

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE

PLENARY ASSEMBLY 2021

November 2021

## RETHINKING ANTHROPOLOGY AT A TIME OF TRANSITION

### TOWARDS A NECESSARY HUMANISM

*Quaeque sunt vetera praecepta sapientium, qui iubent tempori parere et sequi deum et se noscere et nihil nimis,  
haec sine physicis quam vim habeant – et habent maximam – videre nemo potest.*

And no one without Natural Philosophy can discern the value (and their value is very great) of the ancient maxims and precepts of the Wise Men, such as to ‘obey occasion,’ ‘follow God,’ ‘know thyself,’ and ‘moderation in all things’.

Cicero, *De finibus*, III.

#### *Method and mode of participation*

The themes for reflection in the Plenary Assembly were chosen before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Without giving in completely to the urgency of the moment, we decided to maintain the planned themes, convinced that the dramatic consequences of the pandemic confirm the need to reflect on what is permanent in the human condition.

However, the complexity and fluidity of the evolution of the pandemic in different countries and regions, as well as the impossibility of foreseeing which national and international anti-Covid regulations will be in force in November, have required us make to some adjustments to the programme of the Plenary:

- **The Assembly will take place only in telematic mode (not in presence) and will consist of three parts.**
- **The first two parts consist of the materials being shared online. Each participant will then be given time to give them due consideration. Subsequently, the participants will meet in working groups online, split into language groups.**
- **The third part will be an online plenary session to which all are invited.**

The programme is presented at the end of this document (further details, such as links to the sessions, will be available later).

## *Introduction*

Our last Plenary Assembly, in 2017, on the theme *Future of Humanity. New challenges for anthropology*, highlighted some of the most important issues of our time. The development of science and technology, particularly in the fields of neuroscience, artificial intelligence and genetic enhancement, shows that humanity has a radically new path ahead of it.

For some, we are facing a singularity that could lead to a new stage in the evolution of the human species. It is precisely the concept of nature, which was the basis of our reflections in the previous Plenary Assembly, that now serves us a starting point, allowing us to find in biblical anthropology and classical humanism some paths to orient our research on the human condition.

The Plenary Assembly seeks to be inspired by a relational anthropology, which found a clear expression in biblical humanism. For centuries, the values of classical thought and biblical revelation dialogued with each other and, in the context of Western Christianity, increasingly influenced each other and became closer together, achieving a refined harmony. With the arrival of Descartes and the strengthening of the modern scientific method, this vision of the human being entered into crisis; it was challenged by other currents of thought, which left a profound imprint.

The new possibilities offered by science to radically transform humanity, however, have reopened the debate and many today are calling for anthropological points of reference. The latter may find in biblical humanism, properly rediscovered and wisely adapted to today's challenges, perhaps the best tool to address the disturbing questions about the future of humanity: "When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves" (*Laudato Si'*, 115).

The aim of the 2021 Plenary will therefore be to explore the greatness of Humanism and show how it can provide new and creative responses: a Humanism Revisited or rather a Necessary Humanism marked by some fundamental characteristics: the most important of which is the exaltation of our social nature, which will be examined under three aspects enumerated by Cicero in his recalling of the wisdom of the ancients: time (*parere temporis*), identity (*se noscere*) and transcendence (*Deum sequi*).

These aspects are the guiding thread of the reflections of the plenary.

*Part One. The classical roots of humanism*

Prof. **Ivano Dionigi** and Card. **Gianfranco Ravasi** will compare the anthropological models of Greco-Latin culture and the Bible, which in their intertwining of dialogue and opposition gave birth to classical Humanism, the basis of Western culture.

The aim of this first session is to answer some fundamental questions: How was it possible to arrive at Humanism? Does Humanism have its own identity beyond its cultural origins? Can Humanism be considered a universal model? Can we speak of a new Humanism? What are the characteristics of Humanism that make it relevant today? And, above all, can Humanism articulate an anthropological response to the epochal challenge represented by the technological evolution of society?

On this point, Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, in the face of the continuous progress of technology, makes this appeal: “How wonderful it would be if the growth of scientific and technological innovation could come with more equality and social inclusion! How wonderful would it be, even as we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters who orbit around us!” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 31).

*Part Two. The challenges of humanism today*

The themes of time (*parere tempori*), identity (*se noscere*) and transcendence (*Deum sequi*), will be at the heart of three short presentations, given respectively by **Prof. Francesc Torralba**, **Prof. Alessandra Talamo** and **Prof. José Casanova**.

The first reflection explores the relationship between space and time in the context of Necessary Humanism. The aim is to take up some of the many questions that emerge from the transformation of the space-time relationship taking place before our eyes: the “*rapidification*” of which Pope Francis speaks (*Message to participants at the OIEC World Congress*, 5-8 June 2019); the acceleration of time in human processes (obeying time/adapting oneself to time; commanding time/adapting time to oneself); relationships lived as consumers; the precariousness of reference points; the speed of continuous digital, technological, ecological and economic changes; the “priority of time over space.”

Many contemporary expressions are, in fact, indicators of a “spiritual dejection... that produces the ennui of a life lacking in a purpose that can satisfy its spiritual yearning” (Pope Francis, *Humana Communitas*, January 6, 2019).

They can also be starting points, however, for a vision of the human person who lives in society with others, not because he or she is forced to, but because attracted by the beauty and richness that comes from a fruitful interaction with others (interculturality and multiculturalism). As Pope Francis points out: “The flood of information at our fingertips does not make for greater wisdom. Wisdom is not born of quick searches on the internet nor is it a mass of unverified data. That is not the way to mature in the encounter with truth. Conversations revolve only around the latest data; they become merely horizontal and cumulative. We fail to keep our attention focused, to penetrate to the heart of matters, and to recognize what is essential to give meaning to our lives” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 50). Time is an indispensable factor for the human person to be able to communicate and grow in relationality, which stems from the natural, often unconscious desire for fulfilling human relationships, through which a person ultimately understands who he or she is.

The second reflection (*se noscere*) will seek to show – also through the contribution of philosophers of Otherness such as Ricoeur, Lévinas, Marion etc. – how the distinctive and essential traits of an anthropology *in* and *of* relationships, inherent in human nature, enable the person to build relationships with others that give meaning to the many aspects of his or her existence: the identity of male and female, the integration of the bodily dimension with the sexual and affective dimension; the desire to share one’s experiences with others; rootedness in one’s own cultural heritage and today’s digital culture with its positive aspects and the challenges and risks associated with it; human dignity to be protected and promoted through philosophy, ethics and law. Rather than stigmatizing certain current behaviors, the aim is to highlight how these demonstrate the need for a humanistic vision.

Finally, human beings also experience a strong desire for transcendence, as demonstrated by the need for religiosity and spirituality (*Deum sequi*), which have not disappeared but have been adapted to the modern context. It is necessary to consider first of all the search for forms of natural religiosity (*religio naturalis* and *religio civilis*) and interiority (the inner god, the *daimon* in each person, through theology, mysticism and forms of interior research, new age, mindfulness); spirituality understood as a private space of salvation or as a stimulus to community service; the resurgence of manifestations of popular religiosity; without forgetting the new forms of atheism, non-belief, indifference, such as the so-called “apatheism.” In this context, an approach that makes room for the experiences emerging in various cultures of the globe will be useful.

## PROGRAM OF THE ONLINE PLENARY

### A. PART ONE. THE CLASSICAL ROOTS OF HUMANISM (FROM 5-12 NOVEMBER)

Materials available online from November 5

*Athens and Jerusalem. Anthropology in the classical world and in the biblical world*  
Dialogue between **Prof. Ivano Dionigi** and **Card. Gianfranco Ravasi**

Working groups in language groups

*Spanish (60 min.)*      *Wednesday 10 November, 15:00 C.E.T.*

*Italian (60 min.)*      *Thursday 11 November, 10:00 C.E.T.*

*French (60 min.)*      *Thursday 11 November, 15:00 C.E.T.*

*English (60 min.)*      *Friday 12 November, 15:00 C.E.T.*

### B. PART TWO. THE CHALLENGES OF HUMANISM TODAY (FROM 12 TO 19 NOVEMBER)

Materials available online from November 12.

Reflection: *parere temporis* (30 min.)

**Prof. Francesc Torralba**

Reflection: *se noscere* (30 min.)

**Prof.ssa Alessandra Talamo**

Reflection: *Deum sequi* (30 min.)

**Prof. José Casanova**

Working groups in language groups

*Spanish (60 min.)*      *Wednesday 17 November, 15:00 C.E.T.*

*Italian (60 min.)*      *Thursday 18 November, 10:00 C.E.T.*

*French (60 min.)*      *Thursday 18 November, 15:00 C.E.T.*

*English (60 min.)*      *Friday 19 November, 15:00 C.E.T.*

### C. PART THREE. GENERAL MEETING (23 NOVEMBER , 15:00 C.E.T.)

*The Dicastery and the participants will meet online*

Video-message from **H.H. Pope Francis**

Synthesis of the working groups by **relators** (20 min.)

Reactions and questions from **participants** (60 min.)

Concluding greeting from **Card. Gianfranco Ravasi**