Speech on the occasion of the Christian Democrats' victory in the elections of the Student Federation of the University of Chile. October 11, 1959

Young Christian Democrats!

You have good reason to celebrate your victory, because it is the spontaneous triumph of authentic youth over the worn-out machinations of stale and decadent politicking. With you, once again Ariel has defeated Caliban; the clean and generous ideal has defeated hateful and petty forms of materialism; truth has shone brightly over the darkness of hypocrisy and deceit.

Your Party is pleased with you, with that very same satisfaction with which parents rejoice in their children's progress in knowledge and in goodness.

You are our best answer to those who, incapable of calmly judging our differences, descend at every turn from the heights of their arrogance to judge our intentions and heap insults upon us.

Experience teaches us that the youth do not follow the bitter and resentful, nor the naive dreamers who fantasize on the sidelines of life, nor the ambitious, unable to earn their own bread, who seek to rise through the paths of deceit. The youth follow those who have a truth to teach, an example to follow, an enthusiasm to convey, a faith in which to commune, a noble cause for which it is worth giving one's life.

It is often said that universities are the crucible of nations, because within them their ideals of life are forged and their leaders are trained. Christian Democracy in Chile, which was born into the bosom of the university when its first men—Leighton, Frei, Garretón, and a few others—were still students, has in less than thirty years won the hearts of Chilean universities. This is a fact as solid as stone and as fertile as life, which, much to the chagrin of many, is marking the path of our nation.

But we must not limit ourselves to merely acknowledging this fact, nor to rejoicing in it. Our duty is to investigate its causes and fully understand its consequences.

Why is Chilean youth turning to Christian Democracy?

We believe that, to explain it, we need only cast a glance at the reality of our nation. What does a young person see when, from within university halls, they open their eyes to the social reality of our Chile?

They see a diminished and divided Chile, which does not live up to the greatness of its history. They see galling social inequalities in which the ostentatious well-being of the few is an insult to the misery of the many. The average income of a Chilean professional, which is barely enough to live decently, is at least ten times higher than the average income of a Chilean worker. They see 600,000 families without a roof worthy of being called a home. They see 400,000 children without a school. They see

around one-third of the population of this country living a subhuman existence, in which all the advantages of modern civilization are an unattainable fantasy.

They see, at the very same time, how our country's agricultural land, which exceeds in surface area that of nations feeding over forty million inhabitants, is not capable of producing what is necessary to feed seven million Chileans. And they note that of the 640,000 people working in agriculture, 540,000 do not own their land, while of the remaining 100,000 landowners, 11% own more than 75% of the country's irrigated land.

And our young university student also sees how Chilean education, at its various levels, is far from satisfying what the new generations have a right to expect from its former prestige, and fails to enable them to face the new conditions of social life with dynamism. And they observe the same regarding the legal structures that were once the pride of our fathers, but which today prove incapable of providing order, security, and justice to all Chileans.

And, in contrast to this diminished present reality, they see that Chile has a territory rich in copper, iron, coal, oil, hydroelectric power, timber reserves, and forestry potential, suited for agriculture and endowed with a coastline that offers enormous prospects for shipping and fishing. And it has, above all, a homogeneous, intelligent, hardy, and generous people, who have proven a thousand times over how much they are capable of doing.

And what do the various groups that have led or seek to lead this country say to them, in the face of the dramatic questions raised by this distressing reality?

Some survivors from other times speak of nothing but order, the rights of capital, the advantages of free enterprise, and the communist threat. They are recruited from among the holders of economic power and their obsequious servants. They are neither shocked nor angered by social inequalities; when they do notice them, they usually find them natural...

The misery of the people is frequently considered in those circles as a simple consequence of the laziness and vices of the Chilean worker... For them, the magic recipes for all ills are "the principle of authority," "incentives for capital," and "the freezing of salaries and wages." Their theorists believe that by reducing the income of the wage-earning sector, an increase in capitalization will be promoted, which in turn is bound to increase production, bringing about a prosperity in businesses that will eventually reach their workers as well.

This is the policy that has been practiced in Chile for several years. And the studies of the Economic Commission for Latin America show that starting from 1955, along with a decrease in labor's share of the national income, there has been a decline not only in consumption expenditure—that is, the standard of living of employees and workers—but also in gross domestic investment, which is to say, capitalization. The only thing that has increased, reaching its highest level since 1940, is the consumption expenditure of the non-wage-earning sector...

In the face of this blindness and selfishness of the right-wing parties, the Marxist sectors sow the seeds of hatred. Their bourgeois leaders—usually professionals, intellectuals, and sometimes even business

owners—proclaim a "class front," in which they deny even salt and water to anyone who is not proletarian. They aim to divide Chile into two irreconcilable worlds. Disregarding the traditions of our history, they profess an astonishing admiration, if not a servile obedience, to everything that comes from the Soviet nations. Behind their slogans, they hide an astonishing inability to devise their own solutions to national problems and an undisguised affinity for totalitarianism and arbitrariness.

Oscillating between the two, the Radical Party has lost its footing. Having achieved the objectives for which it was born, it has yet to find any path other than bureaucracy to offer the Chilean middle class. Only Christian Democracy offers youth a perspective capable of awakening their enthusiasm and reconciling their love for Chilean tradition with their yearning for justice.

Only within it do they find dynamic and creative ideas that both embrace eternal truths and provide eloquent and optimistic answers to the agonizing questions of our time. Only Christian Democracy provides them with a warm brotherhood, generously open to all, without hatred or exclusions.

We believe this is the reason why—perhaps without even knowing it—Chilean youth are following Christian Democracy. We say this humbly, but without false modesty. We do not believe we are the best, nor the exclusive guardians of all truth. We are deeply respectful of all people and all ideas.

But we firmly believe in the fecundity and efficacy of the Christian Democratic idea as an instrument for the liberation of man and the creation of a truly just and humane social order. And, within the limitations inherent to our imperfect human condition, we strive to live in accordance with that idea, and to use it to serve our people, dedicating to them the best of our lives.

In vain do others try to resurrect a corpse to halt our progress. Seized by panic at our growth, and unable to compete with us by opposing us with the positive weapons of their ideas or solutions, some have deemed it necessary to revive old theological disputes. This is an agenda that has been stirred up in various quarters for some time, and one of its manifestations was that formidable "Radical-Communist front" with which they attempted to block the Christian Democratic youth at the university.

On this occasion, we fulfill an express resolution of the National Council of the Christian Democratic Party by solemnly denouncing before the country this attempt to resume long-extinct religious struggles as a betrayal of the people of Chile.

The true problems of Chile and its people today are different. They are the problems inherent to the development of our backward economy.

They are the problems of the misery afflicting the workers of this land. The great national task is to produce wealth and redistribute it justly, so that every Chilean may live with dignity and joy. This is a task that demands immense effort and profound transformations or changes in the very structure of our society. Raising other issues, promoting artificial disputes, is to turn our backs on the daily hardships of the Chilean worker; it is to sacrifice their needs and interests.

Such disloyalty is only comparable to that of governments which, unable to resolve the problems of their peoples, attempt to conceal their ineptitude and distract public attention by provoking border incidents. These gentlemen must have very little to offer the people when they find nothing better than trying to hoodwink them with an obsolete sectarianism that died more than half a century ago.

But the students of the University of Chile have already said: NO! And the people, who will not be deceived, will also tell them: NO! A thousand times, NO! For we Chileans have already matured enough in the exercise of democracy and freedom to coexist while respecting one another's beliefs. For our part, sectarianism finds no harbor in our spirits. We have our ideas and we respect the right of our fellow citizens to have others, just as we demand that our own be respected. But we will not lend ourselves to the farce of distracting the people and postponing their true needs with a clumsy religious conflict.

We deem it fitting to repeat once more: the Christian Democratic Party is not a confessional group; though formed mostly by Catholics, it does not, however, require its members to share the same religious faith. If this is the case within our own ranks, it is evident that those who raise the false alarm that Christian Democracy, upon coming to power, will attempt to impose a specific religion on all Chileans are lying knowingly.

In the educational sphere, which is where these excesses of sectarianism preferentially seek to take root, we uphold the right of the family to guide the education of its children; the right of the Church to teach its principles; and the right of the State, as the organ of the common good, to provide education and supervise the operation of schools run by private individuals.

We believe that the inadequacy of Chilean education in forming and preparing new generations for life is one of the most serious symptoms of the deep crisis afflicting our homeland. We believe that the simple intention of reducing the educational budget reveals an unprecedented lack of understanding of national needs.

On the contrary, any new financial sacrifice will always be justified if its purpose is to ensure that the State truly fulfills the constitutional mandate that obligates it to concern itself preferentially with education.

We believe that, in this great mission of educating the children and youth of Chile, there is a task for everyone: for the State and for private entities, and that to fulfill it effectively we must all help one another. But let us say it with the raw words of frankness: what the children of Chile have a right to demand of us is that we enable them to face life and be useful to society, and not that we fight over turning them into 'religious devotees' or 'Freemasons'.

Young Christian Democrats:

Victory imposes responsibilities that are its natural consequences.

The eyes of Chile are upon you. It is up to you to prove that you can live up to those responsibilities. Forgive me if I speak to you at this moment not only as a politician, but also as a teacher:

Your first duty, as university students, is to study. Study to repay Chile, with your future professional efficiency and scientific capacity, for the tremendous benefit Chile has bestowed upon you by allowing you to attend university.

Study to broaden your cultural formation and acquire that broad vision of the world and its affairs, that spiritual serenity, that solidity of principles which makes men of unyielding integrity, capable of deep convictions, of living in accordance with them, of knowing where to direct their steps, and of marching steadfastly toward the conquest of their ideals.

Your second duty is to serve your fellow university students who have placed their trust in you. You have done so thus far with selflessness and efficiency; you must continue to do so with renewed zeal. The Student Federation is not a bastion of partisan politicking; it is an instrument to demonstrate in practice how we Christian Democrats honor our principles and serve the common good.

Your third duty is to be the honest and selfless spokespersons for the concerns of the Chilean people. You are the vanguard of this great human community that is our Homeland. Never forget that the workers, that vast world of employees, laborers, and farmers from whose daily effort Chile lives, are your brothers and sisters. Let none of their problems be foreign to you; let the daily drama of their lives be your own drama.

Young Christian Democrats:

We live in a time of profound changes, and in these lands of mestizo America, everything is yet to be done. To you belong the generous and bold initiatives, and if you know how to undertake them with courage, the future will be yours.

How can I express to you how much Chile expects from you?

You are answering history’s call. And there will be no battlefront, in man's struggle for freedom and justice, where you do not hold a vanguard position. A position in the struggle to make Democracy real, and not a farce where money buys consciences. A position in the struggle of the proletarian world in defense of its rights and bread for its children, and to win the share of the earth's goods that justly belongs to it.

A position in the struggle to defeat misery, to conquer ignorance, to banish prejudice. A position in the struggle for the agrarian reform, so that every family may cultivate their own land and Chile's agriculture may feed all its children. A position in the struggle so that this America of ours may overcome its parochial divisions and become a single, powerful, free, and democratic homeland. A position in the struggle so that throughout the entire world there may be peace among men of good will.

Youth of Chile: Forward!