

“SUCKER PUNCH TO THE GUT”: THE “LIFELESS” PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF LIFE

Respect Life Month concludes this week. Quite frankly, I find myself angry and saddened! Since *Roe v. Wade* was issued during my childhood, I have tried to witness to a culture that values all life, born and unborn. I have been intensely proud that my beloved Catholic Church has exhibited an **untiring** and **uncompromising** conviction regarding the sanctity of human life at all stages. That conviction has both flummoxed conservatives (re: opposition to the death penalty) and angered progressives, given our advocacy for the unborn child in the womb. After hearing that University College London economist **Mariana Mazzucato** was nominated to a five-year term as an **ordinary member** of the **Pontifical Academy for Life** (PAL) and studying more about her background, I was **stunned**. Could this really be happening? Here is the backstory.

With the 1994 *motu proprio Vitae Mysterium*, **St. Pope John Paul II** founded the Pontifical Academy for Life. He wrote that the institute has “the specific task to study and provide information and training about the principal problems of law and biomedicine pertaining to the promotion and protection of life, especially in the direct relationship they have with Christian morality and the directives of the Church’s Magisterium.” Okay, so far, so good. But wait— **check out** some of **Mazzucato’s tweets and retweets**. If you are committed to protecting life in the womb, it will make your **blood boil!** The most egregious tweet is in **response** to a clip from a YouTube channel (**5.23 million** subscribers!) entitled “The Young Turks.” There, following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, an atheist host goes on a **vile rant** about pro-life Christians and abortion, calling the bible a “little mythical book,” ironically taking the Lord’s name in vain. Mazzucato, herself an atheist, tweeted in reply “**So good!**” No, rather— “**So bigoted!**”

In 2016, the Academy’s **statutes** were revised by order of Pope Francis. They indicate that the Pontifical Academy for Life “is composed of the Ordinary Members, Corresponding Members, Honorary Members and Young Researcher Members.” Regarding the “ordinary members,” the statutes note they “are appointed for a term of five years by the Holy Father, after hearing the opinion of the Governing Council and on the basis of their academic qualifications, proven professional integrity, professional expertise and **faithful service** in the **defense** and **promotion** of the **right to life** of every human person.” (my emphasis added) As scandalous as this appointment is, it gets worse. To add insult to injury, the PAL **defended** its selection in a dizzying statement that **obfuscates** and **deflects** criticism from the harsh reality that they brazenly **ignored** their own statutes. The pro-life credentials of two other appointees are also being questioned.

We read in paragraph 5b) of *Guidelines and rules concerning membership*: “New Academicians commit themselves to promoting and defending the principles regarding the value of life and the dignity of the human person, **interpreted** in a way **consonant** with the Church’s **Magisterium**.” (my emphasis added) Even more telling, it states “Status as an Academician can be revoked pursuant to the Academy’s own Regulations in the event of a public and deliberate action or statement by a Member clearly contrary to the principles stated in paragraph *b*) above, or seriously offensive to the dignity and prestige of the Catholic Church or of the Academy itself.” **Bingo!** If Mazzucato’s appointment does not qualify as “seriously offensive” to the dignity of the Church, **what on earth does?** This is **beyond scandalous**.

In the press release announcing the appointees, **Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia**, President of the PAL, stated that “it is important that the Pontifical Academy for Life include women and men with expertise in various disciplines and from different backgrounds, for a constant and fruitful

interdisciplinary, intercultural and interreligious dialogue.” It continues: “This is why among the academics there are also non-Catholic people: two rabbis, a Shinto academician, Muslims, an Anglican theologian.” Evidently this is proffered as a **defense** of her appointment, but only clouds the issue. A **separate dicastery** exists precisely for that purpose. The goal of the **Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue** (DID) is “to promote respect, mutual understanding, and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of others religious traditions.” I take **no issue** with PAL academicians hailing from disparate religious or cultural backgrounds. Catholics are not the only people who **defend** unborn life in the womb. It is an ecumenical and interreligious exercise to collaborate in the **common defense** of the dignity of human life. But personal convictions absolutely matter!

Paglia also said that Mazzacuto’s tweets may have been “pro-choice,” but that they were not “pro-abortion.” In Latin, we call that a *non sequitur*. No, this was merely a **red herring** meant to distract us from a stunningly **indefensible** decision— a **sucker punch** to all who advocate for the most voiceless among us. Ask yourself this **single question**. Do you believe that for a second **Planned Parenthood** would invite a staunch pro-life person to be on their board? Am I overreacting? You be the judge— I don’t think so. How reassuring it would be to see a statement from the USCCB General Assembly next month voicing its **displeasure** with this appointment and **calling** on Archbishop Paglia to revoke the invitation at once. **Justice** for the unborn demands no less.

- The **All Saints/All Soul’s Cycle** takes place this week. If you desire to offer a communal Mass of Remembrance on All Souls Day, **special envelopes** are in the pews. This year, we are offering **three Masses** on All Saints Day and two on All Souls. See the **schedule** on page six. Additionally, the November 2 All Souls Day Mass at **7:00 p.m.** features our choir (joined by six seminarians) singing **Tomás Luis de Victoria’s** hauntingly beautiful *Requiem Mass*. This is a polyphonic Renaissance *a capella* work that will leave you breathless.
- As part of the Archdiocese’s **Eucharistic Revival** initiative, the Cathedral will host the *Cor Jesu* Holy Hour this Friday at 7:30 p.m. **Archbishop Hebda** will lead the period of Adoration. Many confessors will be on hand, as well as intercessory prayer teams.
- An **8-year-old** parishioner approached me at the cross-aisle after Mass with a **serious look** on his face. “Father,” he said, “I think I want to be a priest, but I also want to be a baseball player.” My reply to the young lad – “No problem! You can be a **San Diego Padre!**”
- With the mid-term elections just around the corner, I urge you to visit the website of the **Minnesota Catholic Conference** for special election-related resources. Learn your candidate’s **positions** on a variety of issues important to the Church.
- Even at the age of 95, **Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI** remains lucid. He sent a 3-page letter about the 60th anniversary of Vatican II to a conference at the Franciscan University of Steubenville dedicated to his theological legacy. I will cite it in more detail in a future column.
- **Sports fans** are loving this time of year: MLB’s World Series, H.S. fall tourney season, college and NFL football season in full swing, to name a few. But don’t spend too many hours in front of the tube! Keep active— I have a feeling it’s a long winter ahead!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector