



Humana Communitas in het tijdperk van de pandemie: vroegtijdige meditaties over de wedergeboorte van het leven

It is entitled “Humana Communitas in the Age of Pandemic: untimely meditations on Life’s Rebirth” and it is the second document – the first one is from 30 March 2020 – that the Pontifical Academy for Life dedicates to the consequences of the world health crisis and its interpretation.

«In the suffering and death of so many, we have learned the lesson of fragility», stresses the text.

The document underlines the importance of a change of pace: global efforts and a determined international cooperation are needed to face the challenge of a fairer and more just future, whose keywords are better health care for all and vaccination.

«We have not paid sufficient attention, especially at the global level, to human interdependence and common vulnerability. While the virus does not recognize borders, countries have sealed their frontiers. In contrast to other disasters, the pandemic does not impact all countries at the same time. Although this might offer the opportunity to learn from experiences and policies of other countries, learning processes at the global level were minimal. In fact, some countries have sometimes engaged in a cynical game of reciprocal blame».

Moreover, «The phenomenon of Covid-19 is not just the result of natural occurrences. What happens in nature is already the result of a complex intermediation with the human world of economical choices and models of development, themselves “infected” with a different “virus” of our own creation: it is the result, more than the cause, of financial greed, the self-indulgence of life styles defined by consumption indulgence and excess. We have built for ourselves an ethos of prevarication and disregard for what is given to us, in the elemental promise of creation. This is why we are called to reconsider our relation to the natural habitat. To recognize that we dwell on this earth as stewards, not as masters and lords». Then « When compared to the predicament of poor countries, especially in the so called Global South, the plight of the “developed” world looks more like a luxury: only in rich countries people can afford the requirements of safety. In those not so fortunate, on the other hand, “physical distancing” is just an impossibility due to necessity and the weight of dire circumstances: crowded settings and the lack of affordable distancing confront entire populations as an insurmountable fact. The contrast between the two situations throws into relief a strident paradox, recounting, once more, the tale of disproportion in wealth between poor and rich countries».

The crisis has shown the possibilities and limitations of those models focused on hospital care: «For sure, in all countries the common good of public health needs to be balanced against economic interests» and the nursing homes and the elderly have been hit hard. To this must then be added that «Ethical discussions of resource allocation were primarily based on utilitarian considerations, without paying attention to people experiencing higher risk and greater vulnerabilities. In most countries, the role of general practitioners was ignored, while for many people they are the first contact in the care system. The result has been an increase in deaths and disabilities from causes other than Covid-19».

The response that must be given to the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be reduced to an organizational-operational level. Re-interpreting the crisis we went through, the text highlights how much we can learn on a deeper level. The fragility, finitude and vulnerability in which all human beings have found themselves united urge us to a conversion that includes and elaborates existentially and socially the experience of loss, as a constitutive part of



human condition. Only starting from this awareness will it be possible to involve our conscience in a conversion that will allow us to feel responsibly supportive in a global fraternity (cf. Francis, *Humana communitas*, 6 January 2019).

On the level of ethics and public health globally, this entails: 1. An equal risktaking and the distribution of those risks that cannot be eliminated in the conduct of human life, including as regards access to healthcare resources, among which vaccination has a strategic role; 2. A responsible attitude towards scientific research, which protects its autonomy and independence, overcoming forms of subordination to particular economic or political interests, which distort its achievements and its communication; 3. Coordination and cooperation at international and global level to put into effect the universal right to the highest levels of health care, as an expression of protection of the inalienable dignity of the human person.

«We are called to an attitude of hope, beyond the paralyzing effect of two opposite temptations: on the one hand, the resignation that passively undergoes events; on the other, the nostalgia for a return to the past, only longing for what was there before. Instead, it is time to imagine and implement a project of human coexistence that allows a better future for each and every one. The dream recently envisaged for the Amazon region might become a universal dream, a dream for the whole planet to “integrate and promote all its inhabitants, enabling them to enjoy ‘good living’” (*Querida Amazonia*, 8)».

Inter alia, prof. Henk ten Have, Academician of the Pontifical Academy for Life and one of the leading experts in Global Bioethics (Professor emeritus at the Center for Healthcare Ethics at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, USA) and prof. Roberto Dell’Oro, professor at Loyola Marymount University (California, USA) contributed to the drafting of the text. Professor ten Have points out that «The Covid-19 pandemic as a global phenomenon demonstrates that we are nowadays intrinsically interconnected. What affects human beings across the world is a concern for everyone. We all share the same vulnerability because we inhabit the same common home. This experience makes us aware that our individual well-being is dependent on the human community. As articulated in Nota 2 of the Pontifical Academy for Life, a global ethical perspective should therefore be applied which articulates the moral importance of solidarity, cooperation, social responsibility, the common good, and ecological integrity».

For his part, prof. Dell’Oro underlines how «this Nota 2, building on the premises on the first document on COVID, offers a meditation on the human family in the time of the pandemic. The tone is meditative, rather than normative. The intention of the document is not to give cheap recipes, but to recognize that together, as a human family (*humana communitas*), we have to go back to the lessons we have learned. It is life itself who teaches us, but we have to be mindful and attentive, in addition to foster action. In that sense, we need to change together, to dispose ourselves to a different attitude toward life as a whole. The church calls us to interrogate our most profound experiences, without being preachy, but with realism: our finitude, the limits of our freedom, the shared vulnerability that opens our eyes to those who suffers greatly, especially in the Global South. The document also calls for global efforts and international cooperation and for an ethics of solidarity. I personally hope for people of good will, believers and non-believers, to see this document as a call to conversion, which is first of all, a change in our own way of looking at reality, and to build our efforts on a renewed mindfulness».

Pontifical Academy for Life
Vatican City, July 22th 2020



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