



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO MEMBERS OF THE FOUNDATION “CENTESIMUS ANNUS PRO PONTIFICE”
AND THE STRATEGIC ALLIANCE OF CATHOLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 11 March 2023*

[Multimedia]

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, one 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 *care* as 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 a plan that is essentially and always “inclusive”, 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: inclusive, 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 heard an expert in history explain how women came to wear jewelry – women wear jewelry, but now men do too! In a polygamous culture, if a husband decided he didn’t like one of his wives, he would tell her to leave, and she had to depart immediately with whatever she was wearing, without being able to come back and collect her things. That, according to this account, is how women began to wear gold, the origin of jewelry. Perhaps it is only a legend, but it may have something to say to us. From times of old, women have been the first thing to be cast off, discarded. And that is terribly wrong. Every person, together with his or her rights, is to be respected.

We cannot be silent before this scourge of our time. Women are being used. Even here, in a city! They pay you less, because you are a woman. Woe to you if you are pregnant, because if you are clearly pregnant, you won’t get the job, and if it shows in the workplace, you’ll be sent away. This is one of the ways that women today, in large cities, are discarded, because they bear children. It is important to recognize this fact; it is a scourge. 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 the workplace. 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 are 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 departed. Only the courageous remained, and they were 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, but also of the “women next door”, those who heroically put up with difficult marriages, children with problems... such is the heroism of women. Apart from the clichés of a certain genre of hagiography, these are all 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 used to take the bus to the northwest part of the city where there were many parishes. The bus would pass by a prison where there was always a long line of people going to visit the prisoners: ninety percent of them were women, mothers, mothers who never abandon their children! Mothers. And this is the strength of a woman: a silent strength, an enduring strength. Our history abounds in women of this kind, whether famous or anonymous (albeit not to God!): women who have inspired and sustained the journey of families, societies and the Church, some of them putting up with difficult and dissolute husbands, yet always caring for their children. We also see this here in the Vatican, where women who work hard, also in roles of great responsibility, are now numerous, thanks be to God. For example, once a woman became the Secretary General, things are working better here, much better. And other places, where there are women, secretaries... The Council for the Economy, for example, used to be made up of six cardinals and six laypersons, all men. Two years ago, there was a change of personnel, and now there is one lay man and five lay women, and it has begun to function, because they have a different kind of ability, ways of acting and also patience. Once a powerful union leader, someone who had worked himself up from the ranks, told the story of how, when he was young, he had no father, only his mother, who was very poor and employed as a domestic. They lived in a tiny apartment with his mother’s bedroom and a small dining room where he would sleep. Often he would get drunk at night – at the time, he was 22 or 23 years old – and when his mother would go out in the morning to work, she would stop and look at him. He was awake but pretended to be asleep; she would look at him and then leave for work. “My mother’s perseverance, her looking at me, putting up with me, not scolding me.... that eventually turned me around and that is how I got to where I am today”. Only a woman can do this; his father would have kicked him out of the house. We have to appreciate the way women do things: it is something grand.

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. All at once. A mature woman thinks what she feels and does; she feels what she does and thinks; she does what she feels and thinks. All in harmony. This is the genius of women; they can teach men to do the same, but it is women who first achieve this harmony of expression, of thinking with the three languages. This synthesis is distinctively human, and women incarnate it marvelously – I would not say exclusively, but marvelously and also primarily. And they do it 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. Husbands work, sleep and... go about their business. But these things women do, naturally and in a unique way, 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.
