

**Archbishop PAGLIA - 25 years from *Evangelium Vitae*. Interview.  
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**Translation**

**What of *Evangelium Vitae* 25 years on?** It is more than ever a “pressing call” but remember that it is the Magisterium of the Church as a whole, in its continuity and its development, that has a wise and relevant message for today’s challenges. The man who is emphasizing this reality is Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life. In the following interview he links the twenty-five years of *Evangelium Vitae* with developments in subsequent Papal Magisterium and with the Corona Virus pandemic that has developed in just the last four months.

**Twenty-five years after the Encyclical, what appears most pressing in what St. John Paul II wrote?**

The document of Saint John Paul II is a great “hymn to life.” It is a broad-visioned work of art that expresses the unchanging message of the Gospel in relation to the challenges of the document’s times. The sainted Pope clearly and courageously puts into evidence the threats to human life: abortion, euthanasia, “demographic winter,” murder and the death penalty—this last subject, parenthetically, taken up and continuously updated by Pope Francis. Above all however it is an accusation of what today Pope Francis would call a “throwaway culture.” In this we can see how the Magisterium of the Church develops within the flow of history from one pontificate to another, from one age to another. Nevertheless, what has been the driver of *Evangelium Vitae* is more relevant than ever; and it must continue to be so, to be closely tied to our new times.

**Indeed, Archbishop. Today, what is the content of the “Gospel of Life” that the Church is preaching?**

As Pope John taught, it is not the Gospel that changes; it is we who understand it better and better. Today, we see how the challenges to life, which are encountered largely at its beginning and as it draws to a close, extend in reality to every phase of life, and not just to individuals but rather to the whole human family. This is the real challenge of the Corona Virus disease. Political, economic, social and cultural environments affect the life of each of us in a context of “global bioethics.”

**What has *Evangelium Vitae* changed in the Church?**

It brought into focus epoch-making questions, and Pope Francis has further developed them. One that I have already mentioned is the death penalty. Among many others, he has emphasized the importance of the family in the proclamation of the Gospel of Life, and this has profoundly affected the

Church's self-understanding.

**St. John Paul II was strongly critical of cultures that justify crimes against life and human dignity with appeals to personal freedom, a pressing question today. How should we deal with what has become a “dogma” in contemporary society?**

We must abandon the notion that freedom is simply self-determination. Rather it is responsibility that is rooted in the relational element in human nature. What I do affects others and we are bound together by a common destiny. We have never been more aware of this as we deal with restrictive measures intended to limit the spread of Covid-19.

**In your opinion, what are the threats to human life where the Church is called on to play the same prophetic role as twenty-five years ago?**

The threats are “global.” and the effects of the “Corona Virus” should be mentioned. It is exemplary of not only disease but also of environmental pollution, of the lack of basic commodities such as water, of lost possibilities for development, for culture, for therapies, for health care programs. Add to this issues that were unknown a few years ago. In particular, today's technological innovations allow for unprecedented interventions on the human body, and not only in the health care sector. In addition, the profound changes that artificial intelligence and robotics will make in our mental processes and our relationships, will have significant effects on our exercise of freedom and choice.

**What does the Gospel of Life say that helps us overcome the current global emergency?**

The global pandemic tells us something we should not ignore: together, humanity has a future. It has a future if it takes seriously, if it protects, if it watches over, the value of every human life. This is not a Christian message only, even if our faith helps us understand it and take responsibility for it. It is without doubt a message that applies to every human being, and I express our gratitude to all those who are committed to this goal. Particular recognition in this regard is due to Professor Carlo Casini, who died just days ago. His generous witness encourages us and gives us strength.

**St. John Paul II's Encyclical reaffirms the value and inviolability of every human life, especially the most fragile. How much do you see this principle being taken seriously in the context of the Corona Virus and of “choices” being made among those whom it strikes?**

We can learn that life defends and sustains itself by reaffirming and enhancing everyone's right to a dignified existence. We must abandon any hint of what is individualistic, inhospitable and affectionless in our relationships,

whether those relationships be personal, economic, political or institutional. Let me be clear: the civilization of a society is judged by how it treats the elderly. If they are the weakest, they must be treated with even more attention. Everyone is worthy of being loved and cared for.

**Today, is there a need for a “new *Evangelium Vitae*”?**

I believe it is useful to begin thinking about how to readdress and better understand the fundamental issues related to human life, with a new approach to both methodology and content. We need to study in the light of recent magisterial pronouncements, in particular *Caritas in Veritate* and *Laudato si*. the important questions about human life developed in ecclesial tradition. Our reflection must be based on Sacred Scripture and make use of a multiplicity of disciplines (*cf. Veritatis Gaudium*) in sincere dialogue with all who care about human life. It is a fascinating, theological, pastoral, human challenge. This is the direction in which we are working.