



ADDRESS TO THE ACADEMICIANS
HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP VINCENZO PAGLIA
PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE
ROME, 29 SEPTEMBER 2021

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, Esteemed Professors, Dear Friends,

Sharing these days together with many of you who are present at last is a reason for great joy and sincere consolation. Never as in this year and a half have we found out and experienced that human relationships, made up of encounters, closeness and sharing even of daily gestures, are not indifferent to scientific research. Scientific research, in fact, cannot be reduced to a cold laboratory practice; even the necessary rigor of scientific research is based on a passion that precedes it and makes it possible. Scientific research is first and foremost a matter of faces and stories, before ideas and hypotheses. For this reason, personal meetings are certainly decisive to motivate us in our work, but also to carry out our work: in fact, they offer an additional source of knowledge that draws directly from what we often call the mystery of the human person, which is not something hidden, but a process of unveiling, of revelation. We had to learn to look beyond the mask and by doing so we discovered that the "other" is a revelation: the other surprises us, asks for listening and trust, requires respect and care and even mercy. If there is a profound meaning in our meeting again today, after months and months of "social distance", if there is an identity marker that expresses the sense of belonging to this Academy, I believe it is precisely this grateful and amazed custody of the mystery of each one of us, of each person who inhabits this small and battered planet. We - even as Academicians - want to serve this planet by putting into play all our knowledge, our relationships, our refined methodologies, and meticulous daily dedication to our work.

For all of us these months of the pandemic have been anything but a pause - I am convinced of this also because of quite a few contacts I have had with some of you. For us, the world has not

stopped. It must be said that scientific research has had an unparalleled acceleration, offering results that we would never have imagined, first of all in the health and technological fields, but also on the humanistic and therefore ethical-anthropological side. Never as in this time is it been so clear that we need a wise understanding and narrative of biological phenomena and their health consequences; this pandemic is first of all a human fact, it is neither divine wrath nor a natural disaster. I would like to thank each and every one of you for your contribution to this tragic and challenging season; thanks especially to those of you who have found themselves on the front lines facing this terrible pandemic, often putting their own personal health at risk. A special greeting and encouragement to all those who, even after our online meeting last February, have been affected personally or have seen their most loved ones affected by this disease. I would like to remember you all by mentioning Bishop Carrasco: we invited him here today but, although he has recovered from a hard fight against Covid-19, he is not in the physical condition to face a public meeting.

Thanks to the contribution of many of you, our Academy has been able to offer in recent months several insights into the Covid-19 emergency. I am thinking above all of the Notes that I have already mentioned in my opening speech of the workshop, and of the many public statements that have tried to accompany this event. Finally, I am thinking of the beautiful and fruitful collaboration that has been created within the Roman Curia through the establishment of the Vatican Covid-19 Commission, as we heard last night in the final greeting of Sister Alessandra Smerilli, coordinator of that body.

The Covid-19 emergency did not stop the other projects initiated by the Academy. I want to recall some of them.

The conclusion of the 2020 Assembly, celebrated just before the planetary outbreak of the pandemic, saw the signing of the *Rome Call for AI Ethics*. In recent months, despite unforeseen difficulties, we have worked to structure the dissemination and in-depth study of this document. To this end, the Vatican Foundation *renAIssance* was established and has taken its first steps in recent months: Father Paolo Benanti is its scientific director, Professor Mauro Ferrari and Professor Maria Chiara Carrozza sit on the board of directors. We have published the volume of the proceedings and the DVD containing the signing ceremony; we are working on the signing of the *Rome Call* by the leaders of monotheistic religions, scheduled for Abu Dhabi next February, and on the presentation of the document to the European Parliament. Since a few months it is officially possible to sign the *Call*: I invite all of you to do it personally and to involve, in the ways you consider most appropriate, the academic and social institutions to

which you belong. *La Sapienza University of Rome* has already signed the Call and other universities are going to do so; the *Catholic University of Argentina* will soon hold a congress on this subject coordinated by our Father Revello whom I greet from a distance together with all the other academicians who could not be here today. Our Chancellor, Monsignor Renzo Pegoraro, Father Carlo Casalone and Professor Laura Palazzani have collaborated in the drafting of some statements on the theme, in view of the next G20. Finally, a first report should soon be out, indicating the good practices produced by the acceptance of the ethical principles expressed in the *Call*. It is clear to everybody that the two-year period dedicated to ethical-anthropological reflection on new technologies is only the beginning of a work that will see us significantly engaged as individuals, as academic institutions, as the Pontifical Academy.

A second group of issues is addressed by the six study groups active within the Academy. These groups have certainly encountered difficulties during the uncertain time of the pandemic, but they are slowly regaining momentum and will meet this morning immediately after this meeting of the assembly to better focus on the themes to be addressed. The group on global bioethics will examine the possibility of deepening the themes of nutrition in its various facets: a crucial issue, as we heard from yesterday afternoon's report by Prof. David Tilman. The group on neuroscience is focusing on the very topical subject of brain-machine interfaces. The group on robotics will focus primarily on the use of these devices in health care. The group on disabled people, after having contributed to the note we published on that subject during the pandemic, will meet to consider how to continue the journey. As for genetics, that group had already planned a seminar on genome intervention techniques, but it was postponed because of the pandemic. That group will not meet this morning, but will schedule a teleconference meeting soon. The palliative care group continues its activity to disseminate not only the ideas but also the concrete actions that have been elaborated with the *White book*. [Particularly in Italy, our contribution to university education in palliative care has been important]. The work of the groups is so valuable because it allows for original collaboration, capable of addressing crucial issues with that passionate identity I mentioned at the beginning of this speech. It is important that each group can offer, in a relatively short time, the mature outcome of its reflection. I think the article published in *Nature* by the group on robotics is a perfect example. Of course, it is possible to think that some groups may dissolve and others may be born: the central office is at the service of this work of shared research.

I would also like to point out the group working on the theme of Human Fraternity, led by Professor Pierangelo Sequeri, Dean Emeritus of the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for the

Sciences of Marriage and the Family. In recent months you have all received the text of the call promoted by this group, entitled *Rescuing Fraternity - Together*. This work, inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, was born in the field of theology, but immediately established dialogue with the other sciences. That is why it has happily found a home in our Academy, and why I ask you to give it careful consideration. I would like to take this opportunity to greet the new Dean of the John Paul II Pontifical Institute, Msgr. Philippe Bordeyne, who has been an ex officio member of our Governing Council since September 1. Welcome and thank you for your wisdom and your promotion of the collaboration between our two entities, desired five years ago by Pope Francis.

Finally, I would like to mention three issues that seem increasingly urgent, and not only in the Western world: the issue of the elderly, the debate on euthanasia and assisted suicide. These are three huge issues, officially addressed by the Academy only in some specific aspects (I am thinking of the great work done on palliative care, the conference about the end of life with the World Medical Association in 2017, and the Note on Covid-19 and the elderly). A new Foundation on the elderly is being studied and I will soon present it to the attention of the Pope. As you know, for the first time in history we are facing a new phenomenon, that of a mass elderly population. If our society, especially in the West, on the one hand has offered more years of life, thanks also to the progress of science, on the other hand it does not know how to support those years, how to defend them yet. The pandemic has shown this profound and dramatic contradiction: giving more life but not knowing how to preserve it. The elderly have paid the bitterest price for Covid-19. The Academy wants to carefully address this new frontier of life. I point out these issues briefly here because I believe they will become central issues in our future work: every contribution and suggestion of yours on these issues as well is absolutely precious.

It is precisely on the near future of the Academy that I would like to conclude my speech. As I mentioned a few minutes ago, the first five-year period since the reform of Pope Francis is coming to an end. In the coming months, together with the Board, we will consider how to proceed in order to decide the many natural renewals and not to forget but rather to value those who can no longer be renewed as full members due to their age or some other reason. It will also be an occasion to introduce new academicians among the ordinary members, the corresponding members and, above all, the young members, a group that will have to be renewed more than others, for obvious age reasons. I invite everyone to recommend candidates, by sending comprehensive CVs to the central office. I ask you to pay attention to privilege female candidates from countries with little or no representation and from scientific areas with

little presence. These will be the first criteria for selecting new academicians, besides of course the absolute scientific standing of the candidates.

Finally, allow me to recall the names of those who have served this institution in past decades and who now hopefully contemplate the mystery of life in its fullness: we have already listened to the memory of Prof. Vial Correa, President of the Academy, and of Madame Lejeune, wife of the servant of God Jerome Lejeune. But I would also like to remember the Spanish doctor Herranz Rodriguez Gonzalo, the German theologian Johannes Reiter, the Italian parliamentarians Carlo Casini and Vincenzo Di Virgilio.

Before concluding, we want to officially welcome, with the ceremony of delivery of the insignia, the new academicians recently appointed by Pope Francis and the Board. The Pontifical Academy for Life entrusts also to you the great challenges of this time, we are all counting on your passion.

Thanks.

Vatican City, September 29 2021