

**STATEMENT ON THE PRESIDENCY OF THE
PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE
FOLLOWING THE ASSEMBLY OF THE ACADEMY
11-13 FEBRUARY 2010, VATICAN CITY.**

The challenge to Archbishop Rino Fisichella's position as President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, which a number of commentators anticipated, did not occur at last week's Assembly of the Academy. Why? Essentially because of a **political decision** made by a number of those who had been signatories of a letter of 2 April 2009 to Archbishop Fisichella and of a subsequent letter to Cardinal Levada of 1 May 2009, seeking correction of the seriously misleading impression of the Church's teaching about direct abortion created by Archbishop Fisichella's article in *L'Osservatore Romano* of the 15th of March 2009. The reasons for that political decision were twofold: (a) an open challenge to Fisichella in the Assembly would have divided the Academy, not necessarily because Academicians agreed with his behaviour but because many would have thought it inappropriate to treat a Papal appointee who is also an Archbishop in that way. Moreover, an open challenge by lay Academicians would have run the risk of leading the Curia to close ranks around Fisichella because of the clericalist culture of that body and despite the lack of support for him in many quarters. (b) There is credible information that Fisichella is widely perceived in the Curia to be an inappropriate President of PAV and there is a reasonable hope that the Holy Father will recognise the need to provide him with an occupation better suited to his abilities.

The absence of an open challenge to Fisichella has created the unfortunate impression that Academicians are behind his Presidency, resignedly or otherwise. This is an impression he is evidently interested in propagating. Nothing could be further from the truth, and one of the main reasons it is false is because of the seriously ill-judged address he gave at the opening of the Assembly. He showed not the slightest consciousness of the gravely damaging effects of his *L'Osservatore Romano* article of 15 March 2009 or of his own responsibility for those effects. The respectful efforts of Academicians to seek a correction of it from him (which he rejected at the time) he described as personal attacks upon him motivated by "spite"; none of the signatories had the slightest reason to entertain such sentiments towards him. He claimed that the 'Clarification' eventually published on the 11th of July 2009 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith vindicated him. In other words, he retracted nothing of what he said in his article. Fisichella is plausibly able to make this claim of being vindicated because of the unfortunate first paragraph of the 'Clarification' which reads as follows:

"Recently a number of letters have been sent to the Holy See, some of them from prominent figures in political and ecclesial life, explaining the confusion that has been created in various countries, especially in Latin America, ***following the manipulation and exploitation of an article*** by His Excellency Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, on the sad affair of the 'Brazilian girl'." [Emphasis added]

What is not generally known is that this is not the original wording of the opening paragraph which it was intended to publish in *L'Osservatore Romano*. Fisichella obtained sight of the text prior to publication and demanded that the original

paragraph be changed to read as in the published version. In this way he has been permitted to disclaim, with the apparent authority of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, all responsibility for the damaging impact of his article on the defence of innocent pre-born human lives. Responsibility for this damage belongs entirely to the way others have ‘manipulated and exploited’ his article! But not content with disclaiming responsibility for the damage his article has done, Fisichella in his address to the Academy on the 11th of February claimed that the vindication extended to the content of his article. This claim is indeed grave because the clear implication of the wording of that article is that there are difficult situations in which doctors enjoy scope for the autonomous exercise of conscience in deciding whether to carry out a direct abortion. It would appear, then, that the CDF ‘Clarification’ has failed to clarify the mind of Archbishop Rino Fisichella, and, if that is the case, it raises a troubling question about just how generally effective the ‘Clarification’ has been in dispelling the false understanding of the Church’s teaching about direct abortion conveyed by the 15 March 2009 article.

Far from creating unity and genuine harmony in the Academy, Archbishop Fisichella’s address on the 11th of February had the effect of confirming in the minds of many Academicians the impression that we are being led by an ecclesiastic who does not understand what absolute respect for innocent human lives entails. This is an absurd state of affairs in a Pontifical Academy *for Life* but one which can be rectified only by those who are responsible for his appointment as President.

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16 February 2010