



History



The Pontifical Academy of Sciences is international in scope, multi-racial in composition, and non-sectarian in its choice of members. The work of the Academy comprises six major areas: Fundamental science; Science and technology of global problems; Science for the problems of the developing world; Scientific policy; Bioethics; Epistemology.

Origin and Development

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences has its roots in the Academy of the Lynxes (Accademia dei Lincei) which was founded in Rome in 1603 as the first exclusively scientific academy in the world. The Accademia dei Lincei achieved international recognition, and appointed Galileo Galilei as a member on 25 August 1610, but did not survive the death of its founder, Federico Cesi. In 1847 Pope Pius IX reestablished the Academy as the Pontifical Academy of the New Lynxes. Pope Pius XI renewed and reconstituted the Academy in 1936, and gave it its present name. Since 1936 the Pontifical Academy of Sciences has grown increasingly international in character. While continuing to further the work of the separate sciences, it stresses the growing importance of interdisciplinary cooperation. Today the Academy's activities range from a traditional interest in pure research to a concern with the ethical and environmental responsibility of the scientific community.

The Premises of the Academy

The premises of the Academy are in the exquisite Casina Pio IV which was built in 1561 to serve as a summer residence for Pope Pius IV. Surrounded by the greenery of the Vatican gardens, the Casina is a well-preserved treasury of sixteenth century frescoes, stucco reliefs, mosaics and fountains.

Who Are the Pontifical Academicians?

The Pontifical Academicians are eighty women and men from many countries who have made outstanding contributions in their fields of scientific endeavour. They are nominated by the Holy Father after being elected by the body of the Academicians. The Pontifical Academicians participate in study groups and meetings organized by the Academy to examine specific issues. Their deliberations and scientific papers are published by the Academy. They assemble in the Vatican in the Casina Pio IV for Plenary Sessions.

Relationship to the Holy See

The Pontifical Academy of Sciences is an independent entity within the Holy See. Although its rebirth was the result of papal initiative, and though it is placed under the direct protection of the reigning Supreme Pontiff, the Academy defines its own goals with regard to its statuted mission: "...to promote the progress of the mathematical, physical and natural sciences and the study of epistemological problems relating thereto" (Statutes 1:2). Pius XII underlined the Academy's freedom of inquiry in an address of 1940 to the Academicians: "To you noble champions of human arts and disciplines the Church acknowledges complete freedom in method and research...". Since the deliberations and studies which it undertakes are not influenced

by any one national, political or religious point of view, the Academy constitutes an invaluable source of objective information upon which the Holy See and its various bodies can draw.

Economy

The operating expenses of the Academy are defrayed mainly by the Holy See. In addition, gifts from foundations, firms, membership organizations and individuals have enhanced the Academy's efficacy and outreach.

Organization and International Cooperation

The Academy is governed by a President who is nominated from among the Academicians by the Supreme Pontiff. The President is assisted by the Council and by the Chancellor. The Academy maintains relationships and publication exchanges with other academies and with institutions of scientific research. It is a member of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU).