

**XXIV ANNUAL MEETING  
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE**

**Workshop - President's Introduction**

**MOST REVEREND VINCENZO PAGLIA**

**Vatican City, June 25 June 2018**

Dear friends,

I extend to you a most cordial welcome to these days of study and dialogue about a topic that is very close to all our hearts. The continuous and rapid transformations to which we are witnesses invite us to reflect in a new and detailed way on the core mission of the Pontifical Academy for Life— life of the human person. We need to examine how the context in which we find ourselves affects our understanding of bioethics—which is the ethics of life in the most radical sense—and of the responsibility and commitment that bioethics imposes on us. Pope Francis has pointed us to a broad horizon where we can find time and space for reflection on all the questions that challenge human life today.

Undoubtedly, globalization is one of the most visible phenomena in today's world. For the Church, consideration of this phenomenon is not something new. While *Populorum Progressio* (1967) of Paul VI did not use the term “globalization,” he pointed out all its essential elements, and the encyclical reasoned from an explicitly global perspective, as he dealt with the problems of development and examined its dynamics on a planetary scale. We read passages that are surprising in their relevance for today. “We are heirs of earlier generations and we reap benefits from the efforts of our contemporaries, we are under obligation to all men. Therefore we cannot disregard the welfare of those who will come after us to increase the human family. The reality of human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations.” (N. 17). Moreover, the encyclical did not take an abstract, formal approach to justice and limit itself simply what is necessary “to give each his own.” It called for concrete justice, which takes the side of the weakest—poor countries and all those who are pushed to the margins of society. St. John Paul II then took up that message in the 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* that commemorated the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum progressio*.

Pope Francis has taken this perspective and has made it a key element of *Laudato si'*, which shows the perspective's importance for today. Starting from the concept of the "common home" in which we all live, he speaks of "integral ecology," an expression that has been rapidly adopted as an innovative new paradigm. The word "ecology" is not used in a generic and vague sense. The Pope, taking as a reference the global ecosystem, points out a way to approach all complex systems. To understand them, attention should be directed to the relationships among the system's individual parts, as well as with "the whole," which is "greater than its parts." (*Evangelii gaudium*, N. 234). In other words, individual issues can not be understood and accepted responsibly without placing them in an overall, global scenario. This implies a diverse, multi cultural perspective, as well input from many points of view and specific areas of knowledge. Integral ecology thus becomes a way to interpret the connection of phenomena and problems of the natural world with issues that are not normally part of the ecological agenda in a strict sense, such as the delicate balance of interests in large cities or the efficiency of transportation systems. For us, the perspective that Pope Francis offers when speaking of integral ecology, is particularly important to understanding "human ecology" and our relationship with our own bodies, as he said in his speech this morning (cf. LS 155), and with the social and institutional dynamic at all levels: "If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and for the quality of human life" (LS No. 142). It is a perspective that helps to highlight how much full human development, which includes the protection of the fundamental "right to (protection of) health," is influenced by environmental and social factors and by the political choices that govern them.

Following this track makes clear the two main supports of "global bioethics," first, the complexity of the contexts in which people live and, second, the way in which these contexts favor or damage health. In this perspective it becomes clearer how the human person is constitutionally made for relationships. In other words, the person is not a self-sufficient subject who is made to exist outside of relational networks, which he can enter or not, as he chooses. On the contrary, the human person comes into being through relationships that precede him—those from which he receives life as a gift, and those towards whom he is responsible from the beginning. The dignity of the person must be interpreted in this light, as must the fundamental human rights that derive from it and to which the person rightly and universally can have recourse (especially this year, in which

we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). These rights must be affirmed as belonging not only to individuals (“my rights”), but as rights of the community (“our rights”, “the rights of all”). They must be understood as claimable not only for those who want to rely on them, but also for others for whom we are responsible.

I therefore ask myself if we must not proclaim that the human family, and not only individual persons, is a unitary subject of rights and duties. Love for the community, devotion to the common good, a spirit of dedication and even of sacrifice should once again be honored as specific virtues, indispensable to the ethics of life that is the common theme and a universal question of integral bioethics. The extent of this rehabilitation of what is “common” should be the result of a strong sense of the “human family.” The humanity that is common to us is not simply the organized coexistence of persons who are free and equal: fraternity is a value added to that common good that only a family spirit can establish and protect. Here too, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In this vast horizon on which the human family appears, our gaze is directed above all to the poorest and most vulnerable, whose rights are less protected. This is one reason why in our Workshop we are giving serious attention to the delicate mother-child relationship, which is the object of much injustice. This certainly does not mean forgetting other people who are in a state of frailty or weakness, or who, like the elderly, suffer from loneliness. Indeed, the Academy dedicated its 2014 and 2015 Annual Meetings to the needs of the elderly: “ Aging and Disability,” and “Assistance to the Elderly and Palliative Care.”

What, instead, we are focusing on during the next two days first of all the deepening of the basic vision of global bioethics, and then the examination of a particularly sensitive point, not only for the future of individuals, but for that of the human family as a whole. This will enable us to conduct an effective dialogue among differing points of view. We are pleased to have, among the participants in our Workshop, as well as among the members of the Academy, persons who are expert in various scientific disciplines and who belong to different religions and visions of the world. And it is our wish that this plurality of perspectives and knowledge will spread beyond our activities of these next days and become a commitment that we all share as we establish cooperation and alliances with whoever has at heart the same questions and the same transformational desire that are at the root of that commitment. Deepening our awareness of all being dwellers in our common home,

and knowing the importance of that fact for our health, can create a sense of global responsibility. This unity, in which we all have an interest, can inspire a global ethos that makes it possible to overcome the temptation to exclusionary profit, and to strategies that create conflicts and cause poverty, abuse and exclusion.

At this point, elements reemerge that were part of bioethics in its early days, when the goal was to create bridges between natural sciences and humanistic reflection and between generations. Building bridges means making possible the meetings of persons who cross them and who bring their own point of view with them. And a bridge must always be crossable in both directions, and never be only one-way. Let's trust that, with everyone's help, we can make it that happen. Go for it!