



**The Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture and the Cura Foundation's
Fifth International Vatican Conference**

Bridging Science and Faith

His Eminence Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President, Pontifical Council for Culture

Broadcasted on Thursday, May 6, 2021 at 10:05 AM

His Eminence Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi:

On the threshold and as an opening to this important and immense conference, I wish to offer my greetings, in the name of the Dicastery over which I preside – the culture ministry of the Vatican, of the Holy See, which has the task of entering into dialogue with contemporary cultures, with the horizons in which we are situated.

This greeting goes firstly to all those who, over three days, will follow more than 100 speakers seeking to present from different angles the themes at the heart of this meeting. With me in making these greetings, particularly to the students who will participate and listen and follow this itinerary, is the STOQ Foundation. The acronym STOQ stands for Science, Theology and Ontological Quest, that is science, theology and philosophy encountering each other and seeking somehow to explore and understand some themes that are fundamental, especially for anthropology. They are fundamental, that is, for our being and for our existence.

A particular greeting goes to The Cura Foundation, which, together with us, has been the creator of this event in all its aspects.

At this point the voyage should begin. Actually, this is a true journey that began many years ago. This is in fact the fifth conference developing different themes around the horizon of medicine, health, ethics, philosophy and also theology.

The choice of themes is rooted in a type of triad. They are like three stars that light up in the sky – the sometimes dark sky of our contemporary times, of modernity – and that touch some radical, fundamental components of the human figure, of the human person.

First of all, as it is easy to intuit, a fundamental presence is that of the body, and our bodiliness. That is this structure, this component, which is not just biological or physiological, because as we are well aware we do not *have* a body, we *are* a body.

Once again in this moment, even if in a manner forced upon us by the pandemic, the way of online communications, even in this way, again the body is decisive. My lips, your eyes are essential for the sparks of dialogue to be ignited.

The body, then, is a fundamental reality of human existence, of human communication. And it is precisely in its fragility that it will be studied during these days – through voices sometimes of the highest scientific profile and also the testimonies of many people who are engaged in these issues from different angles and perspectives.

The great American poet Walt Whitman, in his most famous work, *Leaves of Grass* – those essential, fundamental poems – defined the body as absolutely the most sacred reality we possess. This might seem paradoxical, but it is not so in Christianity, because after all in Christianity the central mystery of Christian faith, in all its denominations and forms, is the Incarnation. That is, the Word, the Logos – as John's Gospel states – the perfect, infinite, eternal Divinity becomes flesh. Flesh is precisely the bodiliness, and the history in which we are immersed.

The second category, the second star that ideally lights up in this conference – in parallel we must immediately say – is the soul. In antiquity, in ancient Greece and Rome, it was in opposition to the body. We know that the ancient Greek culture had indeed sought to establish a connection through a famous philosopher, Aristotle; while his teacher had tried to disjoin this bond between soul and the body – this great philosopher Aristotle tried to form a joining, a bond, an embrace between these two realities – and so we know that the soul is the conscience, it is personal identity, it is self-awareness, it is the source of the leaning, of the desire for the eternal and the infinite, the beyond, towards the transcendent.

And so we come to the final element, the mind, which is in some ways the bridge between these two realities.

We know that the mind, at least in the cultural vision which we want to develop, is not the brain, that is the extraordinary neuronal structure within our skulls, those 180 billion neurons that are as many as the stars of the Galaxy of the Milky Way, which is to say a real microcosmos that is within us, within a limited space. But we know that the brain, the neuronal system, according to a widespread cultural-religious vision, does not exhaust the spiritual potentialities, cannot completely describe the mind, which is something more. And here the conversation will be complex but certainly meaningful. Not to deny, nor affirm one aspect or another, but to bring them together and put them into dialogue with each other.

These were the three stars for our meeting, for this conference. We wish it every success, for it to be a great contribution especially to that fundamental category of dialogue, which is at the basis of this event and of all the events that we try, as the Catholic Church seeks to articulate the message of Pope Francis – he who at the end will leave his voice, who will enter this conference with his own presence. The meeting of visions that are different. You'll see. There will be visions that are distant from each other, but all will meet in a desire to reflect and search together.

I conclude by returning to two great cultures: Christian culture, biblical-Hebrew-Christian culture, and Greek culture.

Classical culture tells us that “A life without research is not worth living” – this is Socrates, the great master of Plato, the philosopher we mentioned before.

And the bible tells us that “Behold” – in a psalm, in a prayer, in an invocation – “You Lord have made me a marvel in your eyes”. The human creature is almost like the greatest miracle.