

A PHILOSOPHICAL LOOK AT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND SCIENCE

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I wish to thank with all my heart the Academy of Sciences of the Institute of Bologna, the President and each single member, for this invitation, I am honored.

I want to greet Professor Lorusso, the illustrious relators and all the participants. I am truly happy to offer a short contribution – which is especially a personal testimony – to the presentation of the results and cultural vitality of a *Journal* in its first 20 years, adding my congratulations and appreciation for the specific contribution that this publication offers every year, and as the twenty Editorials recently published in a single volume show, to promote and realize the fundamental synergy between art and science.

I do so as the current Rector of the Pontifical Salesian University, though I am at the end of my mandate and as President of the Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Pontificie Romane (CRUIPRO). For fifteen years the University has been among the Institutions that have collaborated with the Journal, and I have always been very happy to be personally involved in its scientific Committee, since, with my colleague Rectors and Deans we have always worked hard to encourage in-depth activities of great educational and cultural quality aimed at constructive dialogue between knowledge and disciplines, and above all between people, bringing together humanistic tradition, scientific development, technical applications and technologies and an educational and intergenerational dimension, for the good of our society.

And we all well know how the University, as *uni-versitas*, a place of convergence *ad unum* of different kinds of knowledge so that each and every one of them not only preserves but is also protected and promoted in its peculiarity and specificity, starting from the different methodologies and epistemologies; it is a privileged place to connect professionalization and the opening of horizons, memory and innovation, specialization – not fragmentation – and the ability to view as one, in an environment rich in transmission (and therefore mission) and *studium* (which etymologically means passion that has been experienced and testified to).

The recent pandemic after all has also reintroduced the past, but always present, debate on the identity and role of academic institutions, and the relationship between didactics and research, theory and application; and in this very context it clearly appears how from the University we expect that new propulsive energy to push young people towards a united view of the world, with an education that has a “large format” and “broad thinking”.

As we were reminded on the occasion of the last inauguration of the academic year at the Alma Mater of Bologna, a “new Humanism” is needed and we have the educational task to fascinate, delight, educate, *teach* – which is possible because we constantly experience learning – and mobilize, inspire, young people as citizens and haruspices of “that tremendous and spectacular thing called life”, as sentinels of what – planned and built together with them – already prefigures the future for us.

At our University, which is distinguished by the presence, especially, of humanistic subjects, we inaugurated the current academic year – to which we have assigned as a general objective the “shared and convergent Research among specialists of different disciplines” – with a splendid Prolusion presented by an ex-student from the University of Bologna, the astrophysicist Marica Branchesi who, starting from her experience spoke about how the “very brief sound” heard in 2015 allowed us to listen for the first time to gravitational waves, a sensational discovery that enabled the development of a technology that has been increasingly perfected, and also allowed us to start the longest and most extensive observational campaign in the history of humankind, conducted by a community of 3.500 scientists.

This is what she said: “Today’s discoveries are collective, the result of the collaboration of scientists from all over the world who have been able to break down barriers and understand that diversity is a value. It is by building bridges and not walls that these great advances in knowledge are achieved and what is needed therefore is a change of mentality, a common language for a common end, being aware of the fact that alone we cannot overcome any of the challenges that we have to face today [...] Research is research that needs to be increasingly more shared and inclusive, because only this can lead to both personal and social development [...] When we explore the sky, we observe all the elements of which we are made. And we can really say that we are “stardust”, because in the sky we find what our body is made of. The beauty of the sky also allows us to better understand what we have around us and what we are. It is extremely important to push the boundaries of knowledge. Students who start a course of study have a great opportunity. I hope they satisfy their curiosity, that they don’t stop dreaming, that they further their knowledge, that they explore knowledge, that can be done through exploring the universe or exploring a book. For this reason, the presence and constitution of increasingly international, inclusive and convergent qualified research centres, and the promotion of proper synergies, are even more necessary today, and the university environment is the ideal place to grow and practice it.” (M. Branchesi, *Opportune sinergie e centri specializzati, per una ricerca “condivisa e convergente”. Una testimonianza dall’astrofisica*, in G. Ruta, ed., *Le scienze: dentro, “a confine” ed oltre...*, Las, Roma 2021, p. 290).

I wanted to refer to this reference because in my opinion the *Journal Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage* is a virtuous realization – with a great impact of international character, as registered by the various “measurements” – of sharing and convergence among universities, academies, national and international research centres, regarding the key issues and fundamental challenges of our time, a historical moment that – as Pope Frances reminds us – is not only an era of change but a real “change of era”.

Looking at the Editorials shared with Professor Lorusso during these years, for example, I notice that together we have examined questions about the relationship between memory and future, cultural identity (such as the tricky theme of the identical and the diverse), integration – in knowledge – between singularity and normality (in putting together “mind”, “heart” and “hands”), the notion of imperfection and perfection in culture, science, art and research. And in the articles, I had the opportunity to offer some contributions on beauty and conservation, Church and art, art, science and history in a globalized world, with a particular look at some interesting experiences in Italy and China, and also an attempt to reflect – “Virus, art and faith” – about how to respond to Covid-19.

I have deliberately left for last, the text, *Thinking independently, and, then, as one*, in which we discussed the relationship between truth, art and science in the context of

transdisciplinarity, in my opinion, a particularly important theme because it focuses on the open discussion about the concepts of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinarity or cross-disciplinarity, overcoming the juxtaposition of knowledge and promoting a “strong” interdisciplinarity through which every discipline relates to the others without degenerating or alienating itself, but is enriched by the relationship due to its peculiarity and specificity, thus allowing it to fully be what it is supposed to be.

I believe that this is indeed what those who work with the Journal in different ways experience. I wish with all my heart that the Journal not only “conserves” its youth as a twenty-year old but also enhances the *heritage* of which it is the guardian and embodiment, for a service that I would dare to define – borrowing an expression by Giovanni Battista Montini, Pope Paul VI – as “intellectual charity”. As a young priest who accompanied university students on their journey of intellectual and spiritual education, he stated: «science can be charity as well. Whoever engages in a topic in depth [...] is a benefactor of humanity. [...] Whoever tries to spread the truth through thought and pen, serves charity. [...] The intellectual activity [...] which spreads in the beneficial intention for others, besides enriching itself with new experiences, and the most useful human experience, becomes, with God’s Grace, charity» (G.B. Montini, *Carità intellettuale*, in G.B. Montini, *Scritti fucini [1925-1933]*, ed. M. Marcocchi, Istituto Paolo VI – Edizioni Studium, Brescia – Roma 2004, pp. 358-359).

Congratulations to the *Journal* for its work in the years 2001-2020, and *ad maiora!*