

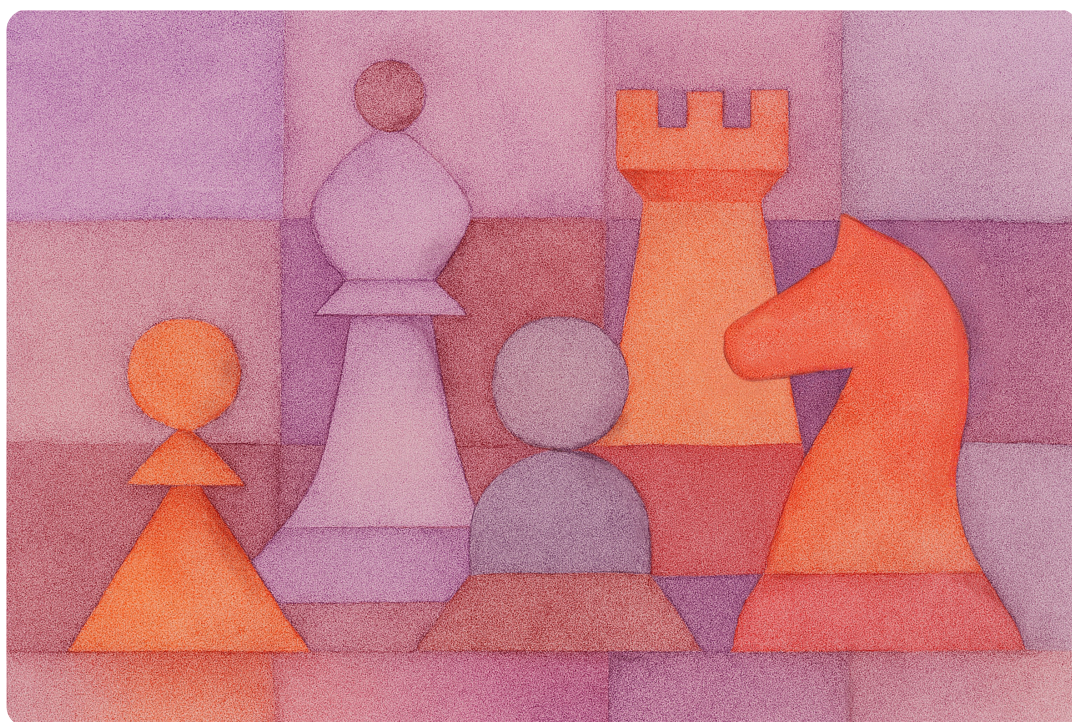


THE PONTIFICAL  
ACADEMY OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCES

PLENARY SESSION ON

# THE USES OF POWER:

*Legitimacy, Democracy and the  
Rewriting of the International Order*



14-16 April 2026  
Casina Pio IV, Vatican City



*The path to peace demands hearts and minds trained in concern for others and capable of perceiving the common good in today's world. For the road to peace involves everyone and leads to the fostering of right relationships between all living beings. As John Paul II pointed out, peace is an indivisible good; it is either everyone's or no one's (cf. Sollicitudo rei socialis, 26). It can truly be attained and enjoyed as a reality of life and integral development only if there exists in people's consciences "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good".*

*Address of his Holiness Pope Leo XIV to the Movements and Associations of the "Arena of Peace", May 30, 2025*

## Concept Note

In 1998 and 2000, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences devoted two plenary sessions to analysing democracy in its various modern forms. In those years, democracy seemed an inescapable horizon for all civilized countries. Three decades later, the situation is no longer the same. In the face of a changing world-landscape, which is witnessing the crisis of liberal democracies and the reshaping of the international order around diverse geopolitical interests, analyzing the fate of those democratic aspirations and, more generally, the moral foundations of political life is becoming a pressing issue.

Catholic Social Teaching can be inspirational in this regard: it has always emphasized that democracy is not morally self-subsistent, but depends on values which have their source in human dignity and should be politically preserved through a legal system attuned with natural law, which sets clear limits to political power and is in the service of the common good. Yet, CST leaves ample room to exercise judgment on the specific ways in which those principles should be applied in contingent, historical situations.

In this context, the purpose of this Plenary is to articulate a **broad, interdisciplinary reflection on the uses of political power, theories and perceptions of political legitimacy and the ongoing rewriting of international relations.**

Generically speaking, “**power**” – of which political power is a particular form – can be described as the capacity to mobilize resources for any given end. This capacity can be based on persuasion/conviction, force/coercion and positive sanctions.

Insofar as it involves assembling wills around a common good, **political power** is first generated by persuasion, but, in order to secure political coexistence throughout time, it needs to be backed by coercive power and the ability to sanction infractions of the instituted political order. Hence, philosophers have sometimes distinguished between **constitutive power** – which is a process – and **constituted (institutionalized) power** (for instance, Spinoza distinguishes between “*potentia*” and “*Potestas*”).

Given the normative ideal of basic equality, the fact that some exercise power over others needs some kind of justification. In distinguishing between *auctoritas* and *potestas*, the Roman republic pointed to the need for the exercise of power (*potestas*) to take place within the moral domain; the medieval distinction between *tyrannus ex defectu tituli* and *tyrannus ex defectu exercitii*, also implied a distinction between political legitimacy and moral legitimacy. In modern history there have been different approaches to the origin and purposes of political power, which also are relevant to understanding the sources of its **legitimacy**.

In addition to these normative theories, philosophers since Plato have also shown an interest in the **social and psychological origins of tyranny**, which are relevant to reflecting on the kind of **education** needed to prevent its emergence; and, in modern times, **sociology** also has pointed to the beliefs that people entertain about the legitimacy of a particular regime as something relevant to explain political “domination” i.e. the probability that people will obey a certain command (Weber). Exploring the different ways in which people seek to participate and exercise power is the matter of **political science**.

Political domination, understood as government of free citizens, is clearly distinct from despotic domination. Yet, in order to avoid arbitrariness and really preserve political freedom, the **uses of political power** must be regulated according to reason and justice. This is the purpose of establishing a constitution, which secures the division and balance of powers, a bill of rights, etc. The **rule of the law** is, by all standards, a critical element in the configuration of a truly political space. Yet finding the balance between the prudential nature of political activity, which deals with contingent situations, and the normative and therefore universal requirements of the law has never been easy. In recent years we have been witnessing two conflicting movements which are symptomatic of a dysfunctional political system: both the politicization of the judiciary, implicit in populism, and the judicialization of politics, implicit in technocracy, represent anomalies that endanger the pillars of **liberal democracy**.

As we know, liberal institutions preexisted democratic ideals, but the confluence of both elements in the previous century was generally thought to be a political achievement. For several decades, “**liberal democracies**” represented a kind of moral north for emerging nations: even if, in many ways, the economic development of such democracies – specifically the discovery of new markets – cannot be disentangled from the parallel history of **imperialism**, there is no doubt that liberal arguments (on freedom and the right to self-determination, for example) formed a part of the challenge to imperialism, and helped to destabilise **colonialism** in the early to mid-20th century.

Yet, this situation may be changing. On the one hand, both at the national and the international level, we are witnessing the persistent erosion of institutions that were supposed to set limits on the exercise of power. On the other, it seems as if the only admissible legitimation is the electoral one. The multiple sources of legitimation of power are lost in a very poor idea of democracy, reduced to the “**will of the people**” or the will of the majority, which, increasingly distrustful of all independent bodies, is easily prey to online disinformation or misinformation. All the complex multiple

notions of democracy, rule of law, constitutionalism, fundamental rights and the like are overlooked: dialogue, compromise, deliberative processes are all recessive in front of the “will” of the people or of its symbolic leader. There is a belief that fundamental norms and rules should no longer limit the exercise of power (domestically and internationally) if they cut against the people’s perceived interest, e.g., longstanding treaties are being called into question.

In an international context marked by mutual distrust, and the struggle for economic resources, juridical arrangements introduced to secure internal political freedom can easily be thought to represent a weakness towards external powers. This is part of the reason why Kant thought that true respect for the law could not be secured in the absence of an international federation of states, all committed to the advancement of peace. This idea was behind the establishment, first, of a League of nations, and then – after WW II – of the United Nations, as well as the development of various international institutions.

Yet, presently, the **rules-based international order** appears to be retreating, as we witness a return to prewar power politics, with a rewriting of the norms regulating the world order, presumably to justify the erasure of sovereign nations, and arguably a new form of *imperium*. This evolution represents a challenge to liberal-democratic norms at the international level, and signals a regression from the ideas of global justice, global citizenship and cosmopolitanism that had animated the political theory of just a decade or two ago. In this new context, Hegel’s critique of Kant easily comes to mind:

“The Kantian representation of a perpetual peace through a federation of states that would arbitrate every dispute

and settle every disagreement as a power recognized by all the individual states, and thus prevent a warlike solution, presupposes the agreement of the States, which would be based on moral or religious reasons, and always ultimately on the particular sovereign will, which would continue to be affected by contingency. Therefore, to the extent that particular wills do not reach an agreement, disputes between States can only be decided by war” (Philosophy of Right, § 333, 334).

Hegel was of the view that a federation of states could not be based on merely pragmatic or strategic reasons, but would only be possible on moral or religious grounds. This, of course, does not mean that shared moral or religious principles would solve all political differences: despite shared moral principles, people can reasonably reach different political conclusions, because the latter also depend on rather contingent situations. Yet, shared moral principles, as well as a reflection on our common origin and destiny, can certainly help in the way we deal with our otherwise inevitable differences, and, most importantly, with the decisions we make in order to prevent war.

As we see the advent of a new world order, it makes sense to reflect on the reasons and causes leading to the collapse of the old one. What have been the weaknesses and vices of that world order that left the door open to such deep and comprehensive reactions as we are seeing now? And, most importantly, what can we do in the present situation to secure justice and peace?

The Plenary will consist of three full days: the first will deal with power and legitimacy; the second with liberal democracy and its critics; and the third with the reshaping of the international order.

# Programme

## APRIL 14. DAY ONE: POWER AND LEGITIMACY

- 8:00 Holy Mass in St. Peter's Basilica**  
**9:00** *Word of Welcome*  
**Sr. Prof. Helen Alford, H.Em. Card. Peter Turkson**  
**9:15** *Opening Speech*  
*Universalism Without Imperialism?*  
**Hans Joas**

### **Morning Chair: Vittorio Hösle**

*The Moral Foundations of the Political Order. Origin and Uses of Political Power. Theories and Perceptions of Legitimacy. Theological Framing*

- 9:45** *The Moral Horizon of Political Power*  
**Ana Marta González**  
**10:10** Discussion  
**10:20** *The Origin of Power and Its Legitimacy: What Sociology Says*  
**Pierpaolo Donati**  
**10:45** Discussion  
**10:55** Coffee Break  
**11:25** *Guardini and Utz on Power*  
**Helen Alford**  
**11:50** Discussion  
**12:00** *Political Theology Today*  
**Philippe Capelle-Dumont**  
**12:25** Discussion  
**12:35** *The Church and the Ethical Regulation of a New World Order*  
**Roland Minnerath**  
**13:00** Discussion  
**13:15** Lunch at the Casina Pio IV

### **Afternoon Chair: Rodrigo Guerra-Lopez**

*Contemporary Erosion of the Limits of Power*  
*Are there Limits to the Will of the People? Reviewing the Division of Powers in the Contemporary Context*

- 14:30** *Erosion of the Limits of Power*  
**Marta Cartabia**  
**14:55** Discussion  
**15:05** *The Normative Core of Democracy After the Populist Turn*  
**Niraja Gopal Jayal**  
**15:30** Discussion  
**15:40** *Can the Rule of Law Survive Authoritarianism?*  
**John McEldowney**  
**16:05** Discussion  
**16:15** Coffee Break  
**16:45** *What Kind of Global Law?*  
**Rafael Domingo Oslé**  
**17:10** Discussion

- 17:20 *Political Participation and Institutional Reforms – Meaning and Purpose // 2050: Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok*  
**Grigory Yavlinskiy**
- 17:45 Discussion
- 17:55 *Potential of Artificial intelligence to Affect the Legitimacy of Political Action*  
**Christoph Engel**
- 18:20 Discussion
- 18:30 General Discussion
- 19:15 Dinner

#### APRIL 15, DAY TWO: LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS CRITICS

##### 8:00 **Holy Mass in St. Stephen of the Abyssinians**

##### **Morning Chair: Krzysztof Wielecki**

*Modern Democracy: Liberal Democracy, Social Democracy and “Third” Ways.*

*Liberalism and Imperialism: the Economic Factor*

- 9:00 *Postliberalism*  
**Adrian Pabst**
- 9:25 Discussion
- 9:35 *Critiques of the Liberal Tradition From the Anglosphere*  
**Tracey Rowland**
- 10:00 Discussion
- 10:10 *Economic Power for Good or For Ill: Positive and Negative Obligations from CST*  
**Albino Barrera**
- 10:35 Discussion
- 10:45 Coffee Break
- 11:15 *The Financing of Politics*  
**Gustavo BÉliz**
- 11:40 Discussion
- 11:50 *The Uses of Nature and Ecology in Political Power*  
**Justin Farrell**
- 12:15 Discussion
- 12:25 *Sustainable Development Goals as Foucauldian Dis-Course*  
**Pearl Sithole**
- 12:50 Discussion
- 13:00 Lunch

##### **Afternoon Chair: Fabio Ferrucci**

*The Forging of A Democratic Citizen: Family, Education, Civil Society.*

*Democracy and Technocracy: the Role of Media and Corporate Power in the Erosion of Trust and Authority*

- 14:30 *The Forging of a Democratic Citizen*  
**Jutta Allmendinger**
- 14:55 Discussion
- 15:05 *The Role of the Family in the Forging of a Democratic Citizen*  
**Rocco Buttiglione**
- 15:30 Discussion
- 15:40 *Citizenship Strengthening in Nigeria: Mapping the Tripartite Roles of Family, Education, and Civil Society*  
**Kokunre Agbontaen-Eghafona**
- 16:05 Discussion
- 16:15 Coffee Break

- 16:45** *Democracy and Populism in the Digital Age*  
**Riccardo Pozzo**
- 17:10** Discussion
- 17:20** *Political theology and the Crisis of Contemporary Democracy: the Political Manipulation of Christian Faith in Contemporary Neopopulisms*  
**Rodrigo Guerra-López**
- 17:45** Discussion
- 17:55** *Debt and Power*  
**Martín Guzmán**
- 18:20** Discussion
- 18:30** General Discussion
- 19:15** Dinner

#### APRIL 16. DAY THREE: RESHAPING THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

**8:00 Holy Mass in St. Stephen of the Abyssinians**

##### **Morning Chair: Niraja Gopal Jayal**

*World Order and Global Governance After 1989*  
*The Return of Power Politics*

- 9:00** *Beyond Nation-State and Cosmopolitanism: A Confucian New Tian Xia Model of State Identity and Global Governance*  
**Tongdong Bai**
- 9:25** Discussion
- 9:35** *The Role of Nations in the Global World*  
**Yaroslav Hrytsak**
- 10:00** Discussion
- 10:10** *Principles for Peace Among the Major Powers*  
**Jeffrey Sachs**
- 10:35** Discussion
- 10:45** Coffee Break
- 11:15** *Mass Immigration and the Re-Writing of the international Order*  
**Marcelo Suárez-Orozco**
- 11:40** Discussion
- 11:50** *Reshaping the International Order for Environmental and Climate Justice*  
**Virgilio Viana**
- 12:15** Discussion
- 12:25** *The Global Order and the Peaceful Resolution of Disputes*  
**Emilia Justyna Powell**
- 12:50** Discussion
- 13:00** Lunch

##### **Afternoon Chair: H.Em. Card. Stephen Chow Sau-Yan**

*War, Peace, and Diplomacy*  
*Nations, Regions, Empires.*

- 14:30** *Under Which Conditions Can Wars be Morally Justified?*  
**Vittorio Hösle**
- 14:55** Discussion
- 15:05** *The Indispensability of Benevolence for international Relations*  
**Gregory Reichberg**
- 15:30** Discussion

- 15:40** *The Role of Religions in Achieving Peace*  
**William Cavanaugh**
- 16:05** Discussion
- 16:15** Coffee Break
- 16:45** *The New Diplomacy for Life, Based on the Social Teachings of Pope Francis*  
**Emilce Cuda**
- 17:10** Discussion
- 17:20** *A Way to a New Peace Process. Against Misoneism*  
**Stefano Zamagni**
- 17:45** Discussion
- 17:55** General Discussion
- 18:30** End of Plenary
- 18:45** Closed Session for Academicians
- 19:15** Dinner at Casina Pio IV

## List of Participants

**Kokunre A. AGBONTAEN-EGHAFONA**  via Zoom  
PASS Academician  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Acting Dean,  
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Nigeria

**Sr. Prof. Helen ALFORD, O.P.**  
PASS President  
Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Pontifical  
University of St Thomas (Angelicum), Rome, Italy

**Rev. Sabina ALKIRE**  
PASS Academician  
Director, Oxford Poverty and Human Development  
Initiative (OPHI), Department of International  
Development, University of Oxford, UK

**Jutta ALLMENDINGER**  
PASS Academician  
Professor of Educational Sociology and Labor Market  
Research at Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

**Tongdong BAI**  
PASS Academician  
Dongfang Chair Professor of Philosophy at Fudan  
University, Global Professor of Law at NYU's Law School,  
and Adjunct Professor at NYU-Shanghai

**Fr. Albino BARRERA, O.P.**  
PASS Academician  
Professor of Economics and Theology, Providence College,  
Rhode Island, USA

**Gustavo BELIZ**  
PASS Academician  
Secretary of the Strategic Affairs Secretariat,  
Buenos Aires, Argentina

**Rocco BUTTIGLIONE**  
PASS Academician  
Professor of Philosophy, Instituto de Filosofia Edith Stein,  
Granada, Spain


**Philippe CAPELLE-DUMONT**  
Dean of the Institut catholique de Paris  
University of Paris-Sorbonne, France

**Paolo CAROZZA**  
PASS Academician  
Professor at the University of Notre Dame, USA

**Marta CARTABIA**  
PASS Academician  
Professor of Constitutional Law, Bocconi University,  
Milan, Italy; President Emeritus of the Italian  
Constitutional Court

**William T. CAVANAUGH**  
Professor, Catholic Studies  
Director, Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural  
Theology, DePaul University, USA

**H.Em. Card. Stephen CHOW**  
PASS Academician  
Bishop of the Diocese of Hong Kong, P.R. China

**Emilce CUDA**  via Zoom  
PASS Academician  
Secretary, Pontifical Commission for Latin America,  
Vatican City

**Rafael DOMINGO OSLE**  
Legal historian and professor of law. University of Navarra;  
Fellow at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at  
Emory University, USA

**Pierpaolo DONATI**  
PASS Academician  
Emeritus Professor of Sociology,  
University of Bologna, Italy

**Mario DRAGHI**  
PASS Academician  
Former Prime Minister of Italy


**Christoph ENGEL**  
PASS Academician  
Director, Max Planck Institute for Research on Collective  
Goods, Cologne, Germany

**Justin FARRELL**  
PASS Academician  
Professor of Sociology, Yale University, USA

**Fabio FERRUCCI**  
PASS Academician  
Head of Department of Humanities, Education and Social  
Sciences, University of Molise, Italy

**Ana Marta GONZÁLEZ**  
PASS Academician  
Full Professor of Philosophy at the University of Navarra,  
Spain

**Rodrigo GUERRA LÓPEZ**  
PASS Academician  
Secretary, Pontifical Commission for Latin America,  
Vatican City

**Martín Maximiliano GUZMAN**  via Zoom  
PASS Academician  
Former Minister of the Economy of the Republic of  
Argentina

**Vittorio HÖSLE**  
PASS Academician  
Paul Kimball Professor of Arts and Letters,  
University of Notre Dame, USA

**Yaroslav HRYTSAK**  
Historian, Doctor of Historical Sciences and professor of  
the Ukrainian Catholic University,  
Lviv, Ukraine

**Niraja Gopal JAYAL**  via Zoom  
PASS Academician  
Avantha Chair and Professor of Politics  
at the King's India Institute,  
King's College London, UK

**Hans JOAS**  
Sociologist and social theorist, Ernst Troeltsch Professor  
for the Sociology of Religion at the Humboldt University  
of Berlin, Germany

**John McELDOWNEY**  
PASS Academician  
Professor of Law, University of Warwick,  
Coventry, UK


**H.E. Msgr. Roland MINNERATH**  
PASS Academician  
Archbishop Emeritus  
Dijon, France

**Adrian PABST**  
PASS Academician  
Honorary Professor, School of Economics and Politics,  
University of Kent, UK

**Emilia POWELL**  
Professor of Political Science and Concurrent Professor  
of Law at the University of Notre Dame, USA

**Riccardo POZZO**  
PASS Academician  
Professor of the History of Philosophy,  
University of Tor Vergata,  
Rome, Italy

**Gregory REICHBERG**  
PASS Academician  
Threats, Coercive Diplomacy, and International Peace

**Tracey Anne Patrice ROWLAND**  via Zoom  
PASS Academician  
Professor of Political and Cultural Theory and Chair  
of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, Australia

**Jeffrey SACHS**  
PASS Academician  
President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions  
Network, Columbia University,  
New York, USA

**Maria Dolores SÁNCHEZ GALERA**  
PASS Councillor from the Dicastery for the Promotion of  
Integral Human Development  
Public Law, Carlos III University, Madrid, Spain;  
LLB Honours in Comparative Public Law,  
European Master's Degree, PhD in Environmental Law  
and Fundamental Rights

**Pearl SITHOLE**  via Zoom

PASS Academician

University Manager – Campus Vice-Principal: Academic and Research, University of the Free State, Qwaqwa Campus, Phuthaditjaba, South Africa

**Joseph STIGLITZ**  via Zoom

PASS Honorary Academician

Columbia University, Graduate School of Business, New York, USA

**Marcelo SUÁREZ-OROZCO**

PASS Academician

UCLA Wasserman Dean Emeritus and Distinguished Professor Emeritus; Chancellor, University of Massachusetts, Boston

**H.Em. Card. Peter K.A. TURKSON**

PASS and PAS Chancellor, Holy See

**Virgilio VIANA**

PASS Academician

CEO at the Foundation for Amazon Sustainability (FAS); Special Professor at Dom Cabral Foundation; Guest Professor at National Amazon Research Institute (INPA), Brazil

**Msgr. Dario Edoardo VIGANÒ**

PASS Vice Chancellor

Professor of Cinema, Photography and Television, International Telematic University, UNINETTUNO, Rome, Italy

**Krzysztof WIELECKI**

PASS Academician

Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Historical and Social Sciences, The Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland

**Grigory YAVLINSKIY**

Politician and Economist, Moscow, Russia

**Stefano ZAMAGNI**

PASS Honorary Academician

Professor of Economics, University of Bologna, Italy; Vice Director, SAIS Bologna, Senior Adjunct Professor of International Political Economics

# Memorandum

## Pickup schedule on 14-15-16 April 2026

- ▶ Holy Mass will be celebrated at 8.00 am in Saint Peter's Basilica (first day) and Saint Stephen of the Abyssinians (second and third day).
- ▶ On 14-15 and 16 April at 7.45 am a Vatican car will accompany participants staying at the *Domus Romana Sacerdotalis* (Via della Traspontina 18) to Saint Peter's Basilica or Saint Stephen of the Abyssinians to take part in the Holy Mass.
- ▶ On 14, 15 and 16 April: at 8.45 am, at the end of the Holy Mass, a bus will wait for participants in the courtyard of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* to accompany them to the Academy.
- ▶ Those who do not wish to attend Holy Mass can walk to Casina Pio IV by entering the Vatican through the Perugino entrance, Via della Stazione Vaticana ([https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e2/Porta\\_del\\_Perugino\\_20141004\\_131702.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e2/Porta_del_Perugino_20141004_131702.jpg))
- ▶ The same buses will take participants back to their hotels after dinner at 8:00/8.30 pm.

**Dress Code** is business casual.

**Food:** We will provide coffee breaks, lunch and dinner on 14, 15 and 16 April. If you have any food allergies or dietary requirements, please let us know in advance.

**Security:** invites are strictly personal. Please remember to bring a valid ID.

## Online Attendance

A Zoom link will be sent to online participants before the event, with the request not to share it with external parties.

## For More Information

Please refer to [www.pass.va](http://www.pass.va) and [www.pas.va](http://www.pas.va) for further information on the Academies, the Academicians, and current and past events.



**WI-FI network:** academy-guest

**Password:** G@rdens1936



**CONTACTS  
AND MAPS**

**Chiesa di Santo Stefano degli Abissini**  
*St Stephen of the Abyssinians Church*

**Sede della Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze Scienze Sociali**  
*Seat of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*  
**(Casina Pio IV)**

**Ingresso del Perugino**  
*The 'Perugino' gate*

**Ingresso Musei Vaticani**  
*Entrance gate to the Vatican Museum*

**Domus Sanctae Marthae**

**Altare Tomba S. Pietro**  
*Altar of St Peter's Tomb*

**Ingresso Sant'Uffizio**  
*The 'Sant'Uffizio' gate*

**Ingresso Sant'Anna**  
*The 'Sant'Anna' gate*

THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
CASINA PIO IV | V-00120 VATICAN CITY  
Tel: +39 0669883451 | Fax: +39 0669885218 | Email: pass@pass.va  
For further information please visit: [www.pas.va](http://www.pas.va) and [www.pass.va](http://www.pass.va)

X @casinapioiv

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/@CasinaPioIV>