

# The Challenges of the Culture of Life

by

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I am grateful for this invitation from the president of the CEA, Bishop Oscar Ojea, to present or rather give you an idea of the activities of the Pontifical Academy for Life. Pope Francis has decided to broaden its horizon of reflection without, of course, abandoning the original inspiration of Saint John Paul II, who founded it twenty-six years ago to address issues related, especially, to the beginning and the end of life. A few months ago, precisely on the occasion of the XXV anniversary of its foundation, Pope Francis relaunched this impulse, writing a very important orientation letter to the Academy, *Humana Communitas*. I brought you some copies .

The expansion of content is due to the extraordinary development of science and technology, which requires a new understanding of the semantic meaning of the term life; one only needs to think on topics related to genetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, integral ecology, and global bioethics. Life must be considered in all of its moments and in all of the conditions in which it exists. At the same time, this expansion has led to the naming of expert members in disciplines other than medicine, such as bible scholars, theologians, moralists, jurists, etc. The multicultural character of contemporary societies has led scientists of other Christian confessions, other religions and non-believers to participate in the Academy, all of whom, without a doubt, care about the defense of the human person and their dignity.

## **Science and technocracy: the imperialism of instrumental reason and its contradictions**

There are many challenges that the contemporary world poses in the area of bioethics: issues related to reproduction and the beginning of life, those that come up in the last stages of earthly life, the new forms of genome editing (CRISPR/Cas9), and those related to the new frontiers of transplants (among which the outlook—in China—of the “head transplant” is certainly impressive). There is a common horizon that unites all of these phenomena which is the land to be cultivated, and that is the knowledge that the empirical sciences produce about life. The sciences, according to their method, use categories that classify living organisms with an objectifying logic that, in fact, places in parentheses the lived experience, proper of human corporeality. To put in parentheses—even if it is only for methodological motives—these dimensions means considering them irrelevant and making them disappear from the horizon of knowledge. The consequence of this is that the living being is studied leaving aside experience and, moreover, the very meaning of its existence.

This tendency, which is related to technical development, is reinforced by a second element of practical nature (at least initially). Of course, we must not undervalue the positive outcomes that this technique has contributed to humanity, supporting the actions of man, reducing his tiredness and improving his wellbeing. However, the instrumental and calculating reason that lies at the base of the technique—precisely due to its successes and the alliance it has established with economic powers—is imposing itself as a paradigm that tends to be exclusive, at the expense of other dimensions and forms of reasoning. In short, there is a risk of the imposition of the dictatorship of the technique.

The Academy is paying special attention to the development of palliative care for the accompaniment of patients in the last stages of their lives. It is a real battle to

prevent a culture of euthanasia and assisted suicide. A few days ago, we signed, at the Vatican, a document on euthanasia and assisted suicide among the responsible of the three Abrahamic religions. We repeated it yesterday here, in Buenos Aires, as well. We have made a “white book” about this topic that we are sending to all Catholic universities and Catholic hospitals so that this culture of care can expand as much as possible.

### **Global bioethics**

Today it is impossible to cover the issues that frame classical medical bioethics outside of the context of globalization, especially spreading reflection to developing countries . This perspective is slowly gaining ground. It introduces, with greater clarity, the subject of international human rights and it demands a new understanding of bioethical issues so that they are not limited to the problems of Western economically-advantaged countries. Also, among the growing number of issues that cross national borders, oceans, and continents , we are urged to find global answers. Issues related to access to care, priorities in the use of resources, inequalities in health promotion and the distribution of technologies– and the knowledge that permits their use and development– should be interpreted with a new perspective. The introduction of reflections on the environment, an increasingly incisive component in determining health, is also of great importance.

### **The John Paul II Institute**

I would like to offer one last word to the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences. I know that complaints have also arrived here. I never replied to the accusations, all of them unfounded. In reality, Pope Francis wanted to abolish the previous institute and created a new one that has [the intention that John Paul II had], but which has completely renewed its curriculum with the arrival of new teachers. This has taken two years of intensive work. But finally, the new course has begun this academic year. And now [we are beginning] the renewal of the Institute [in other countries]. Meanwhile, a new Institute was born in Madrid due to the initiative of Cardinal Osoro, with the approval of the Episcopal Conference of Spain. [Yesterday we signed an agreement with the Institute of Marriage and Family of the UCA ... I participated in the Congress of Bioethics of the UCA and I was able to see their good work, and they have some challenges on the pastoral experience].

In the new proposal, the double extension of its fundamental processes deserves, in the first place, to be recognized. A theological-pastoral itinerary (also in the determining of the legal value of the title itself, which is configured as an actual title in theology in every way) and one called "sciences of marriage and family," which allows for a deepening in the familiar form of human life in its complexity– so it does not necessarily require a bachelor's degree in theology. The latter is a rigorous academic cycle, specially designed for laypeople, whom today are increasingly committed to an active and formative role in family ministry and in the accompaniment of families.

This project enriches and qualifies the theological proposal (which logically sees the confirmation of many courses and professors of the previous institute): it acquires special importance, through an adequate optimization of the disciplinary spaces, in addition to the traditional disciplines of special morality , sacramental and pastoral, the field of the fundamental theology of the faith and of the Christian form , with special attention to human love; teaching on ecclesiology and the family, and on family spirituality and the transmission of faith. As part of the perspective of strengthening the cultural sphere of anthropological knowledge and social transformations, new courses have been added, such as: History and culture of family institutions, Sociology of

marriage and the family, Politics and economics of family institutions, Canon law and Comparative family law. In the same vein, the World Family Observatory was created a year ago, a research project dedicated especially to the issues of relational and economic poverty of families, in which more than 15 universities from around the world are participating.

The irradiation of the divine project on the human family, in the complexity of the current situation , demands a special intellect of love. It also demands a deep evangelical dedication, encouraged by great compassion and mercy for the vulnerability and fallibility of love among men. I believe that today we have a Theological Institute that lives up to this task.

Thank you.

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