

Your Excellency,  
Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to meet with you at this, your Annual Meeting, and I thank Archbishop Paglia for his greeting and his introduction. I express my gratitude for your contributions, whose value, as time passes, is ever more evident, both in your deepening of our scientific, anthropological and ethical understanding, and in your service to life, particularly in your care for human life and for all of creation, our common home.

The theme of your meeting: “Accompanying Life: New Responsibilities in the Era of Technology” calls for a challenging but necessary commitment. That commitment addresses the interplay between the opportunities and the critical choices that arise out of global humanism’s response to recent technological developments in the life sciences, those powerful biotechnologies that can already manipulate life in ways that were until recently unthinkable, and that have given rise to challenging questions.

For this reason, it is urgent to study and analyze more intensely the effects of this technological evolution of society in order to develop an anthropological response that can give an adequate explanation of the challenges that mark the age we live in. Your expert advice cannot be limited simply to offering solutions to particular ethical, social, or legal questions. The inspiration for any conduct consistent with human dignity is to be found in scientific and technical theory and practice taken as a whole and in their relation to life, to life’s meaning and life’s value. It is in this optic that I would like to offer my reflections today.

1. Today, human beings seem to be living a special moment of their history in which they are dealing with the ever ancient, ever new, questions about human life, its origin and its destiny in a completely new context.

The key aspect of this moment is the rapid spread of a culture that is obsessively centered on the sovereignty of man—as a species and as individuals—in relation to all of reality. This situation is even referred to as ego-worship, an actual cult of the ego, on whose altar everything, even the most cherished human affections, are sacrificed. This approach is not harmless: it forms a person who is always looking at himself in the mirror, who can’t look others, or the world, in the eye. This approach has negative consequences for all the affections and relationships in life (cf. *Laudato si’* n. 48).

Naturally, there is no question of denying or minimizing the legitimacy of individual desire for a certain quality of life or for the economic and technical resources that can make that quality possible. Still, we can't just ignore the unprincipled materialism that is an element of the alliance between the economy and technology, and that treats life as a resource to be exploited or to be discarded if it does not advance power or profit.

Sadly, all over the world, men, women and children suffer, with bitterness and sorrow, from the false promises of technocratic materialism. And more, because, far from the propaganda claims that well-being would spread automatically with the expansion of the market, poverty, conflict, rejection, abandonment, resentment and despair are all on the increase. In the face of this situation, real scientific and technological progress should instead inspire more humane policies.

Christian faith prompts us to *take back the initiative*, rejecting any temptation to nostalgia or complaint. The Church, as a matter of fact, has a long tradition of generous and enlightened minds that in their own day paved the way for science and knowledge. The world needs believers who, with seriousness and joy, are creative and proactive, humble and brave, resolutely determined to reconnect the generations. Broken relationships interrupt the transmission of life. The exciting potential of young people is praised, but who guides young people to adulthood? Adulthood means a life capable of accepting responsibility and love, both for future generations and for those past. When fathers and mothers grow old, they rightly expect to be honored for what they have generously given, not to be discarded because they are no longer useful.

2. The inspiration for taking back this initiative comes from the *Word of God*, which shines its light on the beginning of life and on its destiny.

Today, a theology of Creation and Redemption that can be translated into love for each life and for all of life is more necessary than ever if we are to accompany the Church's outreach into our world. The Encyclical *Laudato si'* offers a new vision of the way God sees His creation and the way man should see it as well, starting with the great revelation that is offered to us in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. Genesis makes clear that each of us is a creature who is *willed and loved by God for our self*. We are not just well-organized collections of cells passing through a process of evolution. As well, the whole of creation is included in God's

special love for mankind that reaches all generations of mothers, fathers, and their children.

The divine blessing on the origin of life and the promise of an eternal reward, which are the basis of the dignity of every life, are meant for all. All the men, women, and children on earth - the peoples of the earth - these are the life of the world that God loves and wants to save, no one excluded.

The biblical account of Creation needs to be read again and again to be able to appreciate all the breadth and depth of God's loving gesture e that entrusts creation and history to the covenant between man and woman.

This covenant is certainly sealed by the personal and fruitful loving union that points the way to the transmission of life in matrimony and in the family. However, the covenant goes well beyond this seal. The covenant between man and woman is called to take in hand the guidance of all of society. It is an invitation to become responsible for the world, in culture and politics, in the world of work and in the economy, and in the Church as well. It is not simply about equal opportunity or mutual recognition. It is primarily about the agreement of men and women about the meaning of life and the common path of peoples. Man and woman are called on not only to speak about love, but to speak to each other, with love, about what they must do to ensure that our lives together can be lived in the light of God's love for every creature. Speak to each other, ally with each other, because neither man nor woman can shoulder this responsibility without the other. Together they were created, in their blessed difference; together they sinned, for their presumption in trying to replace God; together, with the grace of Christ, they return to God's presence, to take on care for the world, and for history, that God has entrusted to them.

3. In summary, a real cultural revolution is on the horizon of history in our time. And the Church must take the lead.

First and foremost, however, we must honestly recognize *what is holding us back and what is lacking*. The subordination that, sadly, has marked the history of women must be definitively abandoned. The ethos of peoples must accept a new beginning so that it can create a new culture of identity and difference. The recent proposals for restoring the dignity of the person by radically eliminating any difference between the sexes, and, as a result, the covenant between man and woman, is not right. Rather than opposing negative interpretations of sexual

difference that eliminate the value of that difference for human dignity, these proposals would simply eliminate this difference by proposing techniques and practices that make difference irrelevant to human development and to human relationships. But a "neuter" utopia removes both the human dignity of sexual difference and the personal aspect of the generation and transmission of life. The biological and psychological manipulation of sexual difference, which biomedical technology now presents as a simple matter of personal choice—which it is not!—risks eliminating the source of energy that nourishes the covenant between man and woman and makes it creative and fruitful.

The mysterious bond between the creation of the world and the generation of the Son, which is revealed by the Son's becoming man in Mary's Womb—Mother of Jesus, Mother of God—out of love for us will never cease to leave us astonished and moved. This revelation definitively illuminates the mystery of being and the meaning of life. The image of generation radiates a *profound wisdom about life*. As a gift, life is given great value by being given; generating life gives us new life, giving it up makes us richer.

We must accept the challenge presented by opposition to the transmission of life by those who call it a degradation of woman or a threat to societal well-being.

The generative covenant between man and woman is a bulwark protecting the global humanism of men and women, not a hindrance. Our history will not be renewed if we reject this truth.

4. Passion for accompanying and caring for life, along the entire arc of the individual and social history of life, calls for the rehabilitation of an ethos of compassion or tenderness for generation and the regeneration of human nature with all its differences.

We must first of all rediscover our sensitivity to the *different ages of life*, especially for *children and the elderly*. Everything in them that is weak and fragile, vulnerable and corruptible, is not something that is the province of medicine and well-being only. There are in play areas of the soul and of human sensitivity that demand to be heard and acknowledged, guarded and appreciated, by individuals and by the community. A society in which human qualities can only be bought and sold, bureaucratically regulated and technologically structured, is a society that has already lost the meaning of life. It will not transmit the meaning of life to its young children, it will not recognize it in elderly parents. That's why,

almost without realizing it, we are now building cities that are increasingly hostile to children and communities that are increasingly inhospitable for the elderly, with walls that have no windows or doors: what we build should protect us but in reality we are smothered.

The witness of faith in the mercy of God that refines and fulfills every justice, is essential for true compassion among the generations. Without it, the culture of the secular city has no chance of saving humanism from loss of consciousness and ultimate disappearance.

It is in this new optic that I see the mission of the renewed Pontifical Academy for Life. I understand that the mission is difficult, but it is also exciting. I am sure that in addition to you there are other men and women of good will, not only scholars, with different attitudes to religion and with different anthropological and ethical views of the world, who, for the common good, share a need to bring a more authentic wisdom about life to the attention of all peoples. Open and fruitful dialogue can and must be established with the many who are seeking the true meaning of life.

The Pope, and with him the whole Church, is grateful for the commitment you have undertaken to honor. Responsible accompaniment of human life, from conception and throughout its years to its natural end is a work of discernment and loving intelligence for free and passionate men and women, and for shepherds who are not simply hirelings. God bless your commitment to supporting these persons with all the knowledge and professionalism that you are capable of.

Thank you, and please remember to pray for me.

[TRANSLATED BY PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE'S STAFF]