

Integrale Ecologie – Holistisch mensbeeld

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Pontifical Academy for Life



Pope Francis
June 24th, 2018

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to address my greeting to you all, starting from the President, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, whom I thank for introducing me to this General Assembly, in which the theme of human life will be situated in the broad context of the globalized world in which we live today. And also, I wish to greet to Cardinal Sgreccia, ninety years old but enthusiastic and young, in his commitment in favor of life. Thank you, Your Eminence, for what you have done in this field and for what you are doing. Thank you.

The wisdom that should inspire our attitude towards “human ecology” is encouraged to consider the ethical and spiritual quality of life in all its phases. There exists a conceived human life, a life in gestation, a life that has come to light, a child’s life, a teenage life, an adult life, an aged and consumed life – and there exists an eternal life. There is a life that is family and community, a life that is invocation and hope. Just as there is fragile and sick human life, wounded, offended, dejected, marginalized, discarded life. It is always human life. It is the life of human persons, who inhabit the earth created by God and share the common home with all living creatures. Certainly, in the biology laboratories, life is studied with the tools that allow exploring its physical, chemical and mechanical aspects. A very important and indispensable study, but one which must be integrated with a broader and deeper perspective, which calls for attention to the truly human life, which erupts on the world scene with the prodigy of the word and of thought, affections and spirit. What recognition does the human wisdom of life receive today from the natural sciences? And what political culture inspires the promotion and protection of real human life? The “beautiful” work of life is the generation of a new person, the education of his spiritual and creative qualities, the initiation to the love of family and community, the care of his vulnerabilities and his wounds; as well as initiation into the life of children of God, in Jesus Christ.

When we deliver children to deprivation, the poor to hunger, the persecuted to war, the old to abandonment, do not we ourselves, instead, do the “dirty” work of death? Where does the dirty work of death come from? It comes from sin. Evil tries to persuade us that death is the end of everything, that we have come to the world by chance and we are destined to end up in nothingness. Excluding the other from our horizon, life folds back on itself and becomes a consumer good. Narcissus, the character of ancient mythology, who loves himself and ignores the good of others, is naive and does not even realize it. Meanwhile, however, it spreads a very contagious spiritual virus, which condemns us to become mirror-men and mirror-women, who see only themselves and nothing else. It is like becoming blind to life and its dynamic, as a gift received from others and asking to be placed responsibly in circulation for others.

The global vision of bioethics, which you are preparing to relaunch in the field of social ethics and of planetary humanism, strengthened by Christian inspiration, will engage with more seriousness and rigor to defuse this complicity with the dirty work of death, supported by sin. In this way, I may restore to us the reasons and practices of the covenant with the grace destined by God for the life of each one of us. This bioethics will not take illness and death as a starting point in deciding the meaning of life or defining the value of the person. It

will rather start from the profound conviction of the irrevocable dignity of the human person, as God loves him, the dignity of every person, in every phase and condition of his existence, in the search for the forms of love and care that must be addressed to his vulnerability and fragility.

So, in the first place, this global bioethics will be a specific way of developing the perspective of integral ecology that is proper to the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, in which I have insisted on these strong 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 the 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” (no. 16).

Secondly, in a holistic view of the person, it is necessary to articulate with ever greater clarity all the concrete connections and differences in which the universal human condition dwells and which involve us, starting from our body. Indeed “our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our body as a gift from God 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 a absolute power over creation. Learning to accept your 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, therefore, necessary to proceed with a careful discernment of the complex fundamental differences of human life: of man and woman, of fatherhood and motherhood, of filiation and fraternity, of sociality and also of all the different ages of life. And also, all the difficult conditions and all the delicate or dangerous passages that require special ethical wisdom and courageous moral resistance: sexuality and generation, sickness and old age, insufficiency and disability, deprivation and exclusion, violence and war. “Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a 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, those 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, these themes of the ethics of human life will have to find an appropriate place in the context of a global anthropology, and not be confined to the limit-questions of morality and law. I hope that a conversion to today’s centrality of the integral human ecology, or rather a harmonious and complete comprehension of the human condition, will I hope find valid support and propositional tone in your intellectual, civil and religious effort.

Global bioethics thus urges us towards the wisdom of a profound and objective discernment of the value of personal and community life, which must be preserved and promoted even in the most difficult conditions. We must also strongly state that, without the adequate support of a responsible human closeness, no purely juridical regulation and no technical aid can, on their own, guarantee conditions and relational contexts that correspond to the dignity of the person. The prospect of a globalization that, left only to its spontaneous dynamics, tends to increase and deepen inequalities, urges an ethical response in favor of justice. The attention to the social, economic, cultural and environmental factors that determine health is part of this commitment, and becomes a concrete way to realize “the right of every people to its own identity, independence and security, as well as the right to share, on a basis of equality and solidarity, in the goods intended for all” (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 21).

Finally, the culture of life must take a more serious look at the “serious question” of its ultimate destination. This means highlighting with greater clarity what directs the existence of man towards a horizon that surpasses him: every person is gratuitously called “to commune with God and share in His happiness. [The Church] further teaches that 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 reflect more deeply on the ultimate destination of life, capable of restoring dignity and meaning to the mystery of its deepest and most sacred affections. The life of man, enchantingly beautiful and fragile to die, refers beyond itself: we are infinitely more than what we can do for ourselves. But human life is also incredibly tenacious, certainly for a mysterious grace that comes from above, in the audacity of its invocation of a justice and a definitive victory of love. And it is even capable – hoping against all hope – to sacrifice itself for it, unto the end. Recognizing and appreciating this fidelity and dedication to life arouses gratitude and responsibility in us, and encourages us to generously offer our knowledge and our experience to the whole human community. Christian wisdom must reopen with passion and boldness the thought of the destination of the human race to the life of God, which has promised to open to the love of life, beyond death, the infinite horizon of loving bodies of light, no longer with tears. And to amaze them eternally with the ever new enchantment of all things, “visible and invisible”, concealed in the womb of the Creator.

Thank you.