Heneghan, “Belgium’s Flemish Bishops approve blessings for same-sex couples”, *The Tablet*, 21/09/2022; regarding dioceses, just one example among many: the Austrian diocese of Linz: cf. “Segen für Verliebte in Oberösterreichs Pfarren”, *KirchenZeitung*.

²⁰ Robert McElroy, Archbishop of San Diego (appointed cardinal by Pope Francis in 2022), *America*, July 18, 2016.

²¹ For instance, support for same-sex marriage was highest among Millennials (74%), followed by Gen Xers (58%), Boomers (51%), and the Silent Generation (45%).

²² In addition, six in ten adults in the United States stated that whether a person is a man or a woman is determined by the sex assigned at birth, although this figure was found to be higher among White evangelicals (87%) and Black Protestants (70%), whereas Catholics were in the national median (62%). By contrast, a majority of religiously unaffiliated Americans (58%) stated that a person’s gender can differ from the sex assigned at birth, with atheists (76%) and agnostics (67%) being especially likely to hold this view. See Michael Lipka and Patricia Tevington, “Attitudes About Transgender Issues Vary Widely Among Christians, Religious ‘Nones’ in U.S.,” Pew Research Center, July 7, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/07/07/attitudes-about-transgender-issues-vary-widely-among-christians-religious-nones-in-u-s/>.

²³ However, this was not found to be true in all countries. In Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, and the Philippines, Catholics were somewhat more likely than non-Catholics to say that homosexuality should be accepted by society, whereas in Poland, Catholics were less likely than non-Catholics to say that homosexuality should be accepted by society.

be accepting of homosexuality included Spain (91%), Australia (81%), the Philippines (80%), and South Africa (62%).

In Eastern Europe, acceptance was weaker, with roughly half or fewer Catholics agreeing that homosexuality should be accepted by society in Hungary, Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, and Lithuania. Moreover, in the surveyed countries in Africa and the Middle East, large majorities of Catholics said that homosexuality should not be accepted by society. That was the case in Nigeria (91%), Lebanon (84%), and Kenya (80%)²⁴ (Diamant, 2020).

A similar mixed picture described the number of Catholics who supported same-sex marriage. The vast majority of Catholics in Western European countries were in favor of equal marriage rights for example, in the Netherlands (92%), the United Kingdom (78%), and Germany (70%)²⁵. The percentage of Catholics in the United States who favored same-sex marriage was smaller (around 61%)²⁶. By contrast, in almost all Central and Eastern European countries, most Catholics opposed same-sex marriage. Some 90% of Catholics in Ukraine stated that same-sex marriage should be illegal, as did 66% in Hungary and 62% in Poland.²⁷

French Numbers

In the specific case of France, where Sophia University was located, statistics showed that 47% of French people were Catholics, with the second main religion being Islam (4%), followed by Protestantism (2%), Buddhism (2%), Judaism (1%), Orthodoxy (1%), and no religion (33%) (9% preferred not to answer)²⁸.

More than absolute numbers, what really counted were trends. According to a 2019 report, the Catholic Church in France was shrinking. Some 32% of French adults were identified as Catholic (40 years previously more than 70% did the same), but only 7% of adults attended Catholic Mass at least once a month (it was 17% in 1981). In addition, 21% of French people declared themselves to be committed atheists, which was twice as many as four decades earlier (i.e., there were three committed atheists for every practicing Catholic), while those “without religion” accounted for 58% of the population (40 years ago they accounted for 27%).

Among young people, the figures were even more stark. Indeed, only 3% of people aged 18-29 years were identified as practicing Catholics (i.e., approximately the same number of young people aged 18-29 years declared themselves to be Catholic as declared themselves to be Muslim) (Dargent & Galland, 2019).

Other indicators of the decline of faith in France included the number of baptisms. Around 332,000 children were baptized as Catholics in 2004 (out of the 800,000 who were born), while 15 years later, in 2019, 180,000 babies were baptized (out of 754,000 born in the country). The same trend was seen regarding marriages (i.e., there were 95,000 in 2004 and only 42,000 in 2019)²⁹.

Regarding homosexuality, French Catholics shared the views of their fellow Western Europeans, with 87% stating that the Church should accept homosexuality and 74% being in favor of same-sex marriage³⁰.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “Being Christian in Western Europe,” Pew Research Center, May 29, 2018.

²⁶ “Majority of Public Favors Same-Sex Marriage but Divisions Persist,” Pew Research Center.

²⁷ “Social Views and Morality,” Pew Research Center, May 10, 2017.

²⁸ “Religious Affiliation in France,” Statista, June 21, 2022.

²⁹ “Statistiques de L’Eglise catholique, Les sacrements en France,” Episcopal Conference of France, 2020.

³⁰ “Statistiques de L’Eglise catholique, Les sacrements en France,” Episcopal Conference of France, 2020.

Recent Past (2020-2021)

In recent years, the requests from Sophia University students for an LGBTQ+ club had become increasingly pressing, not only because such a club was supported by many students beyond the LGBTQ+ community, but also because the proposed club was framed in a different way: as a real professional club.

According to the request presented at the end of the 2020-2021 academic year, the proposed club had three goals:

(1) To affirm everybody's identity and facilitate personal support both from the university and among themselves.

(2) To organize academic activities in order to learn more about best practices concerning diversity and inclusion in different industries.

(3) To facilitate hiring by companies and institutions specifically seeking LGBTQ+ candidates (e.g., job interviews, industry treks, etc.).

From the perspective of the students, having such a club would mean a lot in terms of public recognition. Many students who introduced themselves as LGBTQ+ to Mercier had told her that they really felt welcomed at Sophia University. The university environment was characterized by acceptance and support, faculty and staff talked to them with respect, and they never noticed anything offensive in the teaching materials³¹ (de la Cierva, Méndez, & Guzik, 2021). Some exchange students even discussed how they were better treated on the Sophia University campus than at their universities of origin, in which they had their own club. Yet, although they had not experienced any personal discrimination, they thought a club was absolutely necessary in terms of collective dignity.

After receiving this request, Mercier took it to the next executive committee meeting, which was held in early July 2021. During her presentation, after explaining the students' request, she set out three possible courses of action:

(1) To accept the request and approve the Sophia University LGBTQ+ club for the next academic year (2021-2022). In her view, this decision would be the most welcome by students and more than a few faculty members, although it could create controversy among other students and professors, in addition to among other stakeholders: parents, benefactors, sister universities abroad, and most importantly, the university's board of directors, who might think it could compromise the university's identity.

(2) To reject the request, stressing the university's Catholic ethos or giving any other suitable explanation, such as the fact that all the current clubs were industry-oriented (except maybe the two clubs for women). In this case, student demonstrations and social media boycotts might lead to public controversy with unknown consequences (attention of French regulators and watchdogs, dissent among companies seeking to hire graduates, and disagreement with ranking agencies).

(3) To negotiate a compromise—that is, to create a Diversity and Inclusion Club in which students could study and discuss all professional and personal issues related to discrimination (i.e., gender, ability, age, ethnic, religious, and language inclusion) but that was not dedicated to sexual orientation. In addition, the vice provost could also remind students that anybody could book a classroom or any other space for any kind of meeting, as long as that nothing illegal was being done on campus.

³¹ With regard to talking about homosexuality in class, see Yago de la Cierva, Samanta Rico Méndez and Paulina Guzik, "A University Crisis Provoked by an Online Cass: A Communications Case Study on a Social Media Turbulence," *Church, Communication and Culture* 6, no. 2 (2021): 327-359.

Mercier ended her presentation by stating:

I have to say that, as a Catholic, I will accept all the consequences of Sophia's identity, even if they are detrimental for our reputation. At the same time, I would be the No. 1 supporter of the students' request if someone proves to me it doesn't contradict our values. My problem is, I am an economics professor by training, not an expert in moral theology. So, I am a bit uncertain regarding where to draw the red line...

Ultimately, Mercier and the executive committee decided there was not enough time available for the necessary consultation with all stakeholders prior to the start of the next academic year. The majority were due to take holidays in a few weeks. In addition, asking for an urgent response from the board would not only take months (its next meeting was scheduled for mid-September), but might also elicit some unexpected reactions and even block more practical decisions regarding the issue at stake. Thus, the executive committee asked Mercier to present option (c) to students at the beginning of the next year. Afterwards, everybody went on vacation.

Last Year (2021-2022)

Mercier met the students in September 2021. The meeting ended with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the students recognized that their university was taking baby steps in the right direction, and for the first time, they would be able to organize activities within the new club's scope. On the other hand, they were disgruntled that the university discriminated against them as a group.

There was no mention of religious beliefs among the reasons given for rejecting their request. However, they suspected that the real problem lay there, which was confusing given that most Catholic universities were not so intransigent.

The 2021-2022 academic year passed by peacefully. The only guest speaker invited by the LGBTQ+ group was a very prestigious and experienced professional, who shared her views on how to fight discrimination within big multinationals, and the small crowd who attended the lecture found it inspiring and useful. Mercier, who introduced the speaker, did not find anything rejectable or reproachable. On the contrary, most of the speaker's recommendations were completely in-sync with Christian ideals!

The only incident of note was a post on Facebook by "Sophia LGTBQ & Allies—Out for Business" at the beginning of Pride Week, which included a picture of around 85 students wearing colorful dresses in front of the university's main building and invited everybody to a "proud week full of diverse events!" The use of the university's logo with the rainbow colors and the backdrop of the photo generated a bit of social media noise because it looked quite official. Fortunately, after talking to Mercier, the university decided not to react in any way, and in a couple of days the controversy had passed.

However, during the last meeting of the council, which was held in June 2022, the elected student representatives were blunt: last year's improvements were not enough, and either there would be an LGBTQ+ club at Sophia University next September or there would be trouble. For the first time, undergraduate and postgraduate students from the SBS were united in their request.

What parameters would be required to allow a university that wanted to remain faithful to its Catholic roots to neither compromise its values nor alienate its stakeholders?

A Casual Brainstorming Session

Mercier only had the two summer months to develop a solid proposal and present it to the university's executive committee. There was a lot at stake! In fact, if a decision had to be made by September 1, and if she

did not want to ruin anybody's family plans, she had to present the proposal before the end of July, which would give the provost and her team time to study it and make a decision before going on vacation.

In the past, Mercier had tried to organize meetings about this issue, but with no avail. Everybody's agenda was full, which meant it was quite difficult to arrange a time at which the heads of all the departments involved could attend a meeting that might take more than 30 minutes. Yet, the issue was too complex to be figured it out by just one person.

As time was now of the essence, Mercier came up with an out-of-the-box solution. She invited eight trusted colleagues to spend a few days together at her grandmother's cottage on Lake Annecy, a natural oasis less than two hours' drive away. The idea was that they could come to stay, with their spouses (but possibly with no little kids) if they wanted, for a relaxing four-day-long weekend due to the fact that Bastille Day, a national public holiday, fell on a Thursday that year. Mercier's plan was to combine hiking, sailing, and other water sports during the day with a few hours of carefree brainstorming on the issue every evening (while the significant others were taking care of the cooking, logistics, and children).

Those invited to the brainstorming weekend were Margarite LeMond, the vice director of finance; Alain Blanchet, dean of the Liberal Arts School; Elyna Lafayette, head of HR; Angelo Napolitano, a political science professor; Raymond Perez, former dean of the Law School; Danielle Kim, the communications director; Monique Forge, the chief librarian; and Albert Tavistock, a professor of organizational behavior at the School of Economics.

Why those eight? The intention was not to represent the different schools, backgrounds, and sensibilities (although they also did that); rather, Mercier had worked with each one of them on a number of projects, all of them had managerial experience at Sophia University and elsewhere, and all of them were good friends.

Each of the eight was asked to think about and bring to Annecy the answers to three questions:

- (1) What are the risks of either accepting the students' request or denying it?
- (2) Can we accept the creation of an LGBTQ+ club without betraying our principles?
- (3) Is there anything else we should do beyond the issue at hand?

The long weekend was fun and productive. Not everybody was able to stay for the full four days, but there was always a solid group of people eager to listen to and counterattack every argument. Of course, they did not reach a consensus—that was not the point. Actually, the debate helped all of them to make their individual position more solid, although nobody changed sides. At the end, Mercier came back to her office with plenty of ideas.

The following were her notes concerning each person's point of view.

Margarite Lemond, Vice Director of Finance

If we say no, I'm afraid the economic risks are significant, especially in the long term. I am not worried about a decrease in students' fees, but mainly about the fact that a boycott may be followed by some of our sponsors, and also by those companies who hire our graduates. At the same time, if we say yes, some old-time benefactors may cease their donations. In any case, we could compensate for the negative impact on income with some cuts in personnel and research; launch a campaign involving core donors explaining why we need extra help; and delay our plans for building the new information technology engineering school, and then wait and see.

The answer should be negative. From my perspective, it's quite evident that such a club goes against Christian principles. I know that there are other Catholic universities with LGBTQ+ clubs, but that doesn't prove anything... (by the way, maybe we could ask other Catholic universities without a club for advice, for instance, Dallas, Murcia (UCAM), or Milan?). So,

unless we ask the Dicastery for Culture and Education for explicit authorization³² (Francis, 2022), I wouldn't change our policies. In my opinion, the economic risks are necessary to avoid compromising our purpose and our ideals. Catholic principles are the reason we provide a good education in a peaceful environment, not an obstacle to that. If we yield on this issue, more concessions and compromises will follow. The gender ideology is a voracious beast: it always wants more and more. Look at what happened last year! We offered an Inclusion and Diversity Club and now they say it's not enough... We could soon be forced to have a certain percentage of LGBTQ+ faculty and staff or even to hire transexuals; to offer abortion and contraceptives in our healthcare packages; to practice euthanasia in our hospital... We must stand up for our values, no matter what. From a practical perspective, we should continue with our policies. If they want to organize a meeting or an event, they can book a classroom or a hall, simply ensuring that nothing illegal will be done on campus. This includes inviting a speaker. They can use social media to invite people. By no means do I want to see an LGBTQ+ event announced on our website!

To offer a consistent explanation, we should cancel the Women's Club for undergraduate students. That way, we can always say all our clubs are related to industries and strictly professional, and that our negative response has nothing to do with religion. An alternative would be to drop the "Club" category, and treat them the same as any students' association, with no official funding. Or we could reform their status. It makes no sense to me that we fund them but cannot "interfere" in their activities. I know it could be very unpopular, but it's at the core of the problem. On the other hand, I do think we could do more for our students with same-sex attraction. Some seem very certain, but many others look a bit confused... I've seen that several universities offer counselling services and psychological support. We could include those alongside our career development services!

Alain Blanchet, Dean of Liberal Arts

In my opinion, the main risks are not economic but reputational. This university is based on daily miracles. Only the faith can explain why we not only survive in a very secularized society but actually thrive every year: new students, talented faculty, great working environment, good economic results... and lots of spiritual fruits. Many young people leave our campus better prepared to live a Christian life in their professional careers! This happens thanks to the support of the archdiocese, our alumni, and in general, the backing of so many Catholics who really go the extra mile for us. I am afraid that if we authorize such a club, our best friends will be scandalized.³³ They send us students, money, and sponsorships; as providers, they grant us better conditions in relation to many services and products, and we water down our identity. Additionally, they will be alienated if they see that Sophia University money goes toward activities that are directly against our Christian identity. The same scandal will happen among some of our sister universities. They won't understand why we are taking this step, and we might create a problem for them.

My answer would be no to a club, but yes to an LGBTQ+ center, and let's do it as soon as possible. We have to be proactive rather than waiting until it is inevitable, because our margins for negotiation will be much tighter. Also, we have to recognize that we could do more for them; we are doing very little in comparison with other universities.

Let me explain the advantages of such a center. The core of its activities won't involve celebrating their identity but will instead have academic content (lectures, research, publications), in which such issues can be studied and discussed, not just celebrated. Second, every center has a faculty member as its head, so it won't be self-organized by students alone. And third, all centers are self-funded. Those who promote their activities also engage in fundraising initiatives and look for public funding (our government is quite generous with them). The money used by the center has to come from donors who know how it's going to be spent. We don't want anybody protesting that we misuse their donations. This is what most Catholic universities do, so I suppose it is ok for the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

³² The Dicastery for Culture and Education, a department of the Holy See (the headquarters of the Catholic Church), was in charge of guiding schools and Catholic and ecclesiastical institutes of higher education and research worldwide. According to Church law, one of its missions was to collaborate with bishops and regional conferences of bishops to establish and promote the fundamental principles that were to be "implemented contextually and culturally". It issued norms that defined the criteria for Catholic education in a particular cultural context, and it "ensures that the integrity of the Catholic faith is safeguarded in doctrinal teaching." See Pope Francis, "Art. 159," *Praedicate evangelium*, accessed June 27, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html.

³³ According to Christian morals, "a scandal is an action, word, attitude or behavior that induces others to perform evil. He who scandalizes becomes the tempter of his neighbor [...] he can drag his brother to spiritual death." Catechism of the Catholic Church, N°2284.

Elyna Lafayette, Head of HR

I think the real risk here involves provoking a division within the university. This issue could provoke heated conversations among students. I saw what happened just two weeks ago in a religious-based university in the United States. What took place there could easily happen here, and our peaceful environment will go down the drain (Trivedi, 2022)! The wide range of opinions among us here shows that there are many different views among faculty and staff, and trust me, our colleagues may air other ideological disagreements! So far, we have avoided public arguments simply by ignoring the issue (we never discussed it at the faculty meeting or in department meetings), but if there is a boycott or public rallies, professors will take sides, and not everyone will be on the side of the executive committee. This may polarize the campus, leave other Christian principles out to dry, and cause some faculty members to leave our university.

I am in favor of saying yes, as it is a prudential decision and not forbidden (I checked the main Vatican document on Catholic universities, and it doesn't even mention this issue) (Paul II, 1990). But first I would find out why the Diversity and Inclusion Club didn't work out last year. Can we do something extra? Otherwise, I would say yes, but I will be quite strict on the conditions. It must be a professional club, not an event hub for self-celebrating activities. One sign of activism and the club is gone. Alas, my experience with other trendy requests is that they always look bigger than they really are. As soon as this small collective gets recognition, this issue will disappear; otherwise, even those who disagree with them will sign their requests because it's a human rights issue. But if you think an LGBTQ+ club could be too disruptive, at least we can keep the Diversity and Inclusion Club created last year and reinforce it with an Office for Diversity Protection, serving our LGBTQ+ community and any other minority. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. We can do some benchmarking among other Catholic universities and select those best practices that most clearly fit our situation.

I think our emphasis should be on prevention. First, regarding our faculty and staff, maybe we should revise our hiring process, update the "identity clauses" in our contracts according to the current social trends, and introduce an introductory course and a mentoring program for young faculty members. Second, regarding students, I've learned that a few Catholic universities have a core curriculum course for all students (also at their business schools), in which they deal with anthropological and ethical topics. We should do the same. Then, people will decide which principles they want to inspire their lives, but no student could say "I was not told." Third, we should dedicate more attention and resources to "other Catholic issues," including social integration, fighting against poverty effectively, and care for the environment, with a practical approach. Otherwise, some may perceive that the Gospel is mainly about sexuality. Finally, discrimination has many faces. If we make Sophia University exemplary in terms of gender, disability, age, race, cultural, religious, and economic integration, and we can achieve a high rate of all this, our low rate in relation to sexual orientation won't have dire consequences. There'll be a storm, but we will have the legitimacy necessary to defend our position.

Angelo Napolitano, Political Science Professor

In my opinion, the main risk is changing the goal of what a university should be: not a political arena but a center for higher education. People come to class to study and become competent professionals. Political activity on campus can be justified in authoritarian countries, where there are no other spheres for free public debate; however, France is a very democratic country. Everybody enjoys complete freedom, including on sexual matters. Maybe in other parts of the world it would be quite justified to defend those rights, but in most Western countries, LGBTQ+ groups enjoy significant legal protection and strong social recognition beyond their numbers. Therefore, I find it inappropriate to let LGBTQ+ groups instrumentalize the university to increase their already favorable juridical framework. In addition, what if they quarrel among themselves and demand a club for each sexual tendency? For these reasons, our university should not enter into these issues. Having a club for homosexuals is as absurd as having another club for heterosexuals, a third one for people who love pets, etc. It's a private matter; do whatever you want, but don't ask for our approval or disapproval.

As last year we granted authorization to a Diversity and Inclusion Club, I would keep it. It was a bad idea but cancelling it would make things worse. But let's not forget that homosexuality is bad for people, not bad for the Church. Thus, we cannot accept a club that promotes homosexual lifestyles. As far as I remember from my classes in Catholic doctrine when I was much younger, the doctrine of the Church regarding homosexuality is what it is, and it cannot change. What has radically changed, thank God, is the pastoral treatment of the problem. But the doctrine has been well grounded in revelation, tradition, bishops' teachings, and catechisms for centuries. Yes, some Catholic bishops are saying the opposite, likely in a laudable effort to prevent LGBTQ+ people from moving away from the Church, but they are wrong. Taking one truth off the list makes the whole building collapse... Learn from Pope Francis: he has adopted gestures of closeness and

understanding, with his famous “whom am I to judge” (Ivereigh & Lopez, 2012), and he has done everything possible to make them feel welcomed (for instance, last week he received the fourth group of transsexuals so far this year (Mora, 2022). But he has never said anything that presupposes a change in doctrine or any such intention.

Regarding specific decisions to deal with this issue, I agree with most of the proposals by my colleagues. More presence of our values on campus, more training on Catholic doctrine, more personal coaching, etc. But at the end of the day, what really matters is how people feel treated, so I would encourage everyone, faculty and staff, to reinforce our empathy and practical ways of showing our understanding. I am not sure everybody knows how to do that, so I’d suggest adding this topic to our permanent formation courses.

Raymond Perez, Former Dean of the Law School

I want to stress the legal risks involved in saying no to the students’ request. Our legal system is quite explicit on this matter: no institution can treat individuals or groups differently based on their ideas or their sexual orientation. Even before the new anti-discrimination law, there was an extensive line of sentences by provincial and district courts saying that colleges cannot ban any student club if its goal is legal, and the regulators have imposed heavy fines for doing so. So far there are no case precedents applying the new law, but its support for LGBTQ+ rights is even more explicit, and it reverses the burden of proof (also known as “negative discrimination”). If there is not such a club, we could be forced to demonstrate that we don’t discriminate against anybody. This could also provoke an inspection by the Ministry of Universities, and we don’t want that.

In my view, abiding by the law is also a Christian principle. We have no other option than to accept the LGBTQ+ club. Let’s not forget that accepting such a club does not mean we support any moral wrongdoing; rather, it shows that we do our best in a specific context. This is what we did a few years ago when we opened the Family and Partners Club to every significant other, including non-married couples and same-sex spouses. I am the oldest guy here, so I am probably the only one who remembers that 30 years ago, that club didn’t accept divorced and remarried couples if they were Catholics! We changed that policy without changing our identity, and we should now do the same with students. But I approve the Club *ad experimentum* for a year or two, with clear lines they can’t cross, for instance, rules about inviting speakers, making them sign an agreement, etc. If they behave, we can extend it, but if the club becomes a celebration of the gay lifestyle (and that’s not a remote risk: check online for what some LGBTQ+ clubs do in other universities), we go back to square one.

On the practical side, I think it would be prudent to make two decisions. First, include a specific clause in the enrolment saying that students should refrain from any kind of activism, and second, we should put a disclaimer in whatever we do, saying that just because a speech, a lecture, a program, or whatever takes place on campus, it does not mean it’s sponsored by the university, or that we agree with whatever they say. Frankly, we should have a clear and robust statement saying that the university doesn’t endorse everything that’s said by any student association, and we should put it in a very visible place in the university’s public profile, on the website, on our publications, and even at the bottom of all club flyers and banners.

Danielle Kim, Communications Director

I agree with Alain when he mentioned that there is a risk of a scandal. But in my view, it’s the other way around. Scandals are linked to social values at specific times. And today, given the way that our society views LGBT issues, especially young people, the real scandal might be that we are not treating LGBT people with the kind of compassion and dignity that the catechism requires us to. Maybe it is my background as a communicator, but I’d like to insist that what you say isn’t necessarily what people hear. Everybody knows what the Church teaches about homosexuality, so there is little need to insist on that. Instead, what we need to do as Christians is stress the second part of the equation: that homosexual people must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. So, if the executive committee of a Catholic university, or the grand chancellor (which is to say, the Church, because whatever we do will be interpreted as the Church’s decision), says no to this LGBTQ+ club because “we stand by Church teachings on marriage, sexuality and even on how people are made male and female” and all the rest, what people will understand is that we neither respect their freedom to pursue happiness the way they want, nor are we fair on a professional issue, which is looking for jobs in gay-friendly organizations. And that’s the scandal today! Also, if we say no, we can imagine what will happen with the media and on social media: a full storm now and earning the stigma of being an “anti-gay university” forever. I also read the clipping Elyna mentioned³⁴, and I am quite afraid that such a scenario may happen to us. So, before such havoc starts, please make a decision we will

³⁴ Pope Francis, “Art. 159.”

support even if there is a boycott. It wouldn't be the first time that we make a decision, I talk to the media, and then we change direction in the middle of the storm...

That's why I would say yes to the students' request. By allowing such a club, we're saying that we do treat everybody with respect, compassion, and sensitivity, and then we complement that remark affirming that we don't necessarily agree with the conclusions these students come to on some substantive issues. In any case, whatever the decision might be, please keep the human face front and center. Do we really know, frankly, who the students we're engaging with are? What are their names? Where are they from? Is this someone for whom this is just a part of everyday life and the culture they swim in? Did somebody have a challenging and traumatic experience? For instance, some of them (particularly the SBS students) may have to go back to countries in which LGBTQ+ people are persecuted... Only if we say yes, can we have a dialogue.

In the communications realm, we should be more proactive in terms of explaining our identity. For instance, we should explain why our faith moves us to respect their choices (which is more than simply tolerance), although we don't celebrate them. The same thing with other vital choices: we not only allow veganism, we offer a vegan menu in our cafeteria (even if we lose money on it), but we don't allow vegan activists to hassle people for having a steak. Also, we could promote a lecture series by relevant speakers who really talk about this issue in a winning way that might reach young people. This series could be the perfect balance for having an LGBTQ+ club. This is what we think about this issue, but then you do whatever you want, because we truly respect freedom as a fundamental trait of any university.

Monique Forge, Chief Librarian

The risk of a long-lasting controversy involving Sophia University is significant. Any policy that openly contradicts the secular ethos of LGBTQ+ issues could be damaging to the reputation and prestige of the university among precisely those students who it depends on the most. As a Catholic university, compromising on this issue would likely prove a counter-witness to Catholic teaching and, importantly, only invite further pressure on other issues where the Church and culture are at odds. Of all the statistical information available, the most relevant is not that most Catholics look a bit confused, but rather the fact that practicing Catholics understand what is at stake. So, since it is an identity issue, input from the archdiocese is necessary. Although the archbishops have a long history of staying out of Sophia University's management, the archbishop retains significant control over the trustees and responsibility for the university. Any attempt to oppose an LGBTQ+ club on Catholic grounds will almost certainly fail without the archbishop's support (and opposing an LGBTQ+ club on other grounds is slow-motion capitulation). But it shouldn't be a decision taken only at the top. Broad consultation is important, both for gauging the circumstances and for ensuring that whatever decision is ultimately made has increased credibility. No matter the decision, someone—perhaps many people—is going to be upset. That can't be avoided, but it can be mitigated by an inclusive decision-making process.

I would say no to the club... and keep negotiating. Bring to the table other students' requests, not just those of the LGBTQ+ community, and see whether there'll be a common ground acceptable not just for them but for the whole student body. I would only accept the club if I see that the student council is serious about launching a boycott. Toleration of viewpoints and behaviors at odds with the university's Catholic mission is one thing. There can be room for negotiation on that. Affirmation of those identities and behaviors (which is what the LGBTQ+ club proposal demands) is a non-starter. What is being demanded is not toleration but complicity. Make sure everyone (students, faculty, staff, families) knows that, in Sophia University's French context, the hostage-taking approach—"If you love us, you will affirm what we do... otherwise we'll boycott"—is unreasonable and untenable. They are the aggressors, not the university.

I can't stress enough the importance of how we communicate this to all stakeholders (although there is not a great deal of difference in how I would communicate to each of them). The crucial thing is candor and humility—don't over-tailor communication to what one thinks one's audience wants to hear! Say what you mean and mean what you say. Leave the door open for further dialogue, but avoid the twin pitfalls of being defensive or dismissive. In any case, we should confidently connect Sophia University's decision to her Christian ethos. The Catholic faith insists that we love everyone, not that we affirm everyone's beliefs or behaviors. It certainly does not require that we abandon moral commitments in the face of unreasonable demands.

Albert Tavistock, Professor of Organizational Behavior at the School of Economics

I agree with every risk identified by my colleagues. It really is a complex situation. Actually, those risks are even higher in our Masters' programs because postgrad students are older. Moreover, in our promotion, we rely more on international

rankings for students and custom programs, so if the rankings editors decide that sexual orientation should increase in importance, we will drop to the bottom of the list and lose both talented students and important companies. But if I have to pick one, I will stress that a wrong decision here compromises our identity. First, we are a university, a place where we could and should discuss everything because we believe in reason, and everybody is welcomed. If we narrow our scope and become a bubble for “true Catholics,” we are betraying our identity as a university. Second, because one of the most important goals of any Catholic institution is to witness the fullness of our Catholic identity and mission in a specific environment and culture. This is more about pulling than pushing, more about inspiring than forbidding. We have to make sure that any interested student can really explore these issues in detail from a scientific perspective.

I am in favor of saying yes, with all the caveats my colleagues mentioned before: clear rules, *ad experimentum* for two years, etc. My explanation is similar to what we do in the school of economics regarding religion. As you know, we have a higher proportion of students with different religious backgrounds than the rest of the university. From a Catholic point of view, we believe that their beliefs are wrong, but—also from a Catholic perspective—we respect freedom of conscience. Not only that. We encourage them to live according to their beliefs, we facilitate kosher or halal meals on campus, we offer one-on-one exams in case they are on the sabbath, or it is during Ramadan, we grant them classrooms if they want a hall for religious celebrations such as Diwali festivals, etc. Some aspects of gender ideology are quite like a religion. That is, there is no scientific evidence or philosophical demonstrations regarding their axioms, but nevertheless, we should respect them as they are and not question them unless they ask for our opinion.

On a practical note, I have to say that I disagree with the decisions of last year’s executive committee on this topic: just saying no but not explaining why to the interested students and to the whole Sophia University community. I understand that they wanted to avoid controversy, but it is inevitable. We might not mention it in our faculty meetings, but we certainly discuss it in the cafeteria or in corridors. It looks like we are afraid of speaking up about our identity! In addition, the issues of diversity and inclusion are among the new trends changing companies and institutions globally. We should introduce a chair on issues related to discrimination in the broadest sense, including sexual orientation but also considering gender, disability, age, race, language, religion, etc. This way we could influence not only the theoretical framework itself, but also how it is applied to all kinds of organizations. A Christian view on these sensible topics will counterbalance so many research papers published under the umbrella of gender studies.

Time to Decide

Mercier had a week to assimilate the suggestions from her colleagues, some of them incompatible with others and prepare a proposal for the executive committee.

If you were Mercier, what decision-making process would you suggest? Which measures would your plan have? How would you communicate the university’s decisions to each stakeholder?

Part B—Guidelines and Recommendations

A comprehensive response to Sophia’s dilemma described above exceeds the possibilities of this paper. It is a question of the scientific genre: the aim of a case study is to present a challenge to the leaders of a specific organization as a tool to refine their managerial skills and might end up with some takeaways. Instead, the exhaustive analysis of a problem, of its causes and its solutions corresponds rather to a technical note, in which arguments and evidence are presented with their corresponding scientific references and bibliography.

My intention is to return to this subject soon and deal with it directly and monographically. It won’t be easy, since at the heart of the matter there is an ethical dilemma, but some questions also demand a discussion covering issues of legality, policy, corporate governance, and communication. It will require an interdisciplinary approach, beyond my training as a communicator. Most probably it should be carried out by a team.

If this were a mere academic issue, the most prudent answer would be to wait till the theoretical basis is in place. However, I am afraid that this is a real problem right now on the managers’ desks at many Christian universities. In fact, the 11 universities that contacted to write Part A of this paper confirmed that this issue is in

their agendas (and surprisingly, each one is taking a different approach).

Therefore, until such time that the technical note is finished, I have decided to publish this case study as it is, in this provisional form, in the hope that it may be used in the context of a leadership training program, or perhaps as a hypothetical scenario to guide discussion within a university's governing body facing such a challenge.

However, some readers may feel a little frustrated by the fact that I have left too many questions unsolved. What advice would I give to the governing bodies of Sophia University? To avoid that sense of disappointment, let me offer some considerations of a provisional and schematic nature, by way of a first draft of the promised technical note, which could be used as a blueprint for discussion in teams or on boards.

I have made a wider approach so that these considerations go beyond Sophia's Catholic ethos and may be applicable to other Christian denominations. They are numbered to facilitate cross references. I am well aware that these suggestions are partial and incomplete, but I hope that despite their limitations they may serve at least to stimulate the need for more research on such a difficult topic, for the benefit of university heads and administrators.

Framework

The decision of a university of Christian identity to respond affirmatively or negatively to a request to officially approve a student club for the LGBTQ+ community is not, in my opinion, a closed ethical question; a different case would be, for example, whether the legitimacy of the death penalty could be defended in class as an instrument to fight crime, or the performance of abortions in a university hospital owned by a person well known for his Christian beliefs or by a Christian institution. Caution is needed and the answer would largely depend on the specific circumstances of each university.

Therefore, a prudent decision must take into account a number of factors regarding the social and cultural environment:

- Place: the answer will not be the same in Africa as in North America, and there will even be notable variations in the same continent.
- The country's legal system: in some places it will be mandatory by law to accept the request.
- The religious reality of the context: it will not be the same in a mostly Christian country with high rates of Sunday worship as in another where Christians are a small minority, or where the process of secularization is well advanced.
- The type of university: one with civil studies compared with a pontifical university for ecclesiastical studies; its faculty, curricula, and students. It is not the same if the club is requested by undergraduates, graduates, or by managers enrolled on programs at a business school.
- The number of signatories of the application; the situation—peaceful or discriminatory—in which this minority finds itself in the country; what type of student club it would be (types of activities, autonomy, financing, etc.).
- What other universities in the environment, especially those that are also Christian, are doing, etc.

Therefore, it is not possible to supply a definitive and unequivocal answer applicable to any university of Christian inspiration anywhere in the world.

At the same time, it is not a banal and inconsequential issue, because an unwise decision by a governing body could diminish the Christian influence of the university among its students and in its environment—which

is its ultimate reason for existing, its corporate purpose. Such a decision would also distort the Christian anthropological vision on human sexuality, formed by the binomial: “No discrimination of any kind” and “The exercise of sexuality outside marriage is harmful to the person”. Leaders of such an institution cannot make decisions that might obfuscate its message or, even worse, induce its stakeholders to perceive that the university stands for the opposite of what its Church teaches.

It would be naïve to think that these kinds of dilemmas are presented only to the governing bodies of such a university. On the contrary, it is a daily concern at any institution with a Christian ethos (and even of an ecclesial authority), when they have to make decisions rooted in their principles that clash with prevailing values. Unpopularity is an inherent part of some offices and positions. Regarding Sophia specifically, prudence is a matter of importance and while the provost of Sophia University has several legitimate options to choose from in conscience, some others would not be consistent with its Christian identity. Let me mention four samples out of many more.

(1) Adopting a “compatibilist attitude”, which would affirm that values inspired by the Gospel are totally compatible with the values of a post-Christian society, and that nothing in Western culture today is unacceptable to a coherent Christian. In that vision, there is no unsolvable conflict; if there is one, it must be solved by adapting itself to the surrounding environment; and in any case this adaptability would not harm my principles.

(2) Proclaiming categorically that there is not a LGBTQ+ student club in my university and there never will be. The answer to those who enquire about it is: “this is our identity, this is our home: if you don’t like it, find another university”. Apart from the fact that directly seeking confrontation is counter-productive in terms of public opinion, in many countries this type of reaction would be typified in anti-discrimination laws. I wonder whether such an attitude is truly Christian.

(3) Taking a decision—either favorable or contrary to the approval of the students’ club—based fundamentally on external pressure. According to the ethics of Christian anthropology, it is not legitimate to do evil for the good fruits that would result; nor is it legitimate to fail to fulfill a duty for fear of negative effects. You don’t have to go to war, but the decision not to defend yourself can be equally wrong. Social peace and the absence of controversy should not be the primary criterion in deciding.

(4) Choosing the path of tactical political prudence and refusing to give explanations because it would not help to make oneself understood. On the contrary, such a decision would complicate the situation and even hinder the fulfilment of the university’s mission (fewer students, lower financial support from scarcer benefactors, more control by the state regulator, becoming the target of activist groups...). Like any tactical decision, it can be acceptable in the short term if the long-term strategy is to find the right time, place, and way to explain things so that they can be understood. However, if that tactic were actually the strategy (and there is never a good time to explain what is believed and thought), we would be in the previous assumption: it has been decided to hide the reasons for fear of the consequences; and we would also be deceiving ourselves.

From the point of view of the public debate around identity issues, it is not superfluous to point out how the social and media environments in many Western countries confirm Noelle-Neumann’s analysis of the spiral of silence: when an individual or a group perceive that their opinion is unpopular, they will be more inclined to be reserved and remain silent. Perhaps the issue under discussion is one of those issues in which today there is greater divergence between public opinion and published opinion; this divergence is also due to the consequences of the polarization promoted by populisms of the right and the left, which simply refuse to recognize anything good in the position of the other.

Polarization, populisms, and activist movements that do not limit themselves to defending their postulates but deny others their legitimate right to defend their point of view turn this terrain into a minefield. In few cases is the distance between what is said and what is perceived greater. At the same time, silence means accepting other no less dangerous risks. Failure to react would result in the loss of public legitimacy (silence gives consent), the legal battle (silence paves the way for laws that make the majority position compulsory), the social consequences (the minority may be doomed to become an isolated ghetto), and even compromise internal cohesion around the purpose (there are numerous examples of how discrepancies that are not detected or refuted end up by being accepted, since—Noelle-Neumann’s analysis again—from the individual’s perspective, non-isolation is more important than his own judgement).

Identity and public positioning are always united, and even more so in an institution inspired by Christian values, which are not a “weakness” but one of its points of strength and a reason for honor (“proud to be Christians”). Not communicating some aspect of its identity is in some ways a betrayal of its principles. Therefore, the university must have a sustainable public discourse both from ethical and legal points of view, and offer a coherent and persuasive explanation of its decision, either in favor or against the application, based on:

(1) Arguments and evidence which are valid from a logical point of view: true reasoning, substantiated, supported by data from credible sources.

(2) Persuasive from the psychological point of view: presented in a clear and elegant way, with illuminating examples.

(3) Presented in a cordial, empathetic, and sensitive tone: style is part of the Christian message.

(4) At the proper time and place: if the context is not right (because you are in the middle of a controversy, or because there is not enough time for a complex and articulated explanation), it may be better to avoid the clash for the moment and create the circumstances to talk about the issue at the right time.

The decision should use the university’s identity as its starting point, according to the moral root of actions in Christian ethics: that is, to do good and to avoid evil. Therefore, the first step would be to reflect on the principles derived from Revelation involved in the issue.

Those who would apparently be in favor of authorization: the centrality of the person in organizations, the mission to go out to meet everyone, the importance of respect and welcome, the promotion of social integration and the active fight against any type of discrimination, the reality that the truth is proposed, never imposed; the moral obligation to comply with the law, etc.

And those who seem to be opposed: the intrinsic immorality of sex acts outside of marriage; the duty not to provide the means or a platform for a message which is totally opposed to the Christian worldview or contrary to the institutional project; the freedom to choose my goals and the autonomy to self-organize my home, the independence to reject alliances with groups with whom I disagree on many other issues, etc.

Next, you must consider your circumstances. According to the majority perception in Western culture, the issue of sexual orientation is framed as a fundamental human right, that of respect for one’s own identity and destiny; in these fields, guidelines based on scientific evidence (biology, medicine, sociology, etc.) cannot be imposed on the person; absolute moral judgments about behaviors are interpreted as judging the person, and therefore are categorically rejected as an aggressive and discriminatory manifestation (to say “homosexuality is intrinsically disordered”, as the catechism of the Catholic Church says, is understood in many environments as a rejection of the person, not of his or her conduct). Individual rights deserve more protection by law and authority

than the right of institutions to protect their identity, as evidenced by the jurisprudence of French courts—Sophia’s legal context—and the European Court of Human Rights.

Finally, the reasons behind the decision must be made explicit in a transparent manner and at the initiative of the institution, in all circumstances where it is reasonable to explain the consequences of institutional identity: recruitment processes for faculty members and non-teaching staff; student admission interviews; agreements with sponsoring companies and fundraising campaigns, etc. In my opinion, it would be a mistake if the Christian identity of the university were not made known proportionately according to the case, and someone (a hired professor, an exchange student, a benefactor, a company where students do internships) were to discover it later, with unpleasant surprise.

Recommendations

The decision must come from the governing body of the university. Therefore, the rector of Sophia University and his council cannot make this decision on their own, but must raise it with the Board of Trustees, as custodians of the identity and mission of the Institution. We are not dealing with a matter of management but of strategy.

Despite the urgency with which the problem arises at Sophia, the decision should be taken calmly, after careful study: haste is a bad adviser, and haste in this field can be harmful. It’s also relevant to choose the right methodology, combining presentations by experts (on the theoretical and policy issues mentioned in points 7-10 of this section), recommended reading, small-group discussions, time for personal reflection and decision-making meetings.

A final decision should not be reached in an authoritarian manner and made at the apex of the institution, but as a result of study and dialogue among members of the academic community, as is typical of an institution formed mainly by intellectuals. In some cases it will doubtless not be easy to reach a solution that enjoys unanimous consensus; but if the dissent is great, and the staff of a Christian institution is not able to agree on the general guidelines of an issue pertaining to its identity, this is not a communication problem but a (serious) problem of corporate governance involving hiring policies, internal training programs, and other activities to ensure the sense of belonging and the sharing of corporate values and principles.

The question raised by the students’ request affects not only the university’s relations with its internal stakeholders but also its educational mission. The university must certainly take a prudent decision regarding the club, but it should also be able to fulfill its mission and provide society with scientific studies, recommendations, and good practices on the matter. This responsibility would be even greater in universities with specialized schools where business, political, and civil society leaders are trained. It should be considered whether it has a faculty qualified in this area and able to lead the way (and also in others where the future is being elucidated: the struggle against poverty, solutions to immigration, biotechnology issues, artificial intelligence challenges, etc.).

Likewise, this issue cannot be isolated from other issues where Christians are at the forefront of social change (education, marginality, poverty, addictions, etc.) and where the values of the Gospel are widely accepted. In that sense, talking about this issue is an opportunity to talk about one’s own identity and to seek to work together people of different faiths for the benefit of all, and in particular of the most vulnerable. These elements must be highlighted in the university’s communication with its stakeholders.

From a Christian point of view, the center of the university is each person. Therefore, before considering whether to accept or to reject the LGBTQ+ students club, it is necessary to ensure that anyone who identifies

as a member of that community finds a respectful and welcoming environment on campus which is promoted by faculty, administrative staff, and fellow students. It must be clear that manifestations of disrespect, intolerance and verbal or physical violence are adequately addressed in the Code of Discipline. This cannot be taken for granted: policies and initiatives are needed to put good intentions into practice.

University campuses have always been areas of great freedom, even greater than in the rest of society (freedom of expression, demonstration, and even dress codes); they have actively promoted diversity. It is important that universities continue to be places where the peaceful coexistence of the very different is promoted, and to ensure that it is understood that respect for the personal choices of each individual is compatible with resisting the acceptance of activist groups within the university community. For example, the dining hall of a university that wishes to be inclusive because it is Christian, would have to offer—whenever there is minimal demand—a halal, kosher, or vegan menu; but it would not allow activists of any sign to use physical or verbal violence to prevent another person from eating a pork chop in peace.

Universities must also guarantee all people's rights: the right of association, the right of assembly, freedom of expression, the right—in the case of universities with postgraduate studies—to facilitate their recruitment by companies that explicitly seek professionals with a certain profile, etc. Here, too, we need policies, not just declarations of principle.

Holistic Christian vision actively promotes inclusion in all aspects of diversity: gender, age and ability, ethnicity, culture and language, economic position, religion, and sexual orientation. That requires a strategy, precise goals, initiatives and monitoring and evaluation of each area, and an economic investment which is proportional to the impact that each of those areas has on the community it serves. It would be a contradiction, for example, to devote more resources to the LGBTQ+ community than to access to education of any disabled person, or that the scholarship policy does not respond to the most pressing social needs in a given context. These plans not only respond to the Christian identity of the university, but also provide eloquent examples that this higher education institution does not discriminate, but quite the opposite. Moreover, it should be so exemplary that any problem can be solved by comparing its policies with those of other universities.

Given this context, the decision-making process may be helped by considering that respect for free decision on matters of sexual orientation could be understood in a similar way to the freedom of conscience in the religious sphere: for a Christian, the way in which a believer of another religion (Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, believer in an ancestral religion, etc.) understands God and worships is wrong, but the Christian not only respects that person and avoids any proselytism, but defends their freedom against any interference, and even works with the other to defend common interests. In that sense, not to oppose something is quite different from defending it; approving a proposal does not imply that you agree with it, if an adequate explanation of its acceptance is given. In university life you can find numerous examples of this.

Practical Suggestions

Ask for advice. If in other specialized or delicate matters the provost asks for opinions or technical reports from external consultants, also in this matter it seems more than reasonable to ask for advice (regarding its ethical, governance, legal, and communication aspects) from experts, in order to have a solid starting point for reflection. In addition, if the university is associated with a Christian denomination that has some instance for doctrinal and moral issues (the Holy See for Catholics, the various Orthodox patriarchates, the Anglican communion, the Southern Baptist convention, etc.), it is not a bad idea to request an opinion from the corresponding entity.

The decision must take into account not only the most obvious stakeholders (board members, faculty, non-teaching staff, present and future students, educational regulators, benefactors, etc.) but also those of any Christian institution, which is part of a transnational community, which promotes thousands of educational and welfare initiatives on five continents, and—especially in some Christian denominations—with authorities and local government, national and global agencies. In this respect, it is important to keep in mind the notion of scandal, in one form or another. On the other hand, the stakeholders that have less priority are the media, which are mainly relevant as communication channels with stakeholders with whom I do not have direct channels, and even decisive with those who do not know me (and for that reason are less of a priority for me). In the specific problem that challenges Sophia University, it would be wrong to think that the problem is the discrepancy with “outsiders” through pressure from the media, but rather the lack of cohesion of the internal publics in respect of the purpose. In this sense, we should be wary of tendencies in an institution, of people in two blocks: that of those truly committed to the mission, and that of the others: an institution “at two speeds” is much more prone to crisis (and the worst crises are caused by an internal opponent).

Consider also reasons of opportunity: although it might seem logical that a proposal of this type will not be accepted if it does not have considerable weight (not only in number of signatories of the request but in the dominant opinion of the other priority stakeholders), perhaps in some cases it can be counter-productive to resist until the pressure becomes unbearable. If governing bodies act in this way, they will probably have to concede more than if they had accepted the request when there was still room for negotiation (and the battle for the narrative will certainly be lost).

Not all student clubs have the same characteristics: in some university traditions they are mere associations without institutional backing; in others, clubs are official channels of university life, and for that reason they have a consolidated status: they organize activities within the campus and are financed by the university; they enjoy a presence in the media (official website, newsletters, etc.). If the requested club does not require any support from the university, its acceptance would be less problematic. Their degree of independence is also relevant. In some places, clubs are completely autonomous groups of students, while on other campuses the management of the clubs is entrusted to a professor; in other cases, the academic authorities not only approve the existence of a club, but also each single activity must be approved by the vice-chancellor for students (in which case, approval for a club as such would involve less risk).

From the outside, the LGBTQ+ community could be understood as a compact group with a unique vision and strategy; and they can even be framed as an essentially disruptive collective that rejects Christian principles. Reality is quite often very different from that stereotype. Only with good personal relationships and a lot of dialogue will it be possible to know the true expectations of each person without gross generalizations, and also to make it understood that it is compatible to think one thing and defend the right of others to think otherwise. For example, Catholic universities that grant premises on campus so that the believers of other religions can practice their faith are no less Christian, just the opposite.

Perhaps in some cases it will be concluded that circumstances favor the approval of such a student club. That decision, however, would be incomplete if it were not accompanied by concrete initiatives to offer students ways to be informed of the Christian position on these issues... if they want to. This combines respect for their freedom with the active promotion of the values that explain the institutional project and dispels doubts about the position of the university.

Some universities successfully implemented an *ad experimentum* approval, renewed year by year, with reasonable conditions of coexistence and social peace and a written commitment regarding the type of activities, public messages, etc. Perhaps it is more respectful to cancel an authorization after the signatories showed they were not trustworthy than to doubt students on principle before they have broken their word.

Another successful option has been to create not a club but a diversity and inclusion center, focused on personal support of all kinds (personal, professional, psychological, and spiritual) but also capable of organizing activities, research, and publications. Like any academic center, it is run by a faculty member, and could be—like many research centers and chairs—economically autonomous, so its funding does not come from the university but from individuals, companies, and foundations who want to support specific initiatives, as long as they meet the selection conditions required of all university sponsors (field of activity in ethical terms, good reputation, absence of legal problems, etc.).

It is a best practice in troubled times not to be alone but to ask your friends for help, because an isolated institution under fire easily fails. This applies both to the ecclesial community to which a university belongs and to possible collaborations between universities. The goal would not be to jointly make a binding decision for very different universities—which, as we anticipated, would not make sense—but to study collectively a problem that affects all universities of Christian inspiration, and then choose the option most convenient to each one's circumstances. In the conversations I held to prepare this article, I was surprised to learn that although many higher education centers work in coordination on academic, credentialing, international cooperation issues, and even on the prevention of other risks (tornadoes, earthquakes, sexual assault, drug, or alcohol addiction), none has indicated that they had discussed this issue with another university, despite acknowledging that it was important.

Finally, it would be necessary to work on communicative aspects. In order to transmit in a clearly argued way something that in itself can arouse harsh reactions inside and outside my university, it is necessary to carefully craft different texts (mission and vision statements, identity texts, ethical codes, etc.) and to make them widely available; it will also be necessary to train people to deal with these issues in public. There is no doubt that all this will require time, people, resources, and plenty of creativity.

References

- Allen, E. A. (2022). Vatican's academy for life sparks debate over infallibility of "humanae vitae". *Crux Now*, August 10, 2022.
- Avery, D. (2021). These 10 religious universities earn high marks for LGBTQ inclusivity. *NBC News*, August 31, 2021.
- Connaughton, A. (September 28, 2020). Religiously unaffiliated people more likely than those with a religion to lean left, accept homosexuality. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/28/religiously-unaffiliated-people-more-likely-than-those-with-a-religion-to-lean-left-accept-homosexuality/>
- Dargent, C., & Galland, O. (2019). La religion en mouvement [Religion in Motion]. In P. Br échon, F. Gonthier and S. Astor (Eds.), *La France des valeurs. Quarante ans d'évolution [The France of Values. Forty Years of Evolution]* (pp. 221-251). Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble.
- De la Cierva, Y., Méndez, S. R., & Guzik, P. (2021). A university crisis provoked by an online case: A communications case study on a social media turbulence. *Church, Communication and Culture*, 6(2), 327-359.
- Diamant, J. (November 2, 2020). How Catholics around the globe see same-sex marriage, homosexuality. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/02/how-catholics-around-the-world-see-same-sex-marriage-homosexuality/>
- Francis, P. (2022). Art. 159. Praedicate evangelium. Retrieved June 27, 2022 from https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html

- Heneghan, T. (2022). Belgium's Flemish Bishops approve blessings for same-sex couples. *The Tablet*, 21/09/2022.
- Hughes, B. E. (2020). Put the Jesuit out front: How a Catholic, Jesuit university addresses LGBTQ issues. *American Educational Research Journal*, 57(4), 1592-1624.
- Ivereigh & Lopez. (2012). *How to defend your faith without raising your voice*. Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor.
- Ivereigh, A. (2019). *How to defend your faith without raising your voice* (9th Spanish ed.). Madrid: Palabra.
- Lipka, M., & Tevington, P. (July 7, 2022). Attitudes about transgender issues vary widely among Christians, religious "nones" in U.S. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/07/07/attitudes-about-transgender-issues-vary-widely-among-christians-religious-nones-in-u-s/>
- Martin, J., & Tallon, J. (2022). What the bible says (and doesn't say) about homosexuality, sexuality and gender. *Bible and Homosexuality [blog]*, June 27, 2022.
- Mora, S. (2022). El Papa Francisco se reúne con personas trans y prostitutas durante una audiencia general [Pope Francis Meets With Trans People and Prostitutes during a General Audience]. *ABC Sociedad*, August 11, 2022.
- Morgan, T. C. (2022). Anglican division over scripture and sexuality heads south. *Christianity Today*, August 9, 2022.
- Paul II, P. J. (1990). Apostolic constitution of the supreme pontiff John Paul II on catholic universities. *The Vatican*, August 15, 1990.
- Pew Research Center. (May 14, 2019). Majority of public favors same-sex marriage but divisions persist. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/05/14/majority-of-public-favors-same-sex-marriage-but-divisions-persist/>
- Poushter, J., & Kent, N. (2020). The global divide on homosexuality persists—But increasing acceptance in many countries over past two decades. Pew Research Center, June 25, 2020.
- Sandeen, E. (1970). *The roots of fundamentalism: British and American millenarianism 1800-1930*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Trivedi, I. (2022). This university upheld its anti-LGBTQ policy. Students and faculty say it's time to change. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 6, 2022.