

The value of life

In April 2017, the Mario Negri Institute for Pharmacological Research and *The Lancet* invited a diverse group of international experts to a meeting in Rome hosted by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture to discuss ‘The Future of Humanity Through the Lens of Medical Science’. The purpose of this ambitious conference was to start healing the schism between science and religion, and explore how these two intellectual powers can collaborate to find solutions to the unprecedented emergencies that humanity faces. Topics for this conference included climate change, migration, disability, and genome editing, among others. Despite this heterogeneous agenda, the results of the conference were much more coherent, but also challenging, than expected. It became clear that science and religion can have a real dialogue and move beyond simple confrontation. Of the many topics discussed, the most compelling included the way that scientists have responded to Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si* Encyclical Letter On Care For Our Common Home—on irresponsible development, environmental degradation and global warming—as well as the fight against the consequences of poverty on health. These should encourage cooperation between and highlight the complementarity of the scientific and faith communities. Finally, during the meeting there was discussion about the tension that often emerges between science and religion on the issue of the value of life and futile medical care. The often conflictual discussions that arise regarding end-of-life care tend to be unhelpful and even frustrating for patients, families, and the public.

These complex issues cannot be resolved through a dogmatic approach that leaves each side confident in its convictions but does not take the conversation further. With this in mind, the Vatican, the Mario Negri Institute, and *The Lancet* launched a Commission on the Value of Life. The aim is for this commission to bring the profound wisdom of faith communities and the expertise of the scientific community to bear on the most difficult practical and moral issues of our time.

The scientific community and faith communities have more in common than they are in the habit of thinking, and dialogue should be based on shared values. Thus, there is both a moral obligation and an unprecedented opportunity to build on what was achieved at the conference in Rome in order to work together. With the commission, the Vatican, *The Lancet* and the Mario Negri Institute aim to create space for reflection and constructive thinking about how to address issues such as end-of-life care and genome editing, which are of increasing importance in medicine, and more broadly in our cultures. It is too early to say whether a consensus will be reached between scientists and members of religious communities on these issues—some of the most delicate that some patients and their families will ever face. The work of the wide range of scholars who are involved in the Commission on the Value of Life will answer at least some of these questions, and will in all likelihood raise many more.

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[The Vatican-Mario Negri-Lancet Commission on the value of life.](#)

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