



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
FOR LEADERS OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES:
"NEW FRONTIERS FOR UNIVERSITY LEADERS.
THE FUTURE OF HEALTH AND THE UNIVERSITY ECOSYSTEM"**

Room adjacent to Paul VI Audience Hall

Monday, 4 November 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Distinguished Rectors and Professors,

I welcome you on the occasion of this Forum of the *International Federation of Catholic Universities* devoted to the theme “New Frontiers for University Leaders: The Future of Health and the University Ecosystem”. I offer a cordial greeting to the President, Professor Isabel Capeloa Gil, whom I thank for her kindness in speaking Spanish, and to all present. I am grateful to the members of the Federation for their commitment to study and research.

The university system today faces new challenges arising from the development of the sciences, the evolution of new technologies and the needs of society, all of which invite academic institutions to provide appropriate and up-to-date responses. This strong pressure, felt in different areas of socio-economic, political and cultural life, challenges the very vocation of the university. This is especially the case for those who are called to teach, conduct research and prepare new generations to become not only qualified professionals in various disciplines, but also proponents of the common good, creative and responsible leaders in social and civil life, equipped with a proper vision of the person and the world. Universities today, then, need to consider what contribution they can and must make to the integral health of the person and to an inclusive ecology.

If these challenges concern the university system as a whole, Catholic universities should feel these needs even more acutely. With your *universal* openness (precisely as an “*universitas*”), you can enable the Catholic university to become a place where solutions for civil and cultural

progress for individual persons and for humanity, marked by solidarity, are pursued with perseverance and professionalism. You can also examine that which is contingent without losing sight of that which has a more general value. Old and new problems must be studied in their specificity and immediacy, but always within a personal and global perspective. Interdisciplinary approaches, international cooperation and the sharing of resources are important elements that can permit universality to translate into shared and fruitful projects on behalf of humanity, of all men and women, and the environment in which they live and grow.

The development of the technosciences, as we can already see, is destined increasingly to influence people's physical and psychological health. This also affects the methods and procedures of academic study. Today, we need to remember more than ever that all teaching entails questioning the "why". In other words, it calls for reflection on the foundations and purposes of each discipline. Education reduced to mere technical instruction, or mere passing on of information, becomes an alienated and fragmented education. To believe that we can transmit knowledge without concern for its ethical dimension is essentially to abandon the task of teaching.

We need to overcome the legacy of the Enlightenment. Education in general, but university education in particular, is not only about filling the head with concepts. Three kinds of language are needed, and all three languages need to come into play: the language of the mind, the language of the heart and the language of the hands. We need to think in harmony with what we feel and what we do, to feel in harmony with what we think and do, and to act in harmony with what we feel and think. An overall harmony, never divorced from the whole.

In the first place, then, we must start from an idea of education conceived as a *teleological* process, that is, one that looks to an end, is necessarily oriented to an end, and in this sense towards an accurate vision of the human person. A further perspective is necessary in the field of education in order to face questions involving the "why" – questions, that is, of the ethical order. This has to do with the essentially *epistemological* character of education, which deals with the whole span of knowledge, not only the liberal arts, but also natural, scientific and technological studies. The link between education and end leads us to the theme of intentionality and the role of the subject in every cognitive process. And in this way we arrive at a new kind of *episteme*. This is the challenge: to come to a new *episteme*. Traditional epistemology had emphasized this by considering the *impersonal* character of all knowledge as a condition of objectivity, an essential requirement for the universality and communicability of knowledge. Today, however, many authors stress that completely impersonal experiences do not exist: the *forma mentis*, the normative convictions, categories, creativity and existential experiences of the subject represent a "tacit dimension" of knowledge, one that is always present and is an indispensable factor for the understanding of scientific progress. We cannot come up with a new *episteme* in a laboratory. That will not do, for it has to come from real life.

In this light, the university has a conscience, but also an intellectual and moral force with

responsibility not just for the person to be educated but for the needs of humanity as a whole. The *International Federation of Catholic Universities* is called to take up the moral imperative of striving to achieve a more united international academic community. On the one hand by basing itself more faithfully on the Christian context from which universities originated; and on the other, by consolidating the network of older and newer universities, so as to develop a universal spirit aimed at increasing the quality of the cultural life of individuals and peoples. The ecosystem of universities develops when every member of the university becomes sensitive to each person and to the whole person, to the context in which people live and grow, and to everything that can contribute to their advancement.

The training of leaders achieves its goal when it seeks to make the life of the university develop not only the mind but also the “heart”, the conscience, together with students’ practical abilities. Scientific and theoretical knowledge must be blended with the sensitivity of the scholar and researcher, so that the fruits of study are not acquired in a self-referential way, concerned with professional training alone, but have a relational and social end. Ultimately, just as every scientist and every person of culture has an obligation to greater service, because he or she possesses greater knowledge, so too university communities, especially those of Christian inspiration, and the ecosystem of academic institutions must feel the same obligation.

In this perspective, the path that the Church and Catholic scholars must follow was succinctly expressed by the patron of the FIUC, the newly-canonized Cardinal John Henry Newman: the Church “fears no knowledge, but she purifies all; she represses no element of our nature, but cultivates the whole”^[1].

Thank you.

^[1] *The Idea of a University*, Part 1, Discourse 9, 8.