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Audience with members of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation and the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU)

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation and the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU), on the occasion of the presentation of the book “More Women’s Leadership for a Better World. Care as a Driver for our Common Home”:

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends, good day and welcome!

I thank Professors Anna Maria Tarantola and Franco Anelli for their kind words and I greet all of you, members of the Foundation *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* and the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities.

Our meeting takes place on the occasion of the presentation of the volume: *More Women’s Leadership for a Better World. Care as a Driver for our Common Home*. This is a theme quite close to my heart: the importance of *care*. It was one of the first messages that I wanted to give to the Church from the very start of my pontificate, when I recalled the example of Saint Joseph, the *loving protector* of the Saviour.[1] The loving protector who cares.

Before turning briefly to certain particular aspects of the work, I would like to emphasize one that is more general. As we have heard, the present volume is the result of a notable variety of contributions, collected and developed through hitherto unprecedented collaboration between a number of Catholic universities worldwide and a Vatican Foundation entirely made up of laypersons. It represents a new and significant process whose rich content derives from the contribution of experiences, competencies, diverse and complementary ways of listening and approaches. It exemplifies a multidisciplinary and multicultural effort with the sharing of different

sensibilities: values important not only for a book, but also for a better world.

In light of this, I would like to emphasize three aspects of *careas* a contribution that women make towards greater *inclusivity*, greater *respect for others* and *confronting new challenges in a new way*.

First, *greater inclusivity*. The volume discusses the problem of the discrimination often encountered by women, together with other vulnerable groups in society. I have frequently insisted that diversity must never end up in inequality, but in grateful mutual acceptance. True wisdom is multifaceted; it is learned and lived out by journeying together; only thus does it become a “driver” of peace. Your research thus represents a summons, thanks to women and on behalf of women, not to discriminate but to integrate everyone, especially those most vulnerable, at the economic, cultural, racial, and gender levels. No one is to be excluded: this is a sacred principle. Indeed, the plan of God the Creator is an “essentially inclusive” plan, always centred precisely on “those living on the existential peripheries”.^[2] A plan that can be compared to a mother, who sees her children as different fingers of her hand: always inclusive.

The second contribution: *greater respect for others*. Each person must be respected in his or her dignity and fundamental rights: education, employment, freedom of expression, and so forth. This is particularly the case for women, who are more easily subject to violence and abuse. I once listened an expert in history talk about how women came to wear jewelry – women like to wear jewelry, and now men too. There was a civilization where it was the custom that the husband, having many wives, when he arrived home, if did not like one of them, he would say to her: “Go away, get out of here!”; and she had to leave with whatever she was wearing, she could not come back in to take her things: “No, you’re leaving now”. It is for this reason – according to that story – that women began to wear gold, and that was the beginning of the wearing of jewelry. It is a legend, perhaps, but an interesting one. For a long time now, women have been the first material to be discarded. This is terrible. Every person’s rights must be respected.

We cannot be silent before this scourge of our time. Women are used. Yes, here, in the city! They pay you less: well, you are a woman. Then, woe to you if you are pregnant, because if they see you pregnant they won’t give you the job. In fact, if this happens when you are about to start a job, they will send you home. This is one of the techniques they use today in big cities: discarding women, for example, because of their motherhood. It is important to see this reality, it is a plague. Let us make heard the voices of women who are victims of abuse and exploitation, marginalization and undue pressures, like those I mentioned with regard to work. Let us become the voice of their pain, and denounce forcefully the injustices to which they are subjected, often in situations that deprive them of any possibility of defence and redemption. Let us also make space for their activities, which is naturally and potentially sensitive and oriented towards the safeguarding of life in every state, age and condition.

We now come to the third point: *confronting new challenges in a new way*. Creativity. It is undeniable that women contribute to the common good in their own unique way. We see this already in sacred Scripture, where women frequently play a critical role at decisive moments in salvation history. We think of Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, Susanna and Ruth, culminating with Mary and the women who followed Jesus even to the cross, where – let us not forget – the only man who remained was John, the others all left. Only the courageous ones were there: Women. Then too, in the history of the Church, we can think of women like Catherine of Siena, Josephine Bakhita, Edith Stein, Teresa of Calcutta and also the “women next door”, and we know how they heroically endure difficult marriages, children with problems... This is the heroism of women. Apart from the clichés of a certain genre of hagiography, these were women of impressive determination, courage, fidelity, remarkable for their ability to persevere, even amid suffering, and to communicate joy, integrity, humility and firm resolve.

In Buenos Aires I use to take the bus that went to a northwest sector, where there were many parishes, that bus always passed close to the prison and there was always a line of people who went to visit the prisoners: 90% were women, mothers, mothers who never abandon their children! Mothers. And this is the strength of a woman: silent strength, but long-lasting. Our history abounds with women of this kind, whether famous or anonymous – albeit not to God! – who have inspired and sustained the journey of families, societies and the Church; sometimes with problematic, vicious husbands... the children move on... . We see this even here in the Vatican, where women who work hard, also in roles of great responsibility, are now numerous, thank God. For example,

from the moment that a woman became the Deputy Governor, things work better here, much better. And other places, where there are women, Secretaries, the Council for the Economy, for example, there were six cardinals and six laymen, all men. Two years ago, it was renewed, and of the laity one is a man and five are women, and it has started to function, because they have a different capacity: the possibility of acting and also of patience. Once a manager told a story of a worker who became the head of the union and at the time had great authority – he had no father, only a mother, very poor, she did domestic work, they lived in a small house: there was the mother’s bedroom, and then a small room to eat and he slept in that room, he often got drunk at night, he was 22-23 years old – he said that when his mother went out in the morning to work, to clean houses, she stopped, looked at him: he was awake but pretended to be asleep; she would look at him and then go away. “And my mother’s perseverance, of looking at me without reproaching me and tolerating me, changed my heart one day, and so I got where I am”. Only a woman can do this; the father would have kicked him out. We have to look at the way women act: it is a great thing.

We are living in an age of epochal changes, which call for suitable and credible responses. In acknowledging the contributions made by women to these processes, I would like to draw attention to one specific process, namely, the progressive development and use of *forms of artificial intelligence* and the complex issue it raises about the growth of new and unpredictable dynamics of power. This is largely uncharted territory, and so our forecasts can only be conjectural and approximate. In this area, however, women have much to say. For they are uniquely able, in their way of acting, to synthesize three different languages: the language of the mind, the language of the heart and the language of the hands. But symphonically. A woman, when she is mature, thinks what she feels and does; she feels what she does and thinks; she does what she feels and thinks: it is a harmony. This is the genius of woman; and she teaches men to do it, but it is the woman who comes first to this harmony of expression, of thinking with the three languages. This synthesis is distinctively human, and women incarnate it marvelously, – not exclusively but marvelously and also primarily – better than any machine, for no machine can feel beating within itself the heart of a child in the womb, or collapse, exhausted yet happy, at the bedside of a child, or weep with sadness or happiness in sharing the sorrows and joys of a loved one. The husband works, sleeps and... moves on. It is these things that women do, naturally, uniquely, precisely because of their ability to *care*. That is why, as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council wrote, it can be said that: “at this time, when humanity is experiencing such profound changes, women... can greatly assist mankind from degenerating”. [3]

With this conviction, I would like to conclude our meeting by taking up the words of Saint John Paul II in *Mulieris Dignitatem*: “The Church gives thanks for each and every woman. For mothers, for sisters, for wives; for women consecrated to God in virginity; for women who work professionally, for all women, in all the beauty and richness of their femininity”. [4]

Thank you, dear friends! Please know of my appreciation for this important research and my good wishes for your work. I bless you. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

[1] Cf. *Homily for the Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, 13 March 2013

[2] Cf. *Message for the 108th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2022*, 9 May 2023.

[3] *Message of the Council to Women*, 8 December 1965.

[4] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, No. 31.
