



Introduction

The Academy as the Scientific Senate of the Holy See

Reason and Faith

The addresses given by these seven Popes to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at its plenary sessions, study weeks and working groups constitute an unfolding spiritual discourse whose richness can be applied to contemporary conditions, and which express at the highest level the relationship that must exist between reason and faith, science and religion, the human person and the common good, and more generally, technology and morality. These Pontiffs have observed, first and foremost, that at the level of principle, the two truths of faith and of science can never contradict each other, and have emphasised that when this does occur it is the result of an erroneous reading of the Book of Nature or the Book of Divine Revelation. According to the biblical, patristic and theological tradition which was still espoused by Galileo, the one and the same God guarantees the intelligibility and reasonableness of the natural order of things, which constitutes the subject of research carried out by scientists, as well as the intelligibility of faith, which constitutes the object of investigation of Christian theology. This God, who created the Book of Nature, revealed Himself as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him, of all men. It was in this perspective that John Paul II observed at a more detailed level that science and faith are complementary and that their relationship is best understood as a circle: faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth. Science, for its part, can purify religion from error and superstition; and faith, for its part, can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. They can draw each other into a more open world, a world in which both are active and synergetic. For this reason, the *habitus* of faith, when present in an illuminated and creative mind, can act to generate positive scientific research, a truth demonstrated by the fact that Galilean modern science was born in a Christian climate characterised by the increasing assimilation of the message of freedom placed in the heart of man by Jesus Christ.

The Absolute Dignity of the Human Person

The pontifical addresses and documents of Benedict XV, Pius XI, Servant of God Pius XII, Blessed John XXIII, Paul VI, Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences express, in addition, the need for science and technology to constantly depend upon, and be related to, respect for the human person, for his dignity, and for his fundamental rights, because each man and each woman is created by God in His own image and likeness and is a person 'for whom Christ died'.¹ The most advanced forms of scientific research and all the possible practical applications of science must, therefore, be at the service of man, who created science in order to continue the creative work of God and not to go against man, its own creator. 'Science does not exist except through and for man; it must leave the circle of research and pour itself out on man, and hence on society and history as a whole' (Paul VI, Address of 23 April 1966).

These Popes, 'experts in humanity' and seen by men and women of goodwill as the highest custodians of the meaning of the fundamental values of human life and their moral consequences, have expressed in their addresses to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences those guidelines, flowing from human reason illuminated by divine wisdom, which must be respected by science and technology to promote the specific human dimension of man, the well-being of society, and a wise relationship with the environment, all directed toward the common good of the people of the world and of future generations.

The Priority of Peace

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences has demonstrated a particular interest in questions relating to war and peace. Benedict XV in the early decades of the twentieth century indicated that the subject of peace should be a primary concern of the Academy, and during the modern era there have also been a number of episodes where the Supreme Pontiffs have promoted initiatives in favour of peace of which the Academy or some of its members were protagonists. This was the case, for example, of the Academician Max Planck, who, in 1943, in a direct way with Pius XII (whom Max Planck knew well when the latter was still Cardinal Pacelli and a member of the Academy) undertook to warn the world about the risks of war connected with the use of armaments based upon nuclear fission. Thus it is that the Popes, and in particular Pope John Paul II, during these recent decades marked by a growing danger of world conflict, have conferred a high prestige on the initiatives of the Academy and, in line with them, have appealed to members of governments to work in an effective fashion to remove the danger of a new war.

The New Cosmologies and the Theory of Evolution

The Pontifical Academy has devoted some of its activity to the topical question of the new cosmologies and to the theory of evolution. The close relationship between Pius XII and Georges Lemaître (later President from 19 March 1960 to 20 June 1966) enabled this Pontiff to have a more direct understanding in the early 1950s of the meaning of the new cosmological models which were by then beginning to become established in the scientific world, and the philosophical, or even theological, questions which at first sight appeared to be involved. In the addresses of Pius XII it is possible to encounter the impact of the thinking of this scientist and his new cosmology, and special reference may be made here to the address entitled 'the proofs for the existence of God in the light of modern natural science'.

Acknowledgements

In publishing these papal addresses and documents, which are offered in particular to the entire scientific community, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences wishes to express to the Supreme Pontiffs, their authors, its feelings of deeply-felt gratitude and profound admiration.

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1 Rm 15:16.