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Press Conference to present the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life on the theme: "Human: Meanings and Challenges"

At midday today, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office to present the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life on the theme: "Human: Meanings and Challenges", taking place from 12 to 14 February 2024 at the Conference Centre of the *Augustinianum*.

The speakers were: Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life; Msgr. Renzo Pegoraro, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy for Life; Professor Mariana Mazzucato, *Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose* (IIPP), University College London, and full professor; and Professor Jim Al-Khalili, School of Mathematics and Physics, University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia

Good morning,

Pope Francis, in the audience we had with him this morning, again encouraged us to move forward.

And we do so, convinced as we are that the scientific and technological development in which we are immersed - an extraordinary 'change of epoch' - imposes a reflection on the anthropological question. After our Assemblies of the past few years, dedicated to Robo-ethics, Artificial Intelligence, and New technologies, we have decided to address a demanding and inescapable question: the anthropological issue, the question about the meaning of the journey that humanity is taking.

The urgency of the theme was imposed by thinking about our future as a human species, which today presents the risk of disappearing through self-destruction or overcoming. We have therefore placed the anthropological

question at the center of this year's work in a direct way, not least because it is becoming more and more insistent in public debate, not only in the ecclesial and academic spheres.

The novelty of scientific-technical findings sometimes produces an effect of disorientation and a feeling of precariousness that can push public opinion toward negative positions, in the nostalgia for certainties that seem to disappear. This requires a dialogue between all knowledge, scientific and humanistic, and a vision of humanity and its future, together with an ethical reflection on the products of human knowledge.

Thank you.

Intervention of Msgr. Renzo Pegoraro

Good morning,

As our President has already mentioned, after last years' events dedicated to the latest technological developments and global health issues related to the pandemic, this year we return to the anthropological question.

As you can see from the programme, we have two dense days of work and debates, trying to integrate the humanistic vision, the scientific and technical vision, and the religious vision.

The goal is to make a contribution to the Church and society, and for this we will, as always, have the Acts published in the coming months to allow a wider public to benefit from the work we are doing these days.

Tomorrow afternoon we will also have the third *Guardian of Life Award*. The choice of the person to be awarded this year went to Dr. Marie Guerda Coicou, who lives and works in Haiti and is a specialist in Anaesthesia and Reanimation. Dr Coicou is here, at your disposal to talk about her experience. On our part, we thank for her professional and human action. She is here having overcome, as you can imagine, considerable difficulties.

Tomorrow evening, organised by Msgr. Pierangelo Sequeri, whom you know as a theologian and musicologist, we will offer our Academicians - with free admission for all - a meditation-concert with a performance of the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1941), by Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), composed in a concentration camp. The appointment is at 9 p.m. in the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie alle Fornaci, and admission is free.

One more word about our latest publications.

We have the Proceedings of our General Assembly of 2023 on 'Converging on the person'.

We published the Proceedings of the Scientific Colloquium on Perinatal Palliative Care, in English.

As you know, two years ago the *Libreria Editrice Vaticana* (LEV) published the volume 'Theological Ethics of Life', which presents the result of an international seminar in moral theology based on a *Testo Base* (Basic Text). The book prompted great interest in the academic sphere and beyond. That is why we have now decided to publish the *Testo Base* in a separate volume. The volume is entitled *La Gioia della Vita* 'The Joy of Life', is published by LEV, is in Italian; translations into English, French and Spanish are already ready and will be published soon.

Thank you.

Intervention of Professor Mariana Mazzucato

In the Pontifical Academy for Life's International Workshop, I will speak about the topic: "Governing the economy for the common good". The world is facing inter-connected crises: climate, biodiversity, water, and health. While such goals are global and inter-connected, we have failed to treat them as collective goals with common agendas. In my recent paper "Governing the Economics of the Common Good: from Correcting Market Failures to Shaping Collective Goals", I put forth a new framing of the common good – as both, setting shared goals and working out how to achieve them. As Pope Francis recognizes in his Encyclical *Laudato si'*, this involves defending the dignity of the socially, politically, and economically marginalized – not just with words but with policies and new forms of collaboration between government, business, workers, and civil society. The SDGs (*Sustainable Development Goals*) for example can benefit from a common good perspective because their legitimacy requires negotiation of the objective at the global, national, and local level. Different voices must be brought to the table to discuss what it means to co-create a just and sustainable economy. Indeed, one big lesson from COVID-19 was that unless economic activity – such as the development of vaccines – is governed for the common good, many people remain excluded from its benefits. By emphasizing the how as much as the what, the common good offers opportunities to promote human solidarity, knowledge sharing, and collective distribution of rewards.

Intervention of Professor Jim Al-Khalili

The subject I wish to focus on is the role of artificial intelligence – not only in terms of how it will impact humanity in the way we live our everyday lives, but also whether it is changing our views about what it means to be human (in the sense of us being sentient, self-aware, thinking, biological entities).

As a physicist (I feel like a humble physicist, because, I would say, physicists do not usually show humility!) and as a science popularizer, I will try to summarize some aspects of the impact that the computational power of machines can have on our lives.

All these have made our life easier; and we adapt to them so quickly that we forget what it was like without it. And none of them have made us any less 'human'. They've changed us, yes – and we might argue not always for the better – but they have not altered our essence: what it means to be human.

What does all this mean for us humans? There are many challenges and potentially even existential threats that we need to confront in the face of the rapid advances of AI. And we should certainly be prepared for the day that machines might develop true intelligence and consciousness. Just as we should prepare for the day when we might discover life beyond Earth. Neither of these should give us an identity crisis.

But will AI ever think or feel like a human? I would say no. Why would it? And indeed, why should it? What makes us human is more than the neural connections in our brains. It is more than our intelligence, intuition, or creativity, all of which will likely one day be replicated in AIs. What makes us uniquely human is also about our behaviour and interaction with our physical surroundings, our relationships with each other within complex collective structures and societies; it is our shared cultures and beliefs, our history, our memories.
