

By: Montserrat Alom, Director of CIRAD

February 2024

Rethinking the role of the university from the perspective of social responsibility, with a view to dialoguing with the territory and to humanizing our societies

On 6 November 2023, [the "Mónica Jiménez de la Jara" Inter-institutional Chair on Social Responsibility](#) was launched at the Catholic University Silva Henríquez in Chile, the result of a large-scale project led by six Chilean Catholic universities. In the framework of this event, a Round Table was organized with the participation of [Dr. Cristina de la Cruz Ayuso](#) from the [University of Deusto](#) (Spain), [Prof. Francisco De Ferrari Correa](#), Director of the [Outreach Department](#) at the [Catholic University Silva Henríquez](#) (Chile), and Dr. Montserrat Alom from CIRAD-IFCU, with the moderation of [Prof. Javier Villar](#) from the [Catholic University of Temuco](#) (Chile).

This note puts forward some of the key ideas mentioned during the said Round Table.

On the relevance of reflecting on our responsibility in a time of crisis and accelerated change

- It was acknowledged the diversity of ways in which social responsibility has been understood and managed by Catholic universities over time: some have institutionalized it through the creation of units or positions specifically dedicated to its advancement, while others have moved on to other concepts (such as public commitment or sustainability) that are coexisting and that, in some way, respond to the same spirit, which is the role of universities in the resolution of societies' needs.
- In this context, it is legitimate to ask ourselves whether it still makes sense to talk about responsibility, and the answer is in the affirmative: at a time when numerous crises (health, political, economic, social, educational) are occurring and sometimes developing in parallel, and in an era when new technologies (such as artificial intelligence) are disrupting all sectors of our lives, including teaching and research, it is more urgent than ever to follow the Pope's call to humanize our universities, precisely in order to contribute to the common good through the three missions that are proper to our institutions, and the values that unite us as members of the Catholic community.

On the importance of embodying the values we stand for both inside and outside the university

- A fundamental aspect consists of embodying these values that we want so much to transmit to our students and to assert them in front of all the actors with whom we interact. Speeches outside the university must go hand in hand with internal actions, always behaving with respect and dignity towards our peers, without giving in to the tyranny of figures or traditional rankings, which exacerbate competition between institutions and researchers and end up distorting the very being of the university.

On the space for dialogue and the formation of a critical conscience that we should offer for the society we yearn for

- As Cardinal Silva Henríquez commented in 1971, the university is the space for dialogue and critical awareness, that is to say, where the critical thinking of society should be formed. It therefore makes a lot of sense to rethink the role of our universities, which should always question what the market imposes and not take it for granted, as well as to promote the training of people who are sensitive to diversity and thus prepared to engage in the dialogue of which the Holy Father speaks so much.
- At a time when all actors are expected to contribute to the common social good, universities have a social function that involves establishing links with the territory in which they are located, and combating the injustices that exist in it, which are often structural. To “inhabit” the territory, we must decenter our gaze and think about society, think about the place we occupy in it and the type of society we want, both for ourselves and for future generations.

The full recording of the event is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Elg4tt7kO70&list=PLUS6VIK6u89-e7Fs4mFRHIGJNBxDxBxOG&t=1s>

Universities involved in the creation of the Chair: [Universidad Católica del Norte](#), [Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso](#), [Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez](#), [Universidad Católica del Maule](#), [Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción](#) and [Universidad Católica de Temuco](#).

Speech by His Holiness Pope Francis during the private Audience to participants in the Centennial Ceremony of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, Rome, January 19, 2024: https://www.fiuc.org/article28_es.html