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Press Conference for the presentation of the 24th General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAL) on “Global Bioethics”

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia

At 13.00 today, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held for the presentation of the 24 th General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAL) on the theme “Equal beginnings. But then? A global responsibility”, which is taking place in the Vatican’s New Synod Hall from 25 to 27 June 2018.

The speakers were H.E. Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for life; Msgr. Renzo Pegoraro, chancellor of the same Pontifical Academy; and Dr. Sandra Azab, specialist in international health at the *Saint Joseph Institute*, Egypt.

The following is the intervention by H.E. Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia:

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia

The months between the 2017 Assembly and the one we are inaugurating today – the 24th edition – have been particularly full for all of us and for the entire Academy.

A great responsibility

We have been given a great and exciting responsibility which calls for the active commitment of women and men of science, culture and the Church. The specification of being “for Life” places us at the service of the lives of the men and women of our time and none of these lives, starting with those of the poorest and most defenceless, can be lost, discarded or wasted.

In order for this service to be effective and concrete, we must face themes that demand a deep scientific understanding and a great knowledge of the human being: it is of little use to know in minute detail every aspect of living organisms without understanding the meaning of life and human existence.

In recent months the Academy has emphasized some of these serious and urgent subjects, such as the influence of technology in the different ages of people's lives (it was the theme of the last Assembly, the valuable proceedings of which you have in your folder), as well as the complex and often painful issues related to the final moments of human existence, the frontiers of genetics, neurosciences, artificial intelligences and robotics. The close and unavoidable connection between the questions of the ethics of human life and the social and economic context designed by a promising and apparently ungovernable globalization, is the horizon that will be explored in the workshop held today and tomorrow. The list, although long, captures only some of the major issues we have before us and which we must face. Our Academy, through the work of everyone and the service of all, must offer a repositioning of the question of the life of men capable, if not of restoring its overall meaning, at least of making the question re-emerge, to let the human question emerge that each inhabitant of this earth, with his concrete life, poses inexorably. We owe it to everyone, without exclusion, and above all to those who live disfigured by illness, poverty, unbearable injustice.

The Pope has called us to this responsibility within the ambit of the broader mission of the Church, so that the Good News of that Life "that was the light of mankind and [that] darkness has not overcome" (cf. *Jn 1: 4-5*) may reach all over the world. Pope Francis, whom we will listen to this morning, has emphasized several times that the proclamation of the Gospel is sterile when it is limited to a cold re-offering 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 times 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" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 129).*

Our Pontifical Academy is called to be one of those places where dialogue with science and contemporary cultures must produce precious fruits. Returning to the Gospel parable of the talents, I wish to liken our Academy to those talents that the Pope has entrusted to us so that we can make them profit, so we can multiply them. And the way is that of "living" contemporary cultures, exchanging with each other, frequenting the fields of science and knowledge. We can not be like that servant who puts his talent on the ground, out of fear, out of laziness, out of indifference. It would be gravely wrong. I do not simply talk about the talents entrusted to each of us. Here I mean that unique talent that is our Academy, with all its members, ordinaries, correspondents and young researchers, belonging to the Catholic Church and other Christian confessions, to other religions and non-believers. All united in dealing in the talent that is our Academy so that Life is guarded, defended and promoted, everywhere.

Gratitude and wonder

The great issues that have occupied us in recent months have generated a surprising network of relationships and collaborations that – I must admit –at the beginning of my term I would not have imagined to be so wide-ranging. In these few months, the Academy has collaborated with the World Medical Association and numerous Catholic and non-Catholic medical associations, in India, Australia, United States, Italy; we have signed formal collaboration relationships with Georgetown University in Washington, with the Catholic University of Milan, with the UCAM in Murcia, with the Methodist Research Center in Houston, with the Catholic Health Association of India; we worked side by side with the French bishops on the occasion of the General States on the bioethics of that country; and we have engaged with several NGOs accredited to the United Nations.

The frank and sincere dialogue that characterizes an outgoing Church at every level brings surprising results.

That is why today I want to thank you all. What I have tried to summarize in a few lines is the result of your personal work and that of the many collaborators who work alongside you every day: thank them on my behalf, and on behalf of the Pope. It is also the result of the work of the staff of the central office of the Academy, which has faced with passion and diligence this new, tiring and exciting, phase of work. A special thanks goes to Monsignor Renzo Pegoraro, our chancellor, recently reconfirmed in office for the coming five years.

Thank you.
