



23 October 1976

**Address to the Plenary Session and to the Study Week on the Subject 'Natural Products and the Protection of Plants'**

*The Supreme Pontiff affirms that the purpose of science is to 'serve man'. The ecological concerns of the study week form a part of that purpose and Paul VI observes that the stimulation of 'the progress of science for the service of man represents the institutional purpose' of the Academy. The composition of this body, with its representatives from many areas, bears witness to the universality of science, and in the context of this universality the Academy is able to 'promote a more united and peaceful life among nations'. The Pope also emphasises that the Church has always valued scientists – the 'seekers of truth' – and stresses that the Church appreciates the positive values of modern science, which 'are not unrelated to the work of salvation with which she is charged'.*

Your Excellencies,

We are happy to receive you in special audience at the end of your study week, the central subject of which was of quite particular interest: 'natural substances and plant protection'. We greet you all very cordially and are anxious to assure you that we sincerely appreciate the valuable work you are carrying out, with dedication and a spirit of sacrifice, for the benefit of scientific progress. Our esteem is all the deeper in that your fundamental concern, as we know, is to serve man, and that is also the final aim of your research. You feel deeply within you the solidarity that binds you to mankind today and in the future, and that is why you adopt an attitude which is that of the ever serious scientist, the attitude of one who – as we had the opportunity to stress during our meeting last year – 'must honestly consider the question of the earthly future of mankind and, as a responsible person, contribute to prepare it, preserve it and eliminate risks'.<sup>1</sup>

The subject chosen for the present study week reflects this concern in an evident way. With regard to the harmful agents which threaten plants, the fruits of which constitute directly or indirectly the main source of subsistence for the human being, protection is carried out today thanks above all to synthetic chemical products. But the latter are causing more and more serious concern, owing to their possible long-term toxic effects on man, and owing, too, to the changes they bring to the natural environment, with the consequent disturbances of the ecological balance. This is what prompts the scientist to intervene to study the possibility of using, for this work of protection, natural substances, which are already found in the environment and should not therefore cause ecological damage. This is precisely the subject of your study week.

We hope that this possibility of comparing and discussing the results of your researches in this field will have contributed effectively to furthering the progress of scientific knowledge of the means of defence put at man's disposal. May it also encourage the use of forms of protection which are not harmful to health! To stimulate the progress of science for the service of man represents the institutional purpose of this Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

We are happy to recall it on this occasion since we are celebrating this year the fortieth anniversary of its foundation by our predecessor Pius XI. The *Motu Proprio* which instituted this new organism defined its aims as follows: 'Our wish and our desire is that the *Academici Pontifici*, thanks to their and our Institute, will promote the progress of science more and more and better and better, and we ask nothing else of them, since it is this noble aim and this high task which constitute the service we expect of these men attached to truth'.<sup>2</sup>

These forty years of activity have not disappointed this expectation: through study weeks, working groups, scientific publications and the other initiatives of the past decades, the Pontifical Academy, we say so expressing your legitimate pride, has made a valuable contribution not only to the progress of scientific knowledge, but also to the cause of collaboration and understanding among men.

The very composition of the Academy, which gathers men of science regardless of nationality, religion or belief, effectively emphasises this universality of science, which is a primary element of meeting and understanding among peoples. Science tends by its very nature to go beyond the limits that men have given themselves by setting up frontiers between them. It seeks a truth which does not admit, as such, any political colouring. It engages in this research with rational methods which cannot but be the same for all scientists, whatever their origin may be. So it fosters a mentality which permits a trusting, sincere and respectful dialogue with all those involved in the common destiny of mankind. It can clearly be seen, then, what an instrument of mutual

understanding and peace serious scientific research can represent, and what a contribution the Assembly which you constitute can make from this point of view to promoting a more united and peaceful life among the nations.

The Church has always valued, and in a particularly forceful way at the conclusion of the Council, the seekers of truth that scientists are, whose paths are not alien to her own.<sup>3</sup> Not only does she recognise the legitimate methodological autonomy of modern science,<sup>4</sup> but she appreciates, in the change that the latter brings into the way of thinking and living, positive values which are not unrelated to the work of salvation with which she is charged. That is why the Church needs you, your demanding sense of research, and your love of truth.

We encourage you therefore to continue generously on your way as conscientious seekers, aiming at the conquest of new possibilities for human progress. Quoting once more some words of the great Pontiff Pius XI, we express the wish that 'this Academy will become an increasingly rich source of that beneficial charity which Truth is'.<sup>5</sup> And we accompany this wish with our prayer, asking Almighty God, the Source of life and of the human spirit, to assist you in your research in the service of mankind and to bless you personally, as well as all those who are dear to you.

1 AAS 67 (1975), p. 268.

2 Cf. AAS 28 (1936), p. 424.

3 Cf. Paul VI, *Nuntii quibusdam hominum ordinibus dati*, 'Message to Men of Thought and Science', AAS 58 (1966), pp. 18-19.

4 Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 36.

5 Cf. Address to the meeting on 27 December 1925 at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 'Nuovi Lincei'.