

**XXIV ANNUAL MEETING  
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE**

**Opening Greetings from the President  
MOST REVEREND VINCENZO PAGLIA**

**Vatican City, June 25, 2018**

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Professors, Dear Friends,

I welcome you to the Vatican today with great joy, and I thank you for your presence. It shows your devotion to this Academy of ours and to the tasks it carries out in the Church and in the world. The time between our 2017 Meeting and today—our twenty-fourth Annual Meeting—have been particularly intense for the entire Academy.

*A great responsibility*

We have been given a significant and exciting responsibility. It calls for our active commitment as women and men of science, of culture and of the Church. The fact that we are “For Life” puts us at the service of the lives of men and women of our time, and none of those lives, starting with those of the poorest and most defenseless, may be lost, discarded, wasted.

For this service to be effective and practical, we must see how we measure up against situations that demand a deep scientific understanding and a great human wisdom. There is no use in knowing every aspect of living organisms unless we understand the meaning of life itself and of human existence.

In recent months the Academy has dealt with serious and urgent issues, such as the influence of technology on the different ages of people's lives (that was the theme of our last Annual Meeting, the valuable Proceedings of which you have in your document bags), as well as the complex and often painful issues related to the final moments of earthly existence, the frontiers of genetics, neurosciences, artificial intelligence and robotics. The close and inescapable connection between the ethical questions of human life and the social and economic context created by a globalization that was both promising and ungovernable, is the horizon that will be explored in our Workshop today and tomorrow. The list of questions to be considered, although long, captures only some of those facing us and with which we must deal. Our Academy, through everyone's work and service, must put the question of human life on a footing that makes its meaning, if not totally clear at least

stated clearly, so as to reveal the questions that each inhabitant of this earth, by his very life is constrained to raise. We owe this to everyone, no one excluded, and above all we owe it to those whose lives are burdened by illness, poverty, or unbearable injustice.

The Pope has reminded us of our responsibility in the context of the Church's broader mission to preach everywhere in the world the Good News of that Life “that is the light of men and that darkness cannot comprehend” (cf Jn 1:4-5). Pope Francis, whom we will hear this morning, has repeatedly stated that the Gospel proclamation is sterile when it is no more than a frigid restatement of doctrine: *“We should not think, however, that the Gospel message must always be communicated by fixed formulations learned by heart or by specific words which express an absolutely invariable content....The ultimate aim should be that the Gospel, as preached in categories proper to each culture, will create a new synthesis with that particular culture. This is always a slow process and at we can be overly fearful. But if we allow doubts and fears to dampen our courage, instead of being creative we will remain comfortable and make no progress whatsoever. In this case we will not take an active part in historical processes, but become mere onlookers as the Church gradually stagnates.”* (EG 129)

Our Pontifical Academy is called to be one of those places where dialogue with science and contemporary cultures is to produce valuable fruits. Referring to the Gospel parable of the talents, I would like to compare our Academy to talents that the Pope has entrusted to us, expecting us to realize a profit, to make them grow. And the way to that growth is to “live” in contemporary cultures, to measure ourselves against them, to be present in the scientific and academic communities. We can not be like that servant who buries his talent in the ground, out of fear, out of laziness, out of indifference. That would be bad. I am not referring only to the talents entrusted to each of us. Here I mean that unique talent that is our Academy, with all its members, ordinary, corresponding, and young researchers, whether Catholic, other Christians, other religions or non-believers. All are united in investing the talent that is our Academy so that Life is protected, defended and promoted, everywhere.

#### *Gratitude and amazement*

Dear Friends, we are opening our Meeting today with gratitude and with amazement. The great issues that have occupied us in recent months have generated an amazing network of

relationships and collaboration that - I must confide - at the beginning of my term I would not have imagined to be so wide. In these few months, the Academy has collaborated with the World Medical Association and numerous Catholic and non-Catholic medical associations, in India, Australia, the United States, and Italy. We have signed formal collaboration relationships with Georgetown University in Washington, with the Catholic University of Milan, with the Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia, with the Methodist Research Institute in Houston, and with the Catholic Health Association of India. We worked side by side with the French bishops on the occasion of the Estates General of Bioethics created to address bioethics questions in France. We also worked with several non-governmental organizations accredited to the United Nations. The frank and sincere dialogue that, at every level, characterizes a Church that reaches out, bears surprising fruits.

For this, I want to thank all of you today. What I have just summarized in a few words is really the result of your work, and that of your many colleagues who work alongside you every day. Please thank them for me, and on behalf of the Holy Father. Thanks are also due to the staff of the Central Office of the Academy who have responded with enthusiasm and diligence to our new and heavy but exciting workload. A special thanks is due to Monsignor Renzo Pegoraro, our Chancellor, who has just been reconfirmed in his position for another five years.

The new Academy Yearbook, revised and reprinted for this Meeting, includes all our names and pictures and shows our determination to not let up, to be visible and to devote our energy to life, with no one excluded.

Thank you all.