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Audience with participants in the Conference of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (FIUC)

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience in the Vatican the participants in the Conference of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (FIUC), taking place from 4 to 5 November 2019 in Rome, at the *Augustinianum* Congress Centre, on the theme: “New frontiers for University Leaders: the Future of Health and the University Ecosystem”.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Distinguished Rectors and Professors,

I welcome you to this encounter on the occasion of the forum of the *International Federation of Catholic Universities* dedicated to the theme “New Frontiers for University Leaders: The Future of Health and the University Ecosystem”. I extend a cordial greeting to the President, Professor Isabel Capeloa Gil, [in Spanish] and I thank her for the courtesy of speaking in Castilian and to all present, and I am grateful to 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 real 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 lecturers in their task of teaching, and of conducting research and preparing 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, 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 (as in “*universitas*”), you can act in such a way that the Catholic university becomes 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 what 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 sharing of resources are important elements, so that universality may be translated into shared and fruitful projects on behalf of all people in the context 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 processes of academic study. Today, therefore, we need to remember more than ever that every teaching entails asking ourselves about the “why”, that is, it requires a reflection on the foundations and purposes of every discipline. Education reduced to mere technical instruction or to mere information becomes a ruptured education. To believe that we can transmit knowledge by abstracting from its ethical dimension would be to abandon the task of teaching.

It is necessary to overcome the legacy of the Enlightenment. Educating, in general but in particular in universities, is not only a matter of filling the mind with concepts. The three languages are needed. It is necessary for the three languages to be brought into play: the language of the mind, the language of the heart and the language of the hands, so that one thinks in harmony with what one feels and does; one feels in harmony with what one thinks and does; and one acts in harmony with what one feels and thinks. A general harmony, not separated from the whole. In the first place, then, we must start from an idea of education conceived as a *teleological* process, that is, one which looks to the end, is necessarily oriented to an end, and therefore towards an accurate vision of the human person. A further perspective is necessary in the field of education in order to face the questions of “why”, questions, that is, of the ethical order. This involves the typically *epistemological* character of education which concerns the whole span of knowledge: not only the liberal arts, but also natural, scientific and technological studies. The link between knowledge and purpose refers to the theme of intentionality and to the role of the subject in every cognitive process. And we thus arrive at a new episteme: it is a challenge, to make a new episteme. Traditional epistemology had emphasized this role 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 acceptance of scientific progress. We cannot think of a new episteme from a laboratory, but from life, yes.

In this light, the university can be viewed as not only conscious, but also having an intellectual and moral energy whose responsibility goes beyond the person to be educated and extends to the needs of all humanity. 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 between older and newer universities, in order to develop a universal spirit aimed at increasing the quality of the cultural life of persons and of peoples. The ecosystem of universities develops when every member of the university, by focusing on the whole person, cultivates a particular awareness of the context in which people live and grow, and of all that contributes to their advancement.

The formation of leaders achieves its goal when it imbues the academic years with the aim of developing 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, affirming only one’s professional position, but have a relational and social purpose. Ultimately, just as every scientist and every person of culture has an obligation to greater service, because they possess greater knowledge, so too the university community, especially if it has a Christian inspiration, and the ecosystem of academic institutions must respond together to the same duty.

In this perspective, the path that the Church and Catholic academics must follow is 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.
