Fiftieth Anniversary and Plenary Session

On October 27-30, 1986, fifty years after the renewal of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, a Plenary Session was held, which because of the occasion was a solemn meeting. Besides the Academicians, outstanding personalities in the scientific world and winners of the Pius XI Gold Medal were invited, as well as the Presidents of Academies of Sciences from all over the world.

At the inaugural session, with Dr. Carlos Chagas presiding, fiftyseven Academicians were present. There was a commemoration of the Academicians deceased since the last Plenary Session in November 1983. Martin Ryle was commemorated by H.A. Brück, A. Hurtado by H. Croxatto, G. Colombo by G. Puppi, P. Dirac by C. Rubbia, A. de Almeida by Carlos Chagas, G.B. Bonino by G.B. Matini-Bettòlo, G. Moruzzi by R. Levi-Montalcini, and A. Szent-Györgyi by H. Tuppy. Just before the meeting it was learned that Academicians A. Szent-Györgyi and E. Daisy had passed away the day before.

The ceremony was followed by the presentation of the Apostolic Briefs and the gold chain to the following new Academicians as well as a brief summary of their scientific research: Sune Bergström, Nicola Cabibbo, Albert Eschenmoser, Kenichi Fukui, Paul Germain, Stephen Hawking, Beatrice Mintz, Marcos Moshinsky, Czeslaw Olech, John C. Polanyi, Vladimir Prelog, Carlo Rubbia, Kai Siegbahn, Maxine Singer, and Walter Thirring.

Then the delegates from the various Academies of Science were greeted by President Chagas and presented messages from their Academies. They were called in the order of the date of the founding of the Academy they represented, beginning with Professor Francesco Gabrielli, President of the National Academy of the Lincei (which was founded in 1603).

Each President or delegate received from President Chagas, together with his thanks, a medal which was coined for the commemoration of the Academy's 50th anniversary and has on one side a view of the Casina Pio IV, the inscription Pontificia Academia Scientiarum with the dates MCMXXXVI-MCMLXXXVI and the names of Popes Pius XI and John Paul II. On the other side of the medal is the motto of the first Lincei: *Sapientiae Cupidi* – anxious for knowledge – and an allegorical group in which· Science appears, with a series of symbols representing the scientific achievements in various fields during these fifty years: space exploration, Schrodinger's equation, Halley's comet, Marconi's parabolic antenna, the double helix, the orbital and the formula of the steroids. The Medal was designed and engraved by Guido Veroi. Also for the anniversary the Vatican Post Office issued two com- memorative postage stamps, where alongside the coat-of-arms of the Academy are two details of the School of Athens or Platonic-Aristotelian Academy from a fresco by Raphael in the Vatican Palace. The stamps were engraved by P.N. Arghittu.(1)

(1) Pius XII in 1939, compared the Academy of Sciences to the School of Athens: "It is this admirable and legitimate bond of the sciences with faith, this vestibule which the sciences and the arts erect at the entrance of the temple of faith, an image which already for centuries has amazed the world in the Vatican Hall of the Segnatura where science and faith face and illuminate one another in the sublime light of the thought and paintbrush of the incomparable painter Raphael from Urbino. You will certainly have paused to admire the scene named after the school at Athens. In those people, you will have recognised your oldest predecessors in the investigation of both matter and spirit, in the contemplation and the measurement of the skies, in the study of nature and of man, in the mathematical calculations and the learned discourses. The search for truth both animates and gives colour to those countenances and they seem to speak one to another of the many speculative and practical sciences, of their many late nights in study; their faces betray a certain concentration of thought debating with itself and concluding with the realisation of how little actual truth is surrounded by so much which was believed to be true so as to create a number of different worlds, not all of which could become reality". Scripta Varia 66, 38 (1986).