

**POPE FRANCIS SPEECH**  
**TO THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE**  
**VATICAN CITY, JUNE 24<sup>TH</sup> 2018**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to offer my greetings to all of you, beginning with your President, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, whom I thank for his presentation of the Program of this General Assembly, where the question of human life will be considered in its relation to the globalized world we live in today.

Each of you is relying on the wisdom that must inspire your approach to "human ecology" as you examine the *ethical and spiritual quality of life at each of its phases*. Think of human life at its conception, human life growing in the womb, life just born, life as a child, a teenager, an adult; think of life that has grown old and is ready to pass away—into eternal life! There is life that is family and community, life that reaches out with hope. There is life that is frail and sick, wounded, insulted, humiliated, marginalized and cast aside. But all are still human life, the life of human persons who live on God's Earth, and who share a common home with every living creature. In our life-science laboratories we study life with instruments that let us explore life's physical, chemical and mechanical aspects. This is an activity that is important and cannot be ignored, but it must be integrated into a wider and deeper perspective, one that concentrates on human life specifically—life that has entered the world with the miracle of words and thought, affections and spirit. Today, it is fair to ask what recognition the *human wisdom of life* receives from the natural sciences. What political culture inspires us to nurture and protect real human life? The "beautiful" work of life is the generation of new persons, the education of their spiritual and creative qualities, their introduction into the love that is found in the family and the community, in care for weakness and wounds; and in new life's initiation into the life of God's children, in Jesus Christ.

When we give children over to poverty, the poor to hunger, the persecuted to war, and the

elderly to abandonment, do we not ourselves do the “dirty work” of *death*? Where does this dirty work of death come from? It comes from *sin*. Evil tries to convince us that death is the end of everything, that we have come into this world by chance and that our fate is to end up in nothingness. If we exclude “the other” from our thinking, each life thinks only of itself, and life itself becomes simply a consumer commodity. Narcissus, the character of ancient mythology, who loves only himself and ignores the good of others, is shallow-minded but does not even realize it. Meanwhile, he is, in a way, the source of a very contagious spiritual virus that turns us into reflections in a mirror who see only ourselves and nothing else. We become blind to life and its power—to life as a gift that is received from others and that to others must be passed on responsibly.

The *global vision of bioethics* that you are preparing to re-launch in the field of social ethics and worldwide humanism will, strengthened by Christian inspiration, strive with greater commitment and rigor to break free from complicity with the dirty work of death that draws strength from sin. It will bring us back to the covenant with grace that God has destined to be part of our lives. This bioethics will not begin with a consideration of sickness and death in hopes of reaching an understanding of the meaning of life and the worth of the individual. Rather, it will begin with a profound belief in the *irrevocable dignity of the human person*, as loved by God—the dignity of *every* person, in *every* phase and condition of existence—as it searches for those forms of love and care that must address the vulnerability and frailness of each individual.

First of all, your global bioethics will be a specific development of the vision of *integral ecology* set forth in the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, in which I emphasized the following points: the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate; the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.” (*Laudato si'*, 16).

Secondly, in a *holistic vision of the person* our task is to express with ever greater clarity

the connections and differences that the universal human condition inhabits, and that involve us—*starting with our own bodies*. In fact, “our body itself places us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different.” (*Laudato si'*, 155).

It is necessary to proceed with a careful discernment of the complex *fundamental differences of human life*: between man and woman, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity, social factors, and all the different ages of life. Likewise, between all the difficult conditions and all the delicate or dangerous situations that require particular ethical wisdom and courageous moral resistance: sexuality and the transmission of life, sickness and old age, handicaps and disabilities, poverty and exclusion, violence and war. “The defense of the unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor who are already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.” (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, 101).

In the texts and teachings of *Christian and ecclesiastical formation*, the subjects of the ethics of human life will have to be given their proper place in a global anthropology, and not be confined to the borderline areas of morality and law. It is my hope that an acceptance of the centrality of integral human ecology, that is, of an harmonious and comprehensive understanding of the human condition, will find in your intellectual, civic and religious commitment, both strong support and effective resonance.

Global bioethics calls us to the wisdom of a profound and objective discernment of the

*value of individual and community life*, which must be preserved and promoted *even in the most difficult circumstances*. We also state strongly that, without the adequate support of *responsible human closeness*, purely legal regulation and technical assistance cannot, on their own, guarantee conditions and relationships consonant with the dignity of the person. The vision of globalization that, left to its own devices, tends to increase and deepen inequalities, invites an ethical response that favors justice. Attention to social, economic, cultural and environmental factors that affect health is part of this commitment, and it becomes a concrete way to implement the right of every people “to share, on a basis of equality and solidarity, in the enjoyment of goods intended for all.” (St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 21).

Finally, the culture of life must look more deeply into the “serious question” of life’s “ultimate destination.” This means highlighting with greater clarity whatever directs man’s existence toward a horizon that surpasses him: every person is freely called “as a son to commune with God and share in His happiness. [...] a hope related to the end of time does not diminish the importance of intervening duties but rather undergirds the acquittal of them with fresh incentives.” (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 21). We need to question ourselves more deeply about the ultimate destination of life, in a way that makes us capable of restoring dignity and meaning to the mystery of life’s deepest and most sacred affections. Human life, beautiful beyond words yet terrifyingly fragile, takes us beyond ourselves. We *are* infinitely more than *what we can do* for ourselves. But human life is also incredibly tenacious, certainly thanks to some mysterious Grace that comes from above, as it boldly calls for justice and for the final victory of love. And man is able - hoping against all hope - to sacrifice himself for life, until the end. Recognizing and appreciating this faithfulness and dedication to life gives rise in us to gratitude and a sense of responsibility, and it encourages us to offer our knowledge and our experience generously to the whole human community. Christian wisdom must recognize with passion and boldness that the destiny of the human race is the life of God, who has promised to open, beyond death, the infinite horizon of loving bodies of light, with no more tears. And to amaze human kind eternally with the ever-new charm of all the “visible and invisible” things that are hidden in the womb of the Creator.