



## Some questions to Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President, Pontifical Academy for Life – Vatican City

1. *Let's explain the title: Humana Communitas in the era of the pandemic. What does it mean?*

*Humana communitas* is the title of the letter that Pope Francis sent to the Academy on January 6, 2019, on the 25th anniversary of its foundation. The Pope asks us to reflect on the relationships that unite the human community and create shared values, objectives, reciprocity. This pandemic makes us extraordinarily aware of two things. On the one hand, it shows us how interdependent we all are: what happens somewhere on earth now involves the whole world. On the other hand, it aggravates inequalities: we are all in the same storm, but not on the same boat. Those with more fragile boats sink more easily. The ethics of life goes global: will we try to save ourselves by moving further and further away from each other, or will the common vulnerability make us more human? We must answer this question and we must do it now: is the human being still a common responsibility?

2. *The subtitle says: untimely reflections on the rebirth of life. What does it mean?*

"Untimely" is a word that comes from the philosophical tradition. Here we use it, with a little provocation, to indicate the urgency of finding a conception of community which, apparently, is no longer fashionable. At a time when life seems suspended and we are struck by the death of loved ones and the loss of reference points for our society, we cannot limit ourselves to discussing the price of masks or the reopening date of schools. We will have to take the opportunity and find the courage to discuss better conditions to transform the market and the education, instead. Does this sound like an exaggerated claim? Now, this is exactly what we mean by "untimely".

3. *The pandemic has shown the fragility of people and societies. It is a global crisis that affects the North and the South of the world and scientists still have no sure answers. Is this really a novelty?*

The novelty is not so much in the emergence of an unknown virus. In fact, it could have been contained and defeated locally, significantly limiting the damage. The unprecedented fact is the speed and breadth with which it spread through the network of relations and transportation. New is also the role of the media, which decided how the awareness of the crisis had to spread: it has rightly been spoken of "infodemic". The novelty therefore lies in the strange mixture of conformism and confusion induced by the reactions to the representation of danger in the era of "hyper-connected" societies: which are, however, also "hyper-individualistic". The weakness of the community, which should guarantee our support and protection in danger, leaves us exposed to our uncertainties and vulnerabilities.

4. *Political propaganda blames specific contexts and countries. But the reality is that we were unprepared. Why?*

Of course, preparing for exceptional events is a constant challenge for health systems. By preparedness we mean getting ready to predict the problematic event and planning the possible response. This allows you to better deploy skills and resources, in a never-ending process of critical evaluation and progressive response capacity. Our capacity for intervention in the technical and management area deluded us that we could keep everything under control. Instead, even in economically affluent societies, the pandemic has overwhelmed the efficiency of healthcare facilities and laboratories. It was difficult to become aware of the failure of our efficiency and recognize our limits.

5. *What relationship is there between Covid-19 and the exploitation of the planet's resources? They are apparently two unrelated themes.*

It is one of the aspects of interdependence: phenomena pursued with specific and particular intents in the agricultural, industrial, tourism and logistics fields add up to each other and the effects of each one are amplified. Deforestation brings wild animals into contact with human habitats where intensive farming subjects livestock to the logic of industrial production. This is done to meet the demand for meat for export, so that dishes for unbalanced and unsustainable diets can reach our dining tables. All this facilitates the spillover of pathogenic micro-organisms from one species to another, until they affect human beings.

6. *What have we learned about public health?*

First of all, it is necessary to better balance the resources invested in disease prevention and those dedicated to treatment. This means focusing not only on hospitals, but also on local networks, both for assistance and for health education. Furthermore, we understood that the health of everyone is closely related to the health of all. Responsible behavior is needed not only to protect one's own well-being, but also that of others.

7. *What can be done to prevent the commercial exploitation of vaccines or to avoid disparities in health treatments among those living in richer and poorer countries?*

Research must be regulated so that it does not respond only to political and economic interests (of a few), but it can be carried out with freedom and responsibility. For this reason, funding must be transparent and shared, so that the benefits can also be equally distributed.

8. *What about the world scenario? What role can be played by international organizations in a post-Covid-19 world?*

The pandemic has shown that no country can proceed independently of others, not only for health reasons, but also for economic reasons. Therefore, an organization supported by everyone, coordinating operations in the various phases of monitoring, containment and treatment of diseases, allowing a careful circulation of information, is essential. The WHO seems indispensable, even if it certainly had some flaws: we must learn from its failures and improve its functioning. Only in this way can we put into effect the universal right to the highest levels of health care, as an expression of protection of the inalienable dignity of the human person.

9. *What is the role of the Christian community in this crisis?*

The Christian community can help first of all to interpret the crisis not only as an organizational fact, which can be overcome by improving efficiency. It is a matter of understanding more deeply that uncertainty and fragility are constitutive dimensions of the human condition. This limitation must be respected and kept in mind in every development project, taking care of the vulnerability of others, because we are all entrusted to each other. It is a conversion that asks to include and elaborate existentially and socially the experience of loss. Only starting from this awareness will it be possible to involve our conscience in a change that makes us responsibly supportive in a global fraternity.

10. *Interdependence, vulnerability, cooperation, solidarity, access to treatment are the key words of this crisis. In other words: will we truly understand the value of life and the need to protect it, without ideological disputes?*

This is a question that everyone must ask themselves and their community. There is no automatism that guarantees the transition from the factual interconnection (which we have experienced) to the responsible solidarity (which implies an act of freedom). If there is no awakening of consciousness, we will just fix a few organizational problems, but everything will be like it used to be. Instead, we need to rethink our models of development and coexistence, so that they are increasingly worthy of the human community. And therefore, they must be appropriate for the vulnerable people, not beyond their limits, as if they did not exist: within those limits, in fact, there are men, women and children who deserve better care. All of them, not just ours. If we open the doors to truly global threats to the human community, not even ours will be able to save themselves. So, here's the thing: from the "dry run" of this pandemic, we expect a burst of pride from the *humana communitas*. It can make it if it wants to.