



Voor niets hebt gij ontvangen, voor niets moet gij geven

“You received without payment; give without payment” (Mt 10:8)

Message of the Holy Father for 27th World Day of the Sick

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“You received without payment; give without payment” (Mt 10:8). These are the words spoken by Jesus when sending forth his apostles to spread the Gospel, so that his Kingdom might grow through acts of gratuitous love.

On the XXVII World Day of the Sick, to be solemnly celebrated on 11 February 2019 in Calcutta, India, the Church – as a Mother to all her children, especially the infirm – reminds us that generous gestures like that of the Good Samaritan are the most credible means of evangelization. Caring for the sick requires professionalism, tenderness, straightforward and simple gestures freely given, like a caress that makes others feel loved.

Life is a gift from God. Saint Paul asks: “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor 4:7). Precisely because it is a gift, human life cannot be reduced to a personal possession or private property, especially in the light of medical and biotechnological advances that could tempt us to manipulate the “tree of life” (cf. Gen 3:24).

Amid today’s culture of waste and indifference, I would point out that “gift” is the category best suited to challenging today’s individualism and social fragmentation, while at the same time promoting new relationships and means of cooperation between peoples and cultures. Dialogue – the premise of gift – creates possibilities for human growth and development capable of breaking through established ways of exercising power in society. “Gift” means more than simply giving presents: it involves the giving of oneself, and not simply a transfer of property or objects. “Gift” differs from gift-giving because it entails the free gift of self and the desire to build a relationship. It is the acknowledgement of others, which is the basis of society. “Gift” is a reflection of God’s love, which culminates in the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Each of us is poor, needy and destitute. When we are born, we require the care of our parents to survive, and at every stage of life we remain in some way dependent on the help of others. We will always be conscious of our limitations, as “creatures”, before other individuals and situations. A frank acknowledgement of this truth keeps us humble and spurs us to practice solidarity as an essential virtue in life.

Such an acknowledgement leads us to act responsibly to promote a good that is both personal and communal. Only if we see ourselves, not as a world apart, but in a fraternal relationship with others, can we develop a social practice of solidarity aimed at the common good. We should not be afraid to regard ourselves as needy or reliant on others, because individually and by our own efforts we cannot overcome our limitations. So we should not fear, then, to acknowledge those limitations, for God himself, in Jesus, has humbly stooped down to us (cf. Phil 2:8) and continues to do so; in our poverty, he comes to our aid and grants us gifts beyond our imagining.

In light of the solemn celebration in India, I would like to recall, with joy and admiration, the figure of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta – a model of charity who made visible God’s love for the poor and sick. As I noted at her canonization, “Mother Teresa, in all aspects of her life, was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for everyone through her welcome and defence of human life, of those unborn and those abandoned and discarded... She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity; she made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crime – the crimes! – of poverty they created. For Mother Teresa, mercy was the ‘salt’ which gave flavour to her work; it was the ‘light’ that shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears to shed for their poverty and suffering. Her mission to the urban and existential peripheries remains for us today an eloquent witness to God’s closeness to the poorest of the poor” (*Homily*, 4 September 2016).

Saint Mother Teresa helps us understand that our only criterion of action must be selfless love for every human being, without distinction of language, culture, ethnicity or religion. Her example continues to guide us by opening up horizons of joy and hope for all those in need of understanding and tender love, and especially for those who suffer.

Generosity inspires and sustains the work of the many volunteers who are so important in health care and who eloquently embody the spirituality of the Good Samaritan. I express my gratitude and offer my encouragement to all those associations of volunteers committed to the transport and assistance of patients, and all those that organize the donation of blood, tissues and organs. One particular area in which your presence expresses the Church’s care and concern is that of advocacy for the rights of the sick, especially those affected by pathologies requiring special assistance. I would also mention the many efforts made to raise awareness and encourage prevention. Your volunteer work in medical facilities and in homes, which ranges from providing health care to offering spiritual support, is of primary importance. Countless persons who are ill, alone, elderly or frail in mind or body benefit from these services. I urge you to continue to be a sign of the Church’s presence in a secularized world. A volunteer is a good friend with whom one can share personal thoughts and emotions; by their patient listening, volunteers make it possible for the sick to pass from being passive recipients of care to being active participants in a relationship that can restore hope and inspire openness to further treatment. Volunteer work passes on values, behaviours and ways of living born of a deep desire to be generous. It is also a means of making health care more humane.

A spirit of generosity ought especially to inspire Catholic healthcare institutions, whether in the more developed or the poorer areas of our world, since they carry out their activity in the light of the Gospel. Catholic facilities are called to give an example of self-giving, generosity and solidarity in response to the mentality of profit at any price, of giving for the sake of getting, and of exploitation over concern for people.

I urge everyone, at every level, to promote the culture of generosity and of gift, which is indispensable for overcoming the culture of profit and waste. Catholic healthcare institutions must not fall into the trap of simply running a business; they must be concerned with personal care more than profit. We know that health is relational, dependent on interaction with others, and requiring trust, friendship and solidarity. It is a treasure that can be enjoyed fully only when it is shared. The joy of generous giving is a barometer of the health of a Christian.

I entrust all of you to Mary, *Salus Infirmorum*. May she help us to share the gifts we have received in the spirit of dialogue and mutual acceptance, to live as brothers and sisters attentive to each other’s needs, to give from a generous heart, and to learn the joy of selfless service to others. With great affection, I assure you of my closeness in prayer, and to all I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

Vatican City, 25 November 2018

Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe



Abortus en euthanasie zijn ernstig kwaad tegen het Leven

Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the president of the Pontifical Academy for Life for the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the academy

Pope Francis
6 January 2019

The Human Community

The human community is God's dream even from before the creation of the world (cf. *Eph* 1:3-14). In it, the eternal Son begotten of God the Father has taken flesh and blood, heart and emotions. Through the mystery of giving life, the great family of humanity is enabled to discover its true meaning. The ability of the family to initiate its members to human fraternity can be considered a hidden treasure that can aid that general rethinking of social policies and human rights whose need is so urgently felt today. All of us ought to grow in the awareness of our common origin in God's love and creative act. Christian faith confesses the begetting of the Son as the ineffable mystery of the eternal unity between "bringing into being" and "benevolent love" within the life of the Triune God. A renewed proclamation of this often overlooked revelation can open a new chapter in the history of human community and culture, which today cries out — "groaning as if in labour pains" (cf. *Rom* 8:22) — for rebirth in the Spirit. God's tenderness and his will to redeem all those who feel lost, abandoned, discarded, or hopelessly condemned, is revealed in the only-begotten Son. The mystery of the eternal Son who became one of us is the definitive witness to this "passion" of God. The mystery of Christ's cross — "for us and for our salvation" — and resurrection — as "the firstborn of many brothers" (*Rom* 8:29) — tells us the extent to which God's passion is directed to the redemption and full flourishing of human beings.

We need to renew a lively awareness of God's passion for humanity and its world. Human beings were made by God "in his image" — "male and female" (*Gen* 1:27) — as spiritual and sentient, conscious and free. The relationship between man and woman is the primary place where all creation speaks with God and bears witness to his love. This world is the place where we are brought to life; it is the place and time in which we gain a foretaste of the heavenly home that is our destiny (cf. *2 Cor* 5:1) and where we will live fully our communion with God and with all others. The human family is a community with a common origin and a common goal, whose attainment "is hidden, with Christ, in God" (*Col* 3:1-4). In our time, the Church is called once more to propose the humanism of the life that bursts forth from God's passion for human beings. Our commitment to

valuing, supporting and defending the life of every human being is ultimately motivated by God's unconditional love. Such is the beauty and the allure of the Gospel, which does not reduce love of neighbour to criteria of economic or political convenience, or to "certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 39).

A passionate and productive history

1. That passion has inspired the work of the [Pontifical Academy for Life](#) from the time it was created twenty-five years ago by Saint John Paul II at the prompting of the eminent scientist and Servant of God Jérôme Lejeune. Recognizing the rapid and sweeping changes taking place in biomedicine, Pope John Paul saw the need for a more structured and organic approach and engagement in this area. The Academy was thus able to promote initiatives of research, education and communications aimed at demonstrating "*that science and technology, at the service of the human person and his fundamental rights, contribute to the overall good of man and to the fulfilment of the divine plan of salvation.*" (Saint John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Vitae Mysterium* [11 February 1994], 3). The [new statutes of the Academy](#), issued on 18 October 2016, have given renewed impetus to its activities. The goal of the statutes is to make the Academy's reflection on human life issues ever more attuned to the contemporary scene. The ever-quickening pace of technological and scientific innovation, and the phenomenon of globalization have multiplied interactions between cultures, religions and different fields of study, and among the many dimensions of our human family and the earth, our common home. Consequently, as Pope Francis pointed out [to the General Assembly of the Academy](#), "*there is an urgent need for greater study and discussion of the social effects of this technological development, for the sake of articulating an anthropological vision adequate to this epochal challenge. Yet your expert advice cannot be limited solely to offering solutions to the questions raised by specific ethical, social or legal conflict situations. The proposal of forms of conduct consistent with human dignity involves the theory and practice of science and technology in terms of their overall approach to life, its meaning and its value*" (5 October 2017).

Loss of the human dimension and the paradox of "progress"

2. At this moment in time, passion for what is distinctively human, and for the whole human family, encounters serious obstacles. The joys of family relationships and social coexistence appear seriously diminished. Mutual distrust between individuals and peoples is being fed by an inordinate pursuit of self-interest and intense competition that can even turn violent. The gap between concern with one's own well-being and the prosperity of the larger human family seems to be stretching to the point of complete division. In the Encyclical [Laudato Si'](#), I pointed to the state of emergency existing in our relationship with the history of the earth and its peoples. This alarming situation is the result of the scarce attention paid to the decisive global issue of the unity of the human family and its future. The erosion of this sensitivity, due to worldly forces of conflict and war, is growing worldwide at a much higher rate than that of the production of goods. We are speaking of a real culture – indeed, it would be better to speak of anti-culture – of indifference to the community: hostile to men and women and in league with the arrogance of wealth.

3. This emergency reveals a paradox. How could it happen that, at the very moment of history when available economic and technological resources make it possible for us to care suitably for our common home and our human family, in obedience to God's command, those same economic and technological resources are creating our most bitter divisions and our worst nightmares? People sense acutely and painfully, albeit often confusedly, the spiritual dejection, or even nihilism, that subordinates life itself to a world and a society dominated by this paradox. The attempt to dull this sense of deep distress by the blind pursuit of material pleasure produces the ennui of a life lacking in a purpose that can satisfy its spiritual yearning. Let us face the fact: men and women in our time are often demoralized and disoriented, bereft of vision. All of us are, to some extent, closed in on ourselves. The financial system and the ideology of consumerism regulate our needs and manipulate our desires, with little concern for beauty of a life in common and for the sustainability of our common home.

Responsible listening

4. Christians, hearing the cry of suffering peoples, need to react against the negativity that foments division, indifference and hostility. They must do so not simply for their own sake, but for that of everyone. And they need to do so now, before it is too late. The ecclesial family of disciples – and of all others who seek in that family reasons for hope (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15) – has been planted on earth as “a sacrament, a sign and instrument a communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (*Lumen Gentium*, 1). The restoration of each of God’s creatures to the joyful hope of his or her spiritual destiny must become the passionate theme of our preaching. It is urgent that the elderly have greater confidence in their best “dreams” and that the young have “visions” able to sustain them to act boldly in history (cf. *Jl* 3:1). At the level of culture, our goal must be a new and universal ethical perspective attentive to the themes of creation and human life. We cannot continue down the mistaken path followed in recent decades of allowing humanism to be deconstructed and considered simply as another ideology of the will to power. We must resist such ideologies, however strongly urged by the market and by technology, and choose humanism. The distinctiveness of human life is an absolute good, worthy of being ethically defended, precious for the care of creation as a whole. For humanism not to draw inspiration from the loving act of God would be a contradiction and a scandal. The Church must be the first to rediscover the beauty of this inspiration and make her contribution with renewed enthusiasm.

A difficult task for the Church

5. We acknowledge the difficulties involved in restoring this broader humanistic horizon, even within the Church. First, we can ask frankly if our ecclesial communities today realize and testify to the gravity of this contemporary emergency. Are they seriously focused on the passion and joy of proclaiming God’s love for the dwelling of his children on the earth? Or are they still overly focused on their own problems and on making timid accommodations to an essentially worldly outlook? We can question seriously whether we have done enough as Christians to offer our specific contribution to a vision of humanity capable of upholding the unity of the family of peoples in today’s political and cultural conditions. Or whether we have lost sight of its centrality, putting our ambition for spiritual hegemony over the governance of the secular city, concentrated as it is upon itself and its wealth, ahead of a concern for local communities inspired by the Gospel spirit of hospitality towards the poor and the hopeless.

Building universal fraternity

6. It is time for a new vision aimed at promoting a humanism of fraternity and solidarity between individuals and peoples. We know that the faith and love needed for this covenant draw their power from the mystery of history’s redemption in Jesus Christ, a mystery hidden in God even before the creation of the world (cf. *Eph* 1:7-10; 3:9-11; *Col* 1:13-14). We know too that human minds and hearts are not completely closed or insensible to the seeds of faith and the works of this universal fraternity sown by the Gospel of the kingdom of God. We must once again bring this fraternity to the fore. For it is one thing to feel forced to live together, but something entirely different to value the richness and beauty of the seeds of common life needing to be sought out and cultivated. It is one thing to resign oneself to seeing life as a battle against constant foes, but something entirely different to see our human family as a sign of the abundant life of God the Father and the promise of a common destiny redeemed by the infinite love that even now sustains it in being.

7. The ways of the Church all lead to man, as Saint John Paul II solemnly proclaimed in his first encyclical (*Redemptor Hominis*, 1979). Before him, Saint Paul VI, echoing the teaching of the Council, had stated in his own first encyclical that the Church family extends in concentric circles to all men and women, even to those who consider themselves extraneous to the faith and the worship of God (cf. *Ecclesiam Suam*, 1964). The Church shelters and protects the signs of grace and mercy that God offers to every human being who comes into this world.

Recognizing the signs of hope

8. In this mission, we are encouraged by signs that God is at work in our time. These signs need to be acknowledged and not overshadowed by certain negative factors. Along these lines, Saint John Paul II pointed to the many efforts to welcome and defend human life, the growing opposition to war and to the death penalty, and a greater concern for the quality of life and ecology. He also indicated as a sign of hope the development of bioethics as “reflection and dialogue – between believers and nonbelievers, as well as between believers of different religions – on ethical problems, even the most fundamental ones, that affect the life of man” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 27). The scientific community of the Pontifical Academy for Life has demonstrated, over the past twenty-five years, its ability to enter into this dialogue and to offer its own competent and respected contribution. A sign of this is its constant effort to promote and protect human life at every stage of its development, its condemnation of abortion and euthanasia as extremely grave evils that contradict the Spirit of life and plunge us into the anti-culture of death. These efforts must certainly continue, with an eye to emerging issues and challenges that can serve as an opportunity for us to grow in the faith, to understand it more deeply and to communicate it more effectively to the people of our time.

The future of the Academy

9. Before all else, we need to enter into the language and lives of men and women today, making the Gospel message incarnate in their concrete experiences, as the Council demanded. To appreciate the meaning of human life, we should begin with the experience of procreation; this will enable us to avoid reducing life merely to a biological concept or a universal abstraction divorced from relationships and from history. The primordial reality of our “flesh” precedes and makes possible all further consciousness and reflection, preventing us from thinking that we are the source of our own existence. Only after receiving the gift of life, and prior to any intention or decision of our own, can we become aware that we are in fact alive. Life necessarily entails being a child, welcomed and cared for, however inadequately in certain cases. “It thus seems reasonable to see a connection between the care we have received from the beginning of life, that enabled it to grow and develop, and the responsible care we in turn give to others... This precious connection preserves a human and God-given dignity that endures, even despite one’s loss of health, role in society and control over his or her body” (*Letter of the Cardinal Secretary of State to the Conference on Palliative Care*, 28 February 2018).

10. We know that the threshold of basic respect for human life is being crossed, and brutally at that, not only by instances of individual conduct but also by the effects of societal choices and structures. Business strategies and the pace of technological growth now, as never before, condition biomedical research, educational priorities, investment decisions and the quality of interpersonal relationships. The possibility of directing economic development and scientific progress towards the covenant between man and woman, towards caring for our common humanity and towards the dignity of the human person, surely arises from a love for creation that faith helps us to deepen and illuminate. The prospect of a global bioethics, with a broad vision and a concern for the impact of the environment on life and health, offers a significant opportunity for strengthening the new covenant between the Gospel and creation.

11. Our shared humanity demands a global approach to the questions raised by the dialogue between diverse cultures and societies that, in today’s world, are in increasingly close contact. May the Academy for Life be a place for courageous dialogue in the service of the common good. I encourage you not to be afraid to advance arguments and formulations that can serve as a basis for intercultural and interreligious, as well as interdisciplinary, exchanges. But also to take part in the discussion of human rights, which are central to the search for universally acceptable criteria for decisions. At stake is the understanding and exercise of a justice that demonstrates the essential role of responsibility in the discussion of human rights and about their close correlation with duties, beginning with solidarity with those in greatest need. Pope Benedict XVI has spoken of the importance of “a renewed reflection on how rights presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere

licence. Nowadays we are witnessing a grave inconsistency. On the one hand, appeals are made to alleged rights, arbitrary and non-essential in nature, accompanied by the demand that they be recognized and promoted by public structures, while, on the other hand, elementary and basic rights remain unacknowledged and are violated in much of the world". Among those rights, the Pope emeritus points to "lack of food, drinkable water, basic instruction and elementary health care" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 43).

12. Another area calling for study is that of the new technologies described as "emergent" and "convergent." These include information and communication technologies, biotechnologies, nanotechnologies and robotics. Relying on results obtained from physics, genetics and neuroscience, as well as on increasingly powerful computing capabilities, profound interventions on living organisms are now possible. Even the human body is subject to interventions capable of modifying not only its functions and capabilities, but also its ways of relating on personal and societal levels, with the result that it is increasingly exposed to market forces. There is a pressing need, then, to understand these epochal changes and new frontiers in order to determine how to place them at the service of the human person, while respecting and promoting the intrinsic dignity of all. This task is extremely demanding, given its complexity and the unpredictability of future developments; consequently, it requires even greater discernment than usual. We can define this discernment as "a sincere work of conscience, in its effort to know the possible good on the basis of which to engage responsibly in the correct exercise of practical reason" (Synod of Bishops on Young People, *Final Document* [27 October 2018], 109). This process of research and evaluation thus entails the workings of the moral conscience and, for the believer, is part of his or her relationship with the Lord Jesus, in the desire to put on the mind of Christ in our actions and choices (cf. *Phil 2:5*).

13. The kind of medicine, economy, technology and politics that develop within the modern city of man must also, and above all, remain subject to the judgment rendered by the peripheries of the earth. Indeed, the many extraordinary resources made available to human beings by scientific and technological research could overshadow the joy of fraternal sharing and the beauty of common undertakings, unless they find their meaning in advancing that joy and beauty. We should keep in mind that fraternity remains the unkept promise of modernity. The universal spirit of fraternity that grows by mutual trust - within modern civil society and between peoples and nations - appears much weakened. The strengthening of fraternity, generated in the human family by the worship of God in spirit and truth, is the new frontier of Christianity. Every detail of the life of the body and of the soul, in which the love and redemptive power of the new creation shine forth within us, leads to amazement before the miracle of a resurrection in the very process of occurring (cf. *Col 3:1-2*). May the Lord grant that we multiply these miracles! May the witness of Saint Francis of Assisi, who saw himself as the brother of every creature on earth and in heaven, inspire us by its perennial relevance. May the Lord prepare you for this new phase of your mission, your lamps filled with the oil of the Spirit to light your path and to guide your steps. How beautiful indeed are the feet of those who bring the joyful proclamation of God's love for the life of all those who dwell upon our land (cf. *Is 52: 7; Rom 10:15*).



Doodstraf is tegen de waardigheid van het leven dat heilig is

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the delegation of the International Commission against the Death Penalty

Pope Francis
17 December 2018

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cordially greet you and would like to express my personal appreciation for the work that the International Commission against the Death Penalty carries out in favour of the universal abolition of this cruel form of punishment.

I also thank you for the commitment that you have all generously dedicated to this cause in your respective countries.

I addressed a [letter to your former President on 20 March 2015](#) and I expressed the Church's commitment to the cause of abolition in [my discourse before the Congress of the United States on 24 September 2015](#).

I shared several ideas on this theme in [my 30 May 2014 letter to the International Association of Penal Law and to the Latin-American Association of Penal Law and Criminology](#). I expanded on them in [my discourse on 23 October 2014 to the five great world associations dedicated to the study of penal law, criminology, victimology and prison issues](#). The certainty that every life is sacred and that human dignity must be safeguarded without exception, has led me, from the very beginning of my ministry, to work at different levels for the universal abolition of the death penalty.

All this is now reflected [in the recently revised text of n. 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), which expresses the progress of the doctrine of the last Pontiffs, as well as a change in the conscience of the Christian people, which rejects a penalty that is deeply injurious to human dignity (cf. [Address to participants in the Meeting promoted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 11 October 2017](#)); a penalty contrary to the Gospel, because it means suppressing a life which is always sacred in the eyes of the Creator and of which God alone is the true judge and guarantor (cf. [Letter to the President of the International Commission against the Death Penalty, 20 March 2015](#)).

In past centuries, when the instruments that we have available today for the protection of society were lacking and the current level of development in human rights had not yet been achieved, recourse to the death penalty was presented on some occasions as a logical and just consequence. Even in the Papal States recourse was made to this inhuman form of punishment, ignoring the primacy of mercy over justice.

It is for this reason that the new version of the *Catechism* implies that we should also assume our responsibility for the past and that we acknowledge that the acceptance of this type of penalty was due to the mentality of an era that was more legalistic than Christian, which held sacred the value of laws lacking in humanity and mercy. The Church could not maintain a neutral stance in the face of the current demands of reaffirmation of personal dignity.

The revision of the text of the *Catechism* in the article dedicated to the death penalty does not imply any contradiction with past teaching, because the Church has always defended the dignity of human life. However, the harmonious development of doctrine necessarily requires that the *Catechism* reflect the fact that, despite the gravity of the crime committed, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that the death penalty is always inadmissible because it offends the inviolability and dignity of the person.

Likewise, the *Magisterium* of the Church holds that life sentences, which take away the possibility of the moral and existential redemption of the person sentenced and in favour of the community, are a form of death penalty in disguise (cf. [Address to the Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law, 23 October 2014](#)). God is a Father who always awaits the return of his son, who, aware he has made a mistake, asks forgiveness and begins a new life. Thus, life cannot be taken from anyone, nor the hope of one's redemption and reconciliation with the community.

As has happened in the heart of the Church, it is necessary that a similar commitment be assumed in the concert of nations. The sovereign right of every country to define its own legal system cannot be exercised in contradiction to the duties that pertain to it by virtue of international law, nor can it represent an obstacle to the universal recognition of human dignity.

The United Nations' resolutions on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, which aim to suspend the application of capital punishment in member countries, are a necessary path to undertake, without this meaning that the initiative for its universal abolition be discontinued.

On this occasion, I would like to invite all States that have not abolished the death penalty but do not apply it to continue to comply with this international commitment so that the moratorium may apply not only to the execution of the penalty but also to the imposition of the death sentence. The moratorium must not be experienced by the convicted person as merely an extended delay of his execution.

I ask the States that continue to apply the death penalty to adopt a moratorium with a view to the abolition of this cruel form of punishment. I understand that to achieve abolition, which is the objective of this cause, in certain contexts it may be necessary to submit to a complex political process. The suspension of executions and the reduction of offenses punishable by the death penalty as well as the prohibition of this type of punishment for minors, pregnant women or persons with mental or intellectual disabilities, are the least of the objectives to which the leaders of the entire world must commit themselves.

As I have already done on other occasions, I would like to call attention once again to *extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions*, which unfortunately are a recurrent phenomenon in countries with and without the legal death penalty. These are deliberate murders committed by state agents, which are often passed off as the result of clashes with presumed criminals or are presented as the unintended consequences of the rational, necessary and proportionate use of force to protect citizens.

Love toward oneself remains a fundamental principle of morality. Therefore it is legitimate to insist on respect for one's own right to life, even when doing so requires one to deal a lethal blow to one's aggressor (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2264). Legitimate defense is not a right but a duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. Preserving the common good requires rendering the unjust aggressor unable

to inflict harm. To this end, those holding legitimate authority must repel all aggression, even by armed force, to the extent necessary to protect their own lives and those of the people entrusted to their charge (cf. *ibid.*, n. 2265). As a result, any use of deadly force which is not strictly necessary to this end can be regarded only as an illegal execution, a crime by the state.

Any defensive action, in order to be legitimate, must be necessary and measured. As St Thomas Aquinas taught, “this act, since one’s intention is to save one’s own life, is not unlawful, seeing that it is natural to everything to keep itself in ‘being’, as far as possible. And yet, though proceeding from a good intention, an act may be rendered unlawful, if it be out of proportion to the end. Wherefore if a man, in self-defense, uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repel force with moderation his defense will be lawful, because according to the jurists, ‘it is lawful to repel force by force, provided one does not exceed the limits of a blameless defense’” (*Summa Theologiae* ii-ii, q. 64, a. 7).

Lastly, I would like to share with you a reflection that is related to your field of work, to your fight for *truly humane justice*. Reflections in the fields of law and the philosophy of law traditionally focus on those who offend or interfere with the rights of others. Inadequate attention has led to the failure to help others when we are able to do so. This reflection can wait no longer.

The traditional principles of justice, characterized by the idea of respect for individual rights and their protection from any interference by others, must be integrated with an ethic of care. In the field of criminal justice, this entails a greater understanding of the causes of conduct, of their social context, of the situation of vulnerability of those who break the law and of the suffering of victims. This form of reasoning, inspired by divine mercy, should lead us to contemplate each concrete case in its specificity, and not permit ourselves to be influenced by abstract numbers of victims and criminals. In this way it is possible to address the ethical and moral issues that derive from conflict and from social injustice, to understand the pain of the actual persons involved and to reach a different kind of solution that does not increase such suffering.

We could express it with this image: we need justice that in addition to being a father is also a mother. Gestures of mutual care, typical of love that is both civil and political, are present in every action that seeks to build a better world (cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, n. 231). Love for society and the commitment to the common good are an excellent form of charity, which regards not only relationships between individuals, but also “macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)” (Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, 29 June 2009, n. 2: aas 101 [2009], 624).

Social love is the key to authentic development: “In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life — political, economic and cultural — must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 582). In this context, social love spurs us to think of great strategies that encourage a culture of care in the various spheres of life in common. The work you do is a part of this effort to which we are called.

Dear friends, I thank you again for this meeting, and I assure you that I will continue to work together with you for the abolition of the death penalty. The Church is committed to this and I would like the Holy See to cooperate with the International Commission against the Death Penalty in building the consensus necessary for the eradication of capital punishment and of every form of cruel punishment.

It is a cause to which all men and women of good will are called, and a duty for we who share the Christian vocation of Baptism. All of us, in any case, need the help of God, who is the wellspring of all reason and justice.

Therefore, I invoke upon each of you, through the intercession of the Blessed Mother, the light and strength of the Holy Spirit. I bless you wholeheartedly and, please, I ask you to pray for me.



Drugsgebruik schadelijk voor mens en maatschappij

Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to participants in the International Conference on “Drugs And Addictions: An Obstacle to Integral Human Development”

Pope Francis

1 december 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to receive you at the conclusion of this International Congress on Drugs and Addictions. I offer all of you a cordial greeting and I thank Cardinal Turkson for his words of introduction to our meeting.

In these days, you have discussed issues and problems linked to the troubling phenomenon of narcotics and other forms of addiction, old and new, which pose an obstacle to integral human development. Communities everywhere are challenged by current social and cultural changes and by pathologies derived from a secularized climate marked by consumerist capitalism, self-sufficiency, a loss of values, an existential void, and a weakening of bonds and relationships. Drug addiction, as has often been pointed out, is an open wound in our society; its victims, once ensnared, exchange their freedom for enslavement to a dependency that we can define as chemical.

Drug use is gravely harmful to health, human life and society. All of us are called to combat the production, processing and distribution of drugs worldwide. It is the duty and responsibility of governments courageously to undertake this fight against those who deal in death. An area of increasing risk is virtual space; on some Internet sites, young people, and not only the young, are lured into a bondage hard to escape, leading to a loss of life's meaning and, at times, even of life itself. Faced with this disturbing scenario, the Church senses the urgent need to create in today's world a form of humanism capable of restoring the human person to the centre of social, economic and cultural life: a humanism grounded in the “Gospel of Mercy”. There the disciples of Jesus find the inspiration for a pastoral action that can prove truly effective in alleviating, caring for and healing the immense suffering associated with different kinds of addiction present in our world.

The Church, together with local, national and international institutions, and various educational agencies, is concretely engaged in every part of the world in combating the spread of addictions, devoting her resources to prevention, care, rehabilitation and reinsertion, in order to restore dignity to those who have lost it. Fighting addictions calls for a combined effort on the part of various local groups and agencies in enacting social programmes promoting health care, family support and especially education. In this regard, I readily support the desire expressed by this Conference for a better coordination of policies aimed at halting the growth of drug abuse and addictions through the creation of networks of solidarity and closeness to those suffering from these

pathologies.

Dear brothers and sisters, I express my deep gratitude for your contribution to these days of study and reflection. I encourage all of you, in your various sectors, to pursue your commitment to increasing awareness and offering support to those who have emerged from the tunnel of drug addiction and various addictions. They need our help and accompaniment, so that they in turn will be able to ease the pain of so many our brothers and sisters in difficulty.

I entrust your efforts and your worthy initiatives to the intercession of Our Lady, Health of the Infirm. I ask you, please, to remember me in your prayers. To all of you, and to your families and communities, I cordially impart my blessing. Thank you.



Integrale, menselijke ecologie – Holistisch mensbeeld

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.

Kinderen ontvangen zoals ze van God komen

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the delegation of the Forum of Family Associations



Pope Francis
16 June 2018

Extemporaneous speech of the holy father

Good morning everyone,

I thought it would be a welcome address.... But hearing Gianluigi speak, I saw that there was fire in [his words]; there was mysticism. It is a great thing. For some time now, I have not heard the family being spoken about with so much passion. And it takes courage to do so nowadays! It takes courage. And thank you for this! I had prepared a speech but after the warmth with which Gianluigi spoke, I find mine cold. I will consign it, so that he may distribute it later, and then I will publish it.

While he was speaking, many things came to my mind and heart, many things regarding the family, things that are not said, that are not normally said, or if they are said, they are said in a very polite way, as if it were a schooling on the family.... He spoke from the heart and all of you wish to speak like this. I will take something he said, and I too would like to speak from the heart and to ad-lib what came to my heart while he was speaking.

He used the expression : “to look into each other’s eyes”. The man and the woman, the husband and the bride, looked into each other’s eyes. I will tell you an anecdote. During audiences, I like to greet the couples who are celebrating their 50th, their 25th anniversary ..., also when they come to Mass at Santa Marta. There was once a couple who was celebrating their 60th anniversary. But they were young because they married when they were 18 years old, as was done in those days. In those days, people married young. Nowadays, why would a son get married? Poor mothers! But the solution is clear: stop ironing the shirts and he will marry soon, Right? I find this couple before me and they were looking at me.... I said: “Sixty years! But do you still have the same love?”. And they were looking at me; they looked at each other and then they looked at me again, and I saw that their eyes were moist. And they both said to me: “We are in love”. I’ll never forget this. “After 60 years, we are in love”. The warmth of the family that grows, love that is not the love of a romance novel. It is true love. Being in love your whole life with all the problems there are.... But being in love.

Then there is another question I would like to ask the couples who have been married for 50 or 60 years: “which one of you has had more patience?”. It’s predictable; the answer is: “both of us”. This is beautiful! This reveals a life together, a life lived as a couple. That patience of abiding one another.

And then to the young spouses who tell me: “we have been married for one month, two months...” my question is: “Have you argued?” They usually say “yes” — “Ah good, this is important. But it is also important not to end the day without making up”. Please teach this: it is normal to argue because we are free people and there are problems and we must sort them out; but not to end the day without making up. Why? Because the “cold war” of the following day is very dangerous.

With these three anecdotes I wanted to introduce what I would like to say to you.

Family life is a sacrifice but a beautiful sacrifice. Love is like making pasta: every day. Love in marriage is a challenge for the man and for the woman. What is the man's greatest challenge? To help his wife become 'more woman'. More woman. So she may grow as a woman. And what is the woman's challenge? To help her husband become 'more man'. And thus, they both move forward. They move forward.

Another thing that greatly helps in married life is patience: knowing how to wait. Waiting. There are crises in life — very serious crises, terrible crises — where there may also be times of infidelity. When the problem cannot be solved at that time, there is need for that loving patience which waits, which waits. Many women — because this pertains to women more than to men, but even men do this at times — many women have waited in silence, looking the other way, waiting for the husband to return to fidelity. And this is holiness; the holiness that forgives all, because it loves. Patience. A lot of patience, each for the other. If one is nervous and shouts, do not reply with another shout.... Keep quiet; let the storm blow over and then, at the right time, talk about it.

There are three expressions that are magical words, but words that are important in marriage. "Excuse me": do not be invasive with the other; "may I?": that respect for each other. The second expression is "I am sorry". Apologizing is something that is very important! We all make mistakes in life, all of us. "I am sorry; I did this ..."; "I'm sorry, I forgot...". And this helps us to move on. The ability to apologize helps families move forward. It is true that asking forgiveness involves some shame, but it is a holy shame! "Forgive me, I forgot...". It is something that really helps us move forward. And the third expression is "thank you": having the greatness of heart to always say thank you.

You then spoke about Amoris Laetitia, and you said "Here Amoris Laetitia is made flesh". I am happy to hear this: read, read the fourth chapter. The fourth chapter is the very heart of Amoris Laetitia. It is precisely the family's everyday spirituality. Some have reduced Amoris Laetitia to a sterile record of "this can be done, this cannot". They have not understood anything. Then, in Amoris Laetitia the problems are not hidden, problems of marriage preparation. You help engaged couples to prepare: things must be stated clearly, is that not true? Clearly. A woman in Buenos Aires once said to me: "You priests are clever..." — "Why?" — "you study eight years to become priests; you prepare for eight years. And then if after a few years it does not work, you write a nice letter to Rome; and Rome gives you permission and you can marry. Instead to us, to whom they give a lifelong Sacrament, you indulge us with three or four meetings as preparation. This is not right". And that woman was right. Preparing for marriage: yes it requires meetings, explanatory materials, but it takes men and women, friends, who speak to them and help them to grow, to mature on their journey. And we can say that today there is a need of a catechumenate for marriage as there is a catechumenate for Baptism. To prepare, to help one prepare for marriage.

Then, another problem we see in Amoris Laetitia is raising children. It is not easy to raise children. Today children are quicker than we are! In the virtual world, they know more about it than we do. But it is important to educate them about community, educate them about family life. Teach them about making sacrifices for one another. It is not easy to raise children. The difficulties are major. And you, who love the family, can help other families so much in this regard. The family is an adventure, a beautiful adventure! And today — I say this with heartache — we see that so often one thinks about starting a family and getting married as if it were a lottery: "Let's go. If it works, it works. If it doesn't work, we cancel the matter and start over". This superficiality about the greatest gift God has given to humanity: the family. Because, after the account of the creation of man, God shows that he created man and woman in his image and likeness. And when Jesus himself talks about marriage, he says: "A man shall leave his father and mother and with his wife shall become one flesh". Because they are the image and likeness of God. You are the icon of God: the family is the icon of God. Man and woman: are the very image of God. He said so, I am not saying it. And this is great; it is sacred.

Then today — it hurts to say it — we speak of ‘diversified’ families: different types of family. Yes, it is true that the word ‘family’ is an analogical term, because it refers to the ‘family’ of stars, to ‘families’ of trees, to ‘families’ of animals ... it is an analogical term. But the human family as the image of God, man and woman, is one alone. It is one alone. It may be that a man and a woman are not believers: but if they love each other and become joined in marriage, they are the image and likeness of God, even though they do not believe. It is a mystery: Saint Paul calls it the “great mystery”, the “great sacrament” (cf. Eph 5:32). A true mystery. I like everything you said and the passion with which you said it. And this is how one should speak about the family, with passion.

Once, I think a year ago, I called one of my relatives who was getting married. Forty years old. At the end I said: “Tell me a little: what church are you getting married in?” — “We don’t know yet because we are looking for a church that goes well with the dress that — and he said his fiancée’s name — will wear ... and then we have the issue of the restaurant...”. But imagine ... that was the main concern. When what is secondary takes the place of what is important. The important thing is to love each other, to receive the Sacrament, to go forth...; and then do all the celebrating you want, all of it.

Once I met a couple married for 10 years, without children. Talking about this is very delicate, because many times they want children but they do not come, isn’t it true? I did not know how to broach the subject. Then I learned that they did not want children. But these people had three dogs, two cats.... It is nice to have a dog, a cat, it’s nice.... Or when at times you hear them tell you: “Yes, yes, but we do not have children yet because we have to buy a house in the country, then travel...”. Children are the greatest gift. Children who are welcomed as they come, as God sends them, as God allows — even if at times they are sick. I have heard that it is in fashion — or at least customary — in the first months of pregnancy to have certain exams, to see whether the baby is not well, or has some problems.... The first proposal in that case is: “Shall we do away with it?”. The murder of children. And to have a nice life, they do away with an innocent.

When I was a boy, the teacher was teaching us history and told us what the Spartans did when a baby was born with deformities: they carried it up the mountain and cast it down, to maintain “the purity of the race”. And we were stunned: “But how, how could they do this, the poor babies!”. It was an atrocity. Today we do the same thing. Have you ever wondered why you do not see many dwarfs on the streets? Because the protocol of many doctors — many, not all — is to ask the question: “Will it have problems?”. It pains me to say this. In the last century the entire world was scandalized over what the Nazis were doing to maintain the purity of the race. Today we do the same thing, but with white gloves.

Family, love, patience, joy, and frittering away time with the family. You spoke about something bad: that there is no opportunity to “fritter the time away”, because to earn a living today one has to have two jobs, because the family is not taken into consideration. You also spoke about the young people who cannot get married because there is no work. The family is being threatened by unemployment.

And I would like to end with some advice that a teacher once gave me — he gave it to us at school —, a philosophy teacher, the dean. I was in the seminary, in the philosophy phase. There was the topic of human maturity; we study that in philosophy. And he asked: “What is the everyday criterion to know if a man, if a priest is mature?”. We gave some answers.... And he said: “No, a more simple one: an adult person, a priest, is mature if he is able to play with children”. This is the test. And I say to you: fritter away time with your children; fritter away time with your children; play with your children. Do not tell them: “Don’t be a nuisance!”. I once heard a young father of a family say: “Father, when I go to work they are sleeping. When I come home they are sleeping”. It is the cross of this slavery of an unjust way of working that today’s society brings us.

I said that this was the last thing. No, the penultimate. The last thing is what I will say now, because I do not want to forget it. I spoke about children as the treasure of promise. But there is another treasure in the family: it

is grandparents. Please, take care of grandparents! Have the grandparents talk; have the children speak with their grandparents. Embrace grandparents; do not distance them from the family because they are annoying, because they repeat the same things. Love grandparents, and have them talk to the children. Thank you all. Thank you for your passion; thank you for the love that you have for the family. Thanks for everything! And go onward with courage. Thank you! Now before giving you the blessing, let us pray to Our Lady: "Hail Mary..."

Prepared speech of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you and I offer a warm greeting to you and to your President, whom I thank for his words. This encounter allows me to meet your organization, the Forum of Families, up close. Founded 25 years ago, it embraces overall more than 500 associations, and is truly a network which highlights the beauty of communion and the power of sharing. It is a special "family of families", of an associative type, through which you experience the joy of co-existence and at the same time you commit yourselves to assume the burden of the common good, to be built each day both in the environment of the Forum, and that of the broader society.

The family, which you foster in various ways, is at the centre of God's plan, as the entire history of salvation shows. Through a mysterious divine plan, the complementarity and the love between man and woman make them co-operators of the Creator, who entrusts them with the task of bringing new creatures to life, taking to heart their growth and education. Jesus' love for children, his filial relationship with the heavenly Father, his defence of the marriage bond, which he declares sacred and indissoluble, fully reveals the family's place in God's plan: being the cradle of life and the first place of welcome and of love, it plays an essential role in mankind's vocation and is like a window which opens wide onto the very mystery of God, who is Love in the unity and in the trinity of the Persons.

Our world, often tempted and guided by individualistic and selfish reasoning, often loses the meaning and the beauty of stable bonds, of commitment to people, of unconditional care, of assuming responsibility for the good of the other, of gratuitousness and of self-giving. For this reason one has difficulty in comprehending the value of the family, and one ends up understanding it according to the same reasoning that privileges individual interests instead of relationships and the common good. And this is despite the fact that in the recent years of economic crisis the family has represented the most powerful shock absorber, capable of redistributing resources according to the needs of each person.

On the contrary, full recognition and appropriate support of the family should be the top priority of civil institutions, called to promote the formation of sound, serene families who attend to their children's education and who compensate for situations of weakness. Indeed, those who learn to experience authentic relationships in the sphere of the family will be better able to exercise them in the broadest contexts, from school to the world of work; and those who practice it in a spirit of respect and service at home, will be better able to practice it also in society and in the world.

Now, the objective of stronger support for families and a more appropriate appreciation of them, should be reached through a tireless effort toward raising awareness and dialogue. This is the task that the Forum has carried out for 25 years, in which you have accomplished a great deal of initiatives, establishing a relationship of trust and cooperation with the institutions. I exhort you to continue this work, by promoting projects which demonstrate the beauty of the family, and which are attractive because they are convincing, since their importance and value are evident.

Thus I encourage you to witness to the joy of love, which I explained in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris*

Laetitia, where I harvested the fruits of the providential journey of the Synod on the Family, which was carried out by the whole Church. Indeed, there is no better subject than joy which, radiating from the inside, proves the value of ideas and experience and points to the treasure that we have discovered and wish to share.

Therefore, impelled by this force, you will be ever more ready to take the initiative. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy that “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:7). May this be the spirit which animates you too, teaching you respect but also courage, to accept the challenge and seek out new paths, without fear. It is the style I have asked of the entire Church since my first and programmatic Apostolic Exhortation, when I used the term “primerear” [“take the initiative”], which suggests the capacity to go with courage to encounter others, not to close oneself in one’s comfort zone but to look for points of convergence with people, to build bridges by going to discover goodness wherever it may be found (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 24). God is the first to primerear with us: if we have truly met him, we cannot hide, but rather we must go out and act, using our talents.

Thank you for making the effort to do so! Thank you for your generous dedication, in line with your Statute, for the “active and responsible participation of families in the cultural, social and political life” (2.1.b), and for the “promotion of appropriate family policies that protect and support the functions of the family and its rights” (2.1.c). May you continue, moreover, in the school environment, to favour greater parental involvement and to encourage many families to a style of participation. Never tire of supporting the growth of the birth rate in Italy, by raising awareness in institutions and in public opinion of the importance of giving life to policies and structures more open to the gift of children. It is a real paradox that the birth of children, which constitutes the greatest investment for a country and the first condition of its future prosperity, often is a cause of poverty for families, due to the inadequate support they receive or to the inefficiency of many services.

These and other problems must be addressed with determination and charity, demonstrating that the sensitivity that you carry forth regarding the family is not to be labelled as confessional in order to accuse it — wrongly — of partiality. It is instead based on the dignity of the human person and therefore must be recognized and shared by all, as when, also in institutional contexts, the “Family Factor” is referred to as that element of political and operative evaluation, the multiplier of human, economic and social richness.

I thank you again for this meeting. I exhort you to continue in your commitment in service to the family and life, and I invoke upon all members of the Forum God’s blessing and the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Please, do not forget to pray for me.

Pas Evangelie in gezondheidszorg toe

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the World Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC)



Pope Francis
28 May 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you and I greet all of you, beginning with your President, Dr. John Lee, whom I thank for his kind words.

As Catholic physicians, you are committed to an ongoing spiritual, moral and bioethical formation that enables you to bring the values and principles of the Gospel to your practice of medicine, from the doctor-patient relationship to missionary activity aimed at improving health conditions among peoples living on the peripheries of our world. Your work is a particular form of human solidarity and Christian witness, and is enriched by the spirit of faith. It is important that your Associations be concerned to make medical students and young physicians aware of these principles by involving them in your various activities.

Your Catholic identity poses no obstacle to your cooperation with those who, whether from a different religious perspective or with no specific creed, acknowledge the dignity and grandeur of the human person as the criterion of their activity. The Church is committed to life, and to ensuring that nothing opposed to life be imposed on any person, however frail or defenceless, underdeveloped or challenged, he or she may be. To be a Catholic physician thus means being a health care professional who finds in personal faith and communion with the Church a source of inspiration to grow constantly in Christian living and professional expertise, in tireless devotion to others and in the desire to learn and understand the laws of nature in order to serve life ever more effectively (cf. Paul VI, Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, 24).

Everyone is aware of the fidelity and consistency with which the Associations of your Federation have, down the years, maintained their Catholic identity and followed the Church's teaching and the directives of her Magisterium in the medical-moral field. This criterion of recognition and action has fostered your cooperation in the Church's mission of promoting and defending human life from conception to its natural end, out of concern for the quality of life, respect for the weakest, the humanization of medicine and its full socialization.

This fidelity frequently entails hardships and difficulties that, in certain situations, call for great courage. I encourage you to persevere with serenity and conviction along this path, receiving the magisterial interventions in the areas of medicine with an awareness of their moral implications. For the fields of medicine and health care have not been immune to the advance of the technocratic cultural paradigm, the worship of unlimited human power and a practical relativism, wherein everything is considered irrelevant unless necessary for one's personal interests (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 122).

In this context, you are called upon to affirm the centrality of the patient as a person, together with his or her dignity and inalienable rights, especially the right to life. The tendency to view the sick as machines to be repaired, without respect for moral principles, and to exploit the weakest by discarding what does not respond to the ideology of efficiency and profit, has to be resisted. The defence of the personal dimension of the patient is essential for the humanization of medicine, also in terms of "human ecology". Make every effort, in your respective countries and on the international level, to speak out in specialized environments but also in debates about legislation dealing with sensitive ethical problems such as the termination of pregnancy, end-of-life issues and genetic medicine. Take care also to defend the freedom of conscience of physicians and of healthcare workers. It is not acceptable that your role should be reduced to that of a simple executor of the will of the patient or the requirements of the health-care system in which you work.

In your forthcoming Congress, to be held a few days from now in Zagreb, you will reflect upon the theme: "Sanctity of Life and the Medical Profession, from *Humanae vitae* to *Laudato Si'*". This too is evidence of your

participation in the Church's life and mission. This participation – as the Second Vatican Council made clear – “is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect” (Apostolicam actuositatem, 10). Be ever more aware that today it is necessary and urgent that the activity of the Catholic physician be unmistakably evident on the level of both personal and group witness.

In this regard, it is desirable that the activities of Associations of Catholic doctors be interdisciplinary and involve other ecclesial realities. In particular, consider how to coordinate your efforts with those of priests, men and women religious, and all engaged in pastoral care of the sick. Join them in being close to people who suffer; they are in great need of your help. Be ministers not only of care but also of fraternal charity, helping those with whom you come in contact by your knowledge, your great humanity and your evangelical compassion.

Dear brothers and sisters, so many people look to you and your work. Your words, your actions, your advice and your decisions have an echo far beyond the strictly professional sector and become, if consistent, a witness of lived faith. Your profession thus rises to the dignity of a true apostolate. I encourage you to carry forward the efforts of your Associations with joy and generosity, in cooperation with all those individuals and institutions that share a love for life and endeavour to serve it in its dignity and sanctity. May the Virgin Mary, *Salus Infirmorum*, sustain your efforts, which I accompany with my blessing. And please, pray also for me.

Thank you.

Menselijk leven heeft onaantastbare waardigheid

**Address of the Holy Father to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**



Pope Francis
26 January 2018

Cardinals, Venerable Brothers in the episcopate and in the priesthood, dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to meet you at the end of the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I thank the Prefect for his introduction, with which he has summarized the most important lines of your work over the last two years.

I express my appreciation for your delicate service, which responds to your Dicastery's particular bond with the ministry of the Successor of Peter, who is called to confirm brothers in faith and the Church in unity.

I thank you for your daily commitment in support of the teaching of the bishops, in the protection of the righteous faith and the holiness of the Sacraments, and in all the various issues that today require important pastoral discernment, such as the examination of cases relating to graviora delicta and applications for the dissolution of the marriage bond in favorem fidei.

All these tasks are even more current when faced with the horizon, ever more fluid and changeable, which characterizes the self-understanding of the man of today and which has a significant influence on his existential and ethical choices. The man of today no longer knows who he is and, therefore, struggles to recognize how to act well.

In this sense, your Congregation's task in recalling the transcendent vocation of man and the indivisible connection of his reason to truth and good, introduced by faith in Jesus Christ, appears decisive. There is nothing like the opening of reason to the light that comes from God to help man know himself and God's plan for the world.

I, therefore, appreciate the study you have undertaken on some aspects of Christian salvation, in order to reaffirm the meaning of redemption, in reference to the current neo-Pelagian and neo-gnostic tendencies. These tendencies are expressions of an individualism that relies on its own forces to save itself. We, on the other hand, believe that salvation consists in communion with the risen Christ Who, thanks to the gift of His Spirit, has introduced us into a new order of relations with the Father and among men. Thus we can unite ourselves to the Father as sons in the Son and become a sole body in He who is "the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8: 29).

How can I fail to mention, then, the studies you are performing in relation to the ethical implications of an adequate anthropology also in the economic-financial field? Only a vision of man as a person, that is, as an essentially relational subject and connoted by a specific and broad rationality, is able to act in conformity with the objective order of morality. In this regard, the Magisterium of the Church has always clearly stated that "economic activity is to be carried on according to its own methods and laws within the limits of the moral order" (Vatican Ecumenical Council II), Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 64).

During this Plenary Session, you have also studied some sensitive issues regarding the accompaniment of terminally ill patients. In this regard, the process of secularization, by rendering absolute the concepts of self-determination and autonomy, has led to the growth of the demand for euthanasia in many countries as an ideological affirmation of man's will to power over life. This has also led to considering the voluntary interruption of human existence as a choice of "civilization". It is clear that where life is valid not for its dignity, but for its efficiency and productivity, all this becomes possible. In this scenario, it must be reiterated that human life, from conception to its natural end, has a dignity that makes it intangible.

Pain, suffering, the meaning of life and death are realities that contemporary mentality struggles to face with a look full of hope. And yet, without a trustworthy hope to help him confront pain and death, man cannot live well and maintain a confident perspective before his future. This is one of the services that the Church is called to make to contemporary man.

In this sense, your mission assumes an eminently pastoral face. Authentic pastors are those who do not abandon man to himself, nor leave him in the grip of his disorientation and his errors, but with truth and mercy bring him back to find his true face in goodness. Therefore every action aimed at taking the man by the hand, when he has lost the sense of his dignity and his destiny, to lead him trustfully to rediscover the loving paternity of God, his good destiny and the ways to build a more humane world, is authentically pastoral. This is the great task that awaits your Congregation and every other pastoral institution of the Church.

Certain of your dedication to this important service, which has always been the high road of the Church, I reiterate my gratitude and express to you all my closeness, imparting my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

Paus hekelt nieuwe mensenrechten

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See for the traditional exchange of new year greetings



Heilige Stoel, 8 januari 2018

Pope Francis
8 January 2018

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our meeting today is a welcome tradition that allows me, in the enduring joy of the Christmas season, to offer you my personal best wishes for the New Year just begun, and to express my closeness and affection to the peoples you represent. I thank the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, His Excellency Armino Fernandes do Espírito Santo Vieira, Ambassador of Angola, for his respectful greeting on behalf of the entire Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. I offer a particular welcome to the non-resident Ambassadors, whose numbers have increased following the establishment last May of diplomatic relations with the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. I likewise greet the growing number of Ambassadors resident in Rome, which now includes the Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa. I would like in a special way to remember the late Ambassador of Colombia, Guillermo León Escobar-Herrán, who passed away just a few days before Christmas. I thank all of you for your continuing helpful contacts with the Secretariat of State and the other Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, which testify to the interest of the international community in the Holy See's mission and the work of the Catholic Church in your respective countries. This is also the context for the Holy See's pactional activities, which last year saw the signing, in February, of the Framework Agreement with the Republic of the Congo, and, in August, of the Agreement between the Secretariat of State and the Government of the Russian Federation enabling the holders of diplomatic passports to travel without a visa.

In its relations with civil authorities, the Holy See seeks only to promote the spiritual and material well-being of the human person and to pursue the common good. The Apostolic Journeys that I made during the course of the past year to Egypt, Portugal, Colombia, Myanmar and Bangladesh were expressions of this concern. I travelled as a pilgrim to Portugal on the centenary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima, to celebrate the canonization of the shepherd children Jacinta and Francisco Marto. There I witnessed the enthusiastic and joyful faith that the Virgin Mary roused in the many pilgrims assembled for the occasion. In Egypt, Myanmar and Bangladesh too, I was able to meet the local Christian communities that, though small in number, are appreciated for their

contribution to development and fraternal coexistence in those countries. Naturally, I also had meetings with representatives of other religions, as a sign that our differences are not an obstacle to dialogue, but rather a vital source of encouragement in our common desire to know the truth and to practise justice. Finally, in Colombia I wished to bless the efforts and the courage of that beloved people, marked by a lively desire for peace after more than half a century of internal conflict.

Dear Ambassadors,

This year marks the centenary of the end of the First World War, a conflict that reconfigured the face of Europe and the entire world with the emergence of new states in place of ancient empires. From the ashes of the Great War, we can learn two lessons that, sad to say, humanity did not immediately grasp, leading within the space of twenty years to a new and even more devastating conflict. The first lesson is that victory never means humiliating a defeated foe. Peace is not built by vaunting the power of the victor over the vanquished. Future acts of aggression are not deterred by the law of fear, but rather by the power of calm reason that encourages dialogue and mutual understanding as a means of resolving differences.[1] This leads to a second lesson: peace is consolidated when nations can discuss matters on equal terms. This was grasped a hundred years ago – on this very date – by the then President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, who proposed the establishment of a general league of nations with the aim of promoting for all states, great and small alike, mutual guarantees of independence and territorial integrity. This laid the theoretical basis for that multilateral diplomacy, which has gradually acquired over time an increased role and influence in the international community as a whole.

Relations between nations, like all human relationships, “must likewise be harmonized in accordance with the dictates of truth, justice, willing cooperation, and freedom”. [2] This entails “the principle that all states are by nature equal in dignity”, [3] as well as the acknowledgment of one another’s rights and the fulfilment of their respective duties. [4] The basic premise of this approach is the recognition of the dignity of the human person, since disregard and contempt for that dignity resulted in barbarous acts that have outraged the conscience of mankind. [5] Indeed, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. [6]

I would like to devote our meeting today to this important document, seventy years after its adoption on 10 December 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. For the Holy See, to speak of human rights means above all to restate the centrality of the human person, willed and created by God in his image and likeness. The Lord Jesus himself, by healing the leper, restoring sight to the blind man, speaking with the publican, saving the life of the woman caught in adultery and demanding that the injured wayfarer be cared for, makes us understand that every human being, independent of his or her physical, spiritual or social condition, is worthy of respect and consideration. From a Christian perspective, there is a significant relation between the Gospel message and the recognition of human rights in the spirit of those who drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Those rights are premised on the nature objectively shared by the human race. They were proclaimed in order to remove the barriers that divide the human family and to favour what the Church’s social doctrine calls integral human development, since it entails fostering “the development of each man and of the whole man... and humanity as a whole”. [7] A reductive vision of the human person, on the other hand, opens the way to the growth of injustice, social inequality and corruption.

It should be noted, however, that over the years, particularly in the wake of the social upheaval of the 1960’s, the interpretation of some rights has progressively changed, with the inclusion of a number of “new rights” that not infrequently conflict with one another. This has not always helped the promotion of friendly relations between nations, [8] since debatable notions of human rights have been advanced that are at odds with the

culture of many countries; the latter feel that they are not respected in their social and cultural traditions, and instead neglected with regard to the real needs they have to face. Somewhat paradoxically, there is a risk that, in the very name of human rights, we will see the rise of modern forms of ideological colonization by the stronger and the wealthier, to the detriment of the poorer and the most vulnerable. At the same time, it should be recalled that the traditions of individual peoples cannot be invoked as a pretext for disregarding the due respect for the fundamental rights proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At a distance of seventy years, it is painful to see how many fundamental rights continue to be violated today. First among all of these is the right of every human person to life, liberty and personal security.[9] It is not only war or violence that infringes these rights. In our day, there are more subtle means: I think primarily of innocent children discarded even before they are born, unwanted at times simply because they are ill or malformed, or as a result of the selfishness of adults. I think of the elderly, who are often cast aside, especially when infirm and viewed as a burden. I think of women who repeatedly suffer from violence and oppression, even within their own families. I think too of the victims of human trafficking, which violates the prohibition of every form of slavery. How many persons, especially those fleeing from poverty and war, have fallen prey to such commerce perpetrated by unscrupulous individuals?

Defending the right to life and physical integrity also means safeguarding the right to health on the part of individuals and their families. Today this right has assumed implications beyond the original intentions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sought to affirm the right of every individual to receive medical care and necessary social services.[10] In this regard, it is my hope that efforts will be made within the appropriate international forums to facilitate, in the first place, ready access to medical care and treatment on the part of all. It is important to join forces in order to implement policies that ensure, at affordable costs, the provision of medicines essential for the survival of those in need, without neglecting the area of research and the development of treatments that, albeit not financially profitable, are essential for saving human lives.

Defending the right to life also entails actively striving for peace, universally recognized as one of the supreme values to be sought and defended. Yet serious local conflicts continue to flare up in various parts of the world. The collective efforts of the international community, the humanitarian activities of international organizations and the constant pleas for peace rising from lands rent by violence seem to be less and less effective in the face of war's perverse logic. This scenario cannot be allowed to diminish our desire and our efforts for peace. For without peace, integral human development becomes unattainable.

Integral disarmament and integral development are intertwined. Indeed, the quest for peace as a precondition for development requires battling injustice and eliminating, in a non-violent way, the causes of discord that lead to wars. The proliferation of weapons clearly aggravates situations of conflict and entails enormous human and material costs that undermine development and the search for lasting peace. The historic result achieved last year with the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference for negotiating a legally binding instrument to ban nuclear arms, shows how lively the desire for peace continues to be. The promotion of a culture of peace for integral development calls for unremitting efforts in favour of disarmament and the reduction of recourse to the use of armed force in the handling of international affairs. I would therefore like to encourage a serene and wide-ranging debate on the subject, one that avoids polarizing the international community on such a sensitive issue. Every effort in this direction, however modest, represents an important step for mankind.

For its part, the Holy See signed and ratified, also in the name of and on behalf of Vatican City State, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It did so in the belief, expressed by Saint John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*, that "justice, right reason, and the recognition of man's dignity cry out insistently for a cessation to the arms race. The stockpiles of armaments which have been built up in various countries must be reduced all round and simultaneously by the parties concerned. Nuclear weapons must be banned".[11] Indeed, even if "it is difficult

to believe that anyone would dare to assume responsibility for initiating the appalling slaughter and destruction that war would bring in its wake, there is no denying that the conflagration could be started by some chance and unforeseen circumstance".[12]

The Holy See therefore reiterates the firm conviction "that any disputes which may arise between nations must be resolved by negotiation and agreement, not by recourse to arms".[13] The constant production of ever more advanced and "refined" weaponry, and dragging on of numerous conflicts – what I have referred to as "a third world war fought piecemeal" – lead us to reaffirm Pope John's statement that "in this age which boasts of its atomic power, it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice... Nevertheless, we are hopeful that, by establishing contact with one another and by a policy of negotiation, nations will come to a better recognition of the natural ties that bind them together as men. We are hopeful, too, that they will come to a fairer realization of one of the cardinal duties deriving from our common nature: namely, that love, not fear, must dominate the relationships between individuals and between nations. It is principally characteristic of love that it draws men together in all sorts of ways, sincerely united in the bonds of mind and matter; and this is a union from which countless blessings can flow".[14]

In this regard, it is of paramount importance to support every effort at dialogue on the Korean peninsula, in order to find new ways of overcoming the current disputes, increasing mutual trust and ensuring a peaceful future for the Korean people and the entire world.

It is also important for the various peace initiatives aimed at helping Syria to continue, in a constructive climate of growing trust between the parties, so that the lengthy conflict that has caused such immense suffering can finally come to an end. Our shared hope is that, after so much destruction, the time for rebuilding has now come. Yet even more than rebuilding material structures, it is necessary to rebuild hearts, to re-establish the fabric of mutual trust, which is the essential prerequisite for the flourishing of any society. There is a need, then, to promote the legal, political and security conditions that restore a social life where every citizen, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation, can take part in the development of the country. In this regard, it is vital that religious minorities be protected, including Christians, who for centuries have made an active contribution to Syria's history.

It is likewise important that the many refugees who have found shelter and refuge in neighbouring countries, especially in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, be able to return home. The commitment and efforts made by these countries in this difficult situation deserve the appreciation and support of the entire international community, which is also called upon to create the conditions for the repatriation of Syrian refugees. This effort must concretely start with Lebanon, so that that beloved country can continue to be a "message" of respect and coexistence, and a model to imitate, for the whole region and for the entire world.

The desire for dialogue is also necessary in beloved Iraq, to enable its various ethnic and religious groups to rediscover the path of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence and cooperation. Such is the case too in Yemen and other parts of the region, and in Afghanistan.

I think in particular of Israelis and Palestinians, in the wake of the tensions of recent weeks. The Holy See, while expressing sorrow for the loss of life in recent clashes, renews its pressing appeal that every initiative be carefully weighed so as to avoid exacerbating hostilities, and calls for a common commitment to respect, in conformity with the relevant United Nations Resolutions, the status quo of Jerusalem, a city sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims. Seventy years of confrontation make more urgent than ever the need for a political solution that allows the presence in the region of two independent states within internationally recognized borders. Despite the difficulties, a willingness to engage in dialogue and to resume negotiations remains the clearest way to achieving at last a peaceful coexistence between the two peoples.

In national contexts, too, openness and availability to encounter are essential. I think especially of Venezuela, which is experiencing an increasingly dramatic and unprecedented political and humanitarian crisis. The Holy See, while urging an immediate response to the primary needs of the population, expresses the hope that conditions will be created so that the elections scheduled for this year can resolve the existing conflicts, and enable people to look to the future with newfound serenity.

Nor can the international community overlook the suffering of many parts of the African continent, especially in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Nigeria and the Central African Republic, where the right to life is threatened by the indiscriminate exploitation of resources, terrorism, the proliferation of armed groups and protracted conflicts. It is not enough to be appalled at such violence. Rather, everyone, in his or her own situation, should work actively to eliminate the causes of misery and build bridges of fraternity, the fundamental premise for authentic human development.

A shared commitment to rebuilding bridges is also urgent in Ukraine. The year just ended reaped new victims in the conflict that afflicts the country, continuing to bring great suffering to the population, particularly to families who live in areas affected by the war and have lost their loved ones, not infrequently the elderly and children.

I would like to devote a special thought to families. The right to form a family, as a “natural and fundamental group unit of society... is entitled to protection by society and the state”,^[15] and is recognized by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unfortunately, it is a fact that, especially in the West, the family is considered an obsolete institution. Today fleeting relationships are preferred to the stability of a definitive life project. But a house built on the sand of frail and fickle relationships cannot stand. What is needed instead is a rock on which to build solid foundations. And this rock is precisely that faithful and indissoluble communion of love that joins man and woman, a communion that has an austere and simple beauty, a sacred and inviolable character and a natural role in the social order.^[16] I consider it urgent, then, that genuine policies be adopted to support the family, on which the future and the development of states depend. Without this, it is not possible to create societies capable of meeting the challenges of the future. Disregard for families has another dramatic effect – particularly present in some parts of the world – namely, a decline in the birth rate. We are experiencing a true demographic winter! This is a sign of societies that struggle to face the challenges of the present, and thus become ever more fearful of the future, with the result that they close in on themselves.

At the same time, we cannot forget the situation of families torn apart by poverty, war and migration. All too often, we see with our own eyes the tragedy of children who, unaccompanied, cross the borders between the south and the north of our world, and often fall victim to human trafficking.

Today there is much talk about migrants and migration, at times only for the sake of stirring up primal fears. It must not be forgotten that migration has always existed. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the history of salvation is essentially a history of migration. Nor should we forget that freedom of movement, for example, the ability to leave one’s own country and to return there, is a fundamental human right.^[17] There is a need, then, to abandon the familiar rhetoric and start from the essential consideration that we are dealing, above all, with persons.

This is what I sought to reiterate in my Message for the World Day of Peace celebrated on 1 January last, whose theme this year is: “Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace”. While acknowledging that not everyone is always guided by the best of intentions, we must not forget that the majority of migrants would prefer to remain in their homeland. Instead, they find themselves “forced by discrimination, persecution, poverty and environmental degradation” to leave it behind... “Welcoming others requires concrete commitment, a network of assistance and good will, vigilant and sympathetic attention, the responsible management of new and complex situations that at times compound numerous existing problems, to say nothing of resources, which are always limited. By practising the virtue of prudence, government leaders should take practical measures to

welcome, promote, protect, integrate and, 'within the limits allowed by a correct understanding of the common good, to permit [them] to become part of a new society' (Pacem in Terris, 57). Leaders have a clear responsibility towards their own communities, whose legitimate rights and harmonious development they must ensure, lest they become like the rash builder who miscalculated and failed to complete the tower he had begun to construct" (cf. Lk 14:28-30).[18]

I would like once more to thank the authorities of those states who have spared no effort in recent years to assist the many migrants arriving at their borders. I think above all of the efforts made by more than a few countries in Asia, Africa and the Americas that welcome and assist numerous persons. I cherish vivid memories of my meeting in Dhaka with some members of the Rohingya people, and I renew my sentiments of gratitude to the Bangladeshi authorities for the assistance provided to them on their own territory.

I would also like to express particular gratitude to Italy, which in these years has shown an open and generous heart and offered positive examples of integration. It is my hope that the difficulties that the country has experienced in these years, and whose effects are still felt, will not lead to forms of refusal and obstruction, but instead to a rediscovery of those roots and traditions that have nourished the rich history of the nation and constitute a priceless treasure offered to the whole world. I likewise express my appreciation for the efforts made by other European states, particularly Greece and Germany. Nor must it be forgotten that many refugees and migrants seek to reach Europe because they know that there they will find peace and security, which for that matter are the fruit of a lengthy process born of the ideals of the Founding Fathers of the European project in the aftermath of the Second World War. Europe should be proud of this legacy, grounded on certain principles and a vision of man rooted in its millenary history, inspired by the Christian conception of the human person. The arrival of migrants should spur Europe to recover its cultural and religious heritage, so that, with a renewed consciousness of the values on which the continent was built, it can keep alive her own tradition while continuing to be a place of welcome, a herald of peace and of development.

In the past year, governments, international organizations and civil society have engaged in discussions about the basic principles, priorities and most suitable means for responding to movements of migration and the enduring situations involving refugees. The United Nations, following the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, has initiated important preparations for the adoption of the two Global Compacts for refugees and for safe, orderly and regular migration respectively.

The Holy See trusts that these efforts, with the negotiations soon to begin, will lead to results worthy of a world community growing ever more independent and grounded in the principles of solidarity and mutual assistance. In the current international situation, ways and means are not lacking to ensure that every man and every woman on earth can enjoy living conditions worthy of the human person.

In the Message for this year's World Day of Peace, I suggested four "mileposts" for action: welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating.[19] I would like to dwell particularly on the last of these, which has given rise to various opposed positions in the light of varying evaluations, experiences, concerns and convictions. Integration is a "two-way process", entailing reciprocal rights and duties. Those who welcome are called to promote integral human development, while those who are welcomed must necessarily conform to the rules of the country offering them hospitality, with respect for its identity and values. Processes of integration must always keep the protection and advancement of persons, especially those in situations of vulnerability, at the centre of the rules governing various aspects of political and social life.

The Holy See has no intention of interfering in decisions that fall to states, which, in the light of their respective political, social and economic situations, and their capacities and possibilities for receiving and integrating, have the primary responsibility for accepting newcomers. Nonetheless, the Holy See does consider it its role to appeal to the principles of humanity and fraternity at the basis of every cohesive and harmonious society. In

this regard, its interaction with religious communities, on the level of institutions and associations, should not be forgotten, since these can play a valuable supportive role in assisting and protecting, in social and cultural mediation, and in pacification and integration.

Among the human rights that I would also like to mention today is the right to freedom of thought, conscience and of religion, including the freedom to change religion.[20] Sad to say, it is well-known that the right to religious freedom is often disregarded, and not infrequently religion becomes either an occasion for the ideological justification of new forms of extremism or a pretext for the social marginalization of believers, if not their downright persecution. The condition for building inclusive societies is the integral comprehension of the human person, who can feel himself or herself truly accepted when recognized and accepted in all the dimensions that constitute his or her identity, including the religious dimension.

Finally, I wish to recall the importance of the right to employment. There can be no peace or development if individuals are not given the chance to contribute personally by their own labour to the growth of the common good. Regrettably, in many parts of the world, employment is scarcely available. At times, few opportunities exist, especially for young people, to find work. Often it is easily lost not only due to the effects of alternating economic cycles, but to the increasing use of ever more perfect and precise technologies and tools that can replace human beings. On the one hand, we note an inequitable distribution of the work opportunities, while on the other, a tendency to demand of labourers an ever more pressing pace. The demands of profit, dictated by globalization, have led to a progressive reduction of times and days of rest, with the result that a fundamental dimension of life has been lost – that of rest – which serves to regenerate persons not only physically but also spiritually. God himself rested on the seventh day; he blessed and consecrated that day “because on it he rested from all the work that he had done in creation” (Gen 2:3). In the alternation of exertion and repose, human beings share in the “sanctification of time” laid down by God and ennoble their work, saving it from constant repetition and dull daily routine.

A cause for particular concern are the data recently published by the International Labour Organization regarding the increase of child labourers and victims of the new forms of slavery. The scourge of juvenile employment continues to compromise gravely the physical and psychological development of young people, depriving them of the joys of childhood and reaping innocent victims. We cannot think of planning a better future, or hope to build more inclusive societies, if we continue to maintain economic models directed to profit alone and the exploitation of those who are most vulnerable, such as children. Eliminating the structural causes of this scourge should be a priority of governments and international organizations, which are called to intensify efforts to adopt integrated strategies and coordinated policies aimed at putting an end to child labour in all its forms.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In recalling some of the rights contained in the 1948 Universal Declaration, I do not mean to overlook one of its important aspects, namely, the recognition that every individual also has duties towards the community, for the sake of “meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society”.[21] The just appeal to the rights of each human being must take into account the fact that every individual is part of a greater body. Our societies too, like every human body, enjoy good health if each member makes his or her own contribution in the awareness that it is at the service of the common good.

Among today’s particularly pressing duties is that of caring for our earth. We know that nature can itself be cruel, even apart from human responsibility. We saw this in the past year with the earthquakes that struck different parts of our world, especially those of recent months in Mexico and in Iran, with their high toll of victims, and with the powerful hurricanes that struck different countries of the Caribbean, also reaching the coast of the United States, and, more recently, the Philippines. Even so, one must not downplay the importance

of our own responsibility in interaction with nature. Climate changes, with the global rise in temperatures and their devastating effects, are also a consequence of human activity. Hence there is a need to take up, in a united effort, the responsibility of leaving to coming generations a more beautiful and livable world, and to work, in the light of the commitments agreed upon in Paris in 2015, for the reduction of gas emissions that harm the atmosphere and human health.

The spirit that must guide individuals and nations in this effort can be compared to that of the builders of the medieval cathedrals that dot the landscape of Europe. These impressive buildings show the importance of each individual taking part in a work that transcends the limits of time. The builders of the cathedrals knew that they would not see the completion of their work. Yet they worked diligently, in the knowledge that they were part of a project that would be left to their children to enjoy. These, in turn, would embellish and expand it for their own children. Each man and woman in this world – particularly those with governmental responsibilities – is called to cultivate the same spirit of service and intergenerational solidarity, and in this way to be a sign of hope for our troubled world.

With these thoughts, I renew to each of you, to your families and to your peoples, my prayerful good wishes for a year filled with joy, hope and peace. Thank you.

Notes

[1] Cf. JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April 1963, 90.

[2] *Ibid.*, 80.

[3] *Ibid.*, 86.

[4] *Ibid.*, 91.

[5] Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948.

[6] *Ibid.* Preamble.

[7] PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 26 March 1967, 14.

[8] Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Preamble.

[9] Cf. *ibid.*, Art.3.

[10] Cf. *ibid.*, Art. 25.

[11] *Pacem in Terris*, 112.

[12] *Ibid.*, 111.

[13] *Ibid.*, 126.

[14] *Ibid.*, 127 and 129.

[15] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 16.

[16] Cf. PAUL VI, Address in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, 5 January 1964.

[17] Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 13.

[18] FRANCIS, Message for the 2018 World Day of Peace, 13 November 2017, 1.

[19] *Ibid.*, 4.

[20] Cf. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 18.

[21] *Ibid.*, Art. 29.



Kwesties rond het levenseinde

Aan de Voorzitter van de Pauselijke Academie voor het Leven, aartsbisschop Vincenzo Paglia, en aan de deelnemers aan de Europese Regionale Bijeenkomst van de World Medical Association

Paus Franciscus
7 november 2017

1

Aan mijn Eerbiedwaardige Broeder Aartsbisschop Vincenzo Paglia, Voorzitter van de Pauselijke Academie voor het Leven

Ik maak mijn hartelijke groeten aan u over en aan al de deelnemers van de Europese Regionale Bijeenkomst van de World Medical Association betreffende vraagstukken aangaande het einde van het leven, die gehouden werd in het Vaticaan, tezamen met de Pauselijke Academie voor het Leven.

Uw bijeenkomst zal vragen behandelen omtrent het einde van het aardse leven. Het zijn vragen die de mensheid steeds hebben uitgedaagd, maar die vandaag nieuwe vormen aannemen omwille van de verhoogde kennis en de ontwikkeling van nieuwe technische instrumenten.

De groeiende therapeutische mogelijkheden van de medische wetenschap hebben het mogelijk gemaakt om vele ziektes te doen verdwijnen, de gezondheid te verbeteren en de levensduur te verlengen. Terwijl deze ontwikkelingen als positief kunnen geduid worden, is het ook mogelijk geworden het leven te verlengen door manieren die ondenkbaar waren in het verleden. Operaties en andere medische ingrepen zijn meer effectief geworden, maar ze zijn niet altijd heilzaam; ze kunnen falende vitale functies ondersteunen of zelfs vervangen, maar dat is niet hetzelfde als de gezondheid bevorderen. Grotere wijsheid is vandaag nodig, omwille van de verleiding om aan te dringen op behandelingen die krachtige gevolgen hebben voor het lichaam, maar soms niet het integrale welzijn van de persoon dienen.

2

Ongeveer zestig jaar geleden stelde paus Pius XII [in een gedenkwaardige toespraak tot anesthesisten en specialisten in intensieve zorgen](#) dat er geen verplichting is om in alle omstandigheden toevlucht te zoeken naar elke mogelijke remedie en dat, in sommige specifieke gevallen, het is toegestaan om zich te onthouden van het gebruik ervan. (1) Bijgevolg is het moreel aanvaardbaar om te beslissen geen therapeutische maatregelen te nemen, of er niet mee door te gaan, wanneer hun gebruik niet overeen komt met die ethische en humanistische standaard die later zou genoemd worden “evenredig nut”. (2)

Het specifieke element van dit criterium is dat “het effect dat men ermee hoopt te bereiken, rekening houdend met de toestand van de zieke en met zijn lichamelijke en geestelijke krachten” in overweging wordt genomen. (3) Het maakt dus een beslissing mogelijk die moreel wordt gekwalificeerd als terugtrekken van “therapeutische hardnekkigheid”.

3

Zulk een beslissing erkent op een verantwoordelijke manier de grenzen van onze sterfelijkheid, eenmaal het duidelijk wordt dat verzet ertegen nutteloos is. "Men wil zo niet de dood bewerken; men aanvaardt dat men hem niet kan verhinderen". (4) Dit verschil van perspectief herstelt de mensheid in de begeleiding van de stervenden, waarbij niet wordt getracht de onderdrukking van de levenden te rechtvaardigen. Het is duidelijk dat het niet aannemen of anders het opheffen van disproportionele maatregelen, betekent hardnekkig behandelen vermijden; vanuit een ethisch standpunt is dit compleet verschillend van euthanasie, dat altijd verkeerd is, vermits de intentie van euthanasie is om het leven te beëindigen en de dood te veroorzaken.

4

Het is overbodig om te zeggen dat in het aanschijn van kritische situaties en in een klinische praktijk het soms moeilijk is om de factoren die in het geding zijn, te evalueren. Om te bepalen of een klinisch aangepaste medische interventie werkelijk proportioneel is, is de mechanische toepassing van een algemene regel niet voldoende. Een zorgvuldige onderscheiding van het morele doel is nodig, evenals van de omstandigheden van de behandeling en de intenties van diegenen die erbij betrokken zijn. Bij het zorgen voor en het begeleiden van een welbepaalde patiënt moeten de persoonlijke en relationele elementen in zijn of haar leven en sterven – dat tenslotte het laatste moment in het leven is – in overweging worden genomen die het best passen bij de menselijke waardigheid. In dit proces komt de eerste rol toe aan de patiënt. De Catechismus van de Katholieke Kerk maakt dit duidelijk: "De beslissingen moeten genomen worden door de patiënt, als hij daartoe de bevoegdheid en het vermogen heeft". (5) De patiënt in de eerste plaats heeft het recht, vanzelfsprekend in dialoog met medische professionals, om een voorgestelde therapie te evalueren en diens actuele proportionaliteit te beoordelen in zijn of haar geval, en ze noodzakelijkerwijs te weigeren indien wordt geoordeeld dat de proportionaliteit ontbreekt. Die evaluatie is niet gemakkelijk te maken in de huidige medische context, waarin de relatie arts-patiënt enorm is gefragmenteerd en medische zorg een groot aantal technologische en organisatorische aspecten bevat.

5

Ook moet worden opgemerkt dat deze evaluatieprocessen worden bepaald door de groeiende kloof tussen gezondheidsmogelijkheden die voortvloeien uit de combinatie van technische en wetenschappelijk bekwaamheid en economische interesses. Toenemende gesofisticeerde en kostelijke behandelingen zijn beschikbaar voor meer en meer gelimiteerde en geprivilegieerde segmenten van de bevolking. En dit doet vragen rijzen over de duurzaamheid van het leveren van gezondheidszorg en wat kan genoemd worden een systematische tendens naar een groeiende ongelijkheid in gezondheidszorg. Deze tendens is duidelijk zichtbaar op het globale niveau, in het bijzonder wanneer verschillende continenten worden vergeleken. Maar die is ook aanwezig in de meer rijke landen, waar de toegang tot de gezondheidszorg meer afhankelijk dreigt te worden van de economische middelen van de individuen, eerder dan van hun actuele nood voor behandeling.

6

In de complexiteit die voortvloeit uit de invloed van deze verschillende factoren in de klinische praktijk, maar ook in de medische cultuur in het algemeen, moet het hoogste gebod van verantwoordelijke nabijheid zeker in gedachten worden gehouden, zoals we duidelijk zien in het Evangelie van de Barmhartige Samaritaan. (6) Het kan gesteld worden dat de categorische imperatief erin bestaat om nooit de zieken te verlaten. De angst verbonden met de situaties die ons brengen op de drempel van de menselijke sterfelijkheid en de moeilijkheid van de beslissing die we moeten nemen, kunnen ons ertoe brengen om ons te verwijderen van de patiënt. Maar het is daar, meer dan om het even waar, dat wij geroepen zijn om liefde en nabijheid te tonen, waarbij we de grens erkennen die we allen delen en om onze solidariteit te tonen. Laat ieder van ons liefde geven op zijn of haar manier – als een vader, een moeder, een zoon, een dochter, een broer, een zuster, een arts, een verpleegster. Maar laat ons ze geven! En zelfs als we weten dat we niet altijd heling of genezing kunnen garanderen, kunnen en moeten we altijd zorg dragen voor de levenden, zonder dat we zelf hun leven verkorten, maar ook zonder nutteloos hun dood tegen te gaan. Dat is de aanpak die in de palliatieve zorg aanwezig is, en die uiterst belangrijk blijkt te zijn in onze cultuur. Want die is tegenovergesteld aan wat de dood zeer

schrikwekkend en niet welkom maakt – pijn en eenzaamheid.

7

In democratische samenlevingen moeten deze gevoelige onderwerpen kalm, ernstig en bedachtzaam worden aangepakt, op een manier om in de mate van het mogelijke aanvaardde oplossingen te vinden, ook op juridisch vlak.

Eenzijds is er een nood om rekening te houden met de verschillende wereldvisies, ethische overtuigingen en religieuze affiliaties, in een klimaat van openheid en dialoog. Anderzijds kan de staat niet verzaken aan zijn plicht om allen die betrokken zijn te beschermen, door de fundamentele gelijkheid te verdedigen waarbij iedereen is erkend door de wet als een menselijk wezen dat leeft met anderen in de samenleving. Bijzondere aandacht moet besteed worden aan de meest kwetsbaren, die hulp nodig hebben om hun eigen belangen te verdedigen. Indien deze kern van waarden, die essentieel is voor het samenleven, verzwakt, zal de mogelijkheid om tot overeenstemming te komen omtrent die erkenning van de ander, die de voorwaarde is voor elke dialoog en het leven in gemeenschap, ook verloren gaan. Wetgeving inzake gezondheidszorg heeft ook deze brede visie nodig en een begrijpelijke kijk op wat daadwerkelijk het algemeen welzijn bevordert in elke concrete situatie.

8

In de hoop dat deze reflecties kunnen helpen, bied ik u mijn hartelijke goede wensen aan voor een serene en constructieve bijeenkomst. Ik vertrouw erop dat u de meest aangepaste manieren zult vinden om deze delicate onderwerpen te behandelen met een kijk op het welzijn van allen die u ontmoet en met diegenen met u werkt in uw veeleisend beroep.

Moge de Heer u zegenen en moge de Maagd Maria u beschermen.

Noten

1. Vgl. Paus Pius XII, Toespraak, Ook over de vraag naar het ontvangen van de Ziekenzalving in die omstandigheid, Le Dr. Bruno Haid – Tot anaesthesisten over het probleem van reanimatie (24 nov 1957)
2. Vgl. Congregatie voor de Geloofsleer, Verklaring over euthanasie, Iura et Bona (5 mei 1980). vgl. Congregatie voor de Geloofsleer, Verklaring omtrent euthanasie, 5 mei 1980, IV: Acta Apostolicae Sedis LXXII (1980), 542-552.
3. Congregatie voor de Geloofsleer, Verklaring over euthanasie, Iura et Bona (5 mei 1980), 4. **“De maat die men moet houden bij het gebruik van geneesmiddelen ”** In onze tijden is het van groot belang dat het ogenblik van de dood de waardigheid van de menselijke persoon en de christelijke betekenis van het leven intact laat, ...”
4. Catechismus-Compendium, Catechismus van de Katholieke Kerk (15 aug 1997), 2278. *“Het stopzetten van medische behandelingen die belastend zijn, gevaarlijk, buitengewoon of die niet in verhouding tot de verwachte resultaten staan, kan geoorloofd zijn. Dit is het afwijzen van “therapeutische koppigheid”. Men wil zo niet de dood bewerken; men aanvaardt dat*
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6. Vgl. Lc. 10, 25-37. *“DE BARMHARTIGE SAMARITAAN. Daar trad een wetgeleerde naar voren om Hem op de proef te stellen. Hij zei: ‘Meester, wat moet ik doen om het eeuwig leven te verwerven?’*

Vertaling: Patrick De Pooter

Overgenomen met toestemming van [R.K. Documenten](#)

Message of his holiness Pope Francis to the participants in the European Regional Meeting of the World Medical Association

To My Venerable Brother Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia President of the Pontifical Academy for Life

I extend my cordial greetings to you and to all the participants in the European Regional Meeting of the World Medical Association on end-of-life issues, held in the Vatican in conjunction with the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Your meeting will address questions dealing with the end of earthly life. They are questions that have always challenged humanity, but that today take on new forms by reason of increased knowledge and the development of new technical tools. The growing therapeutic capabilities of medical science have made it possible to eliminate many diseases, to improve health and to prolong people's life span. While these developments have proved quite positive, it has also become possible nowadays to extend life by means that were inconceivable in the past. Surgery and other medical interventions have become ever more effective, but they are not always beneficial: they can sustain, or even replace, failing vital functions, but that is not the same as promoting health. Greater wisdom is called for today, because of the temptation to insist on treatments that have powerful effects on the body, yet at times do not serve the integral good of the person.

Some sixty years ago, Pope Pius XII, in a memorable address to anaesthesiologists and intensive care specialists, stated that there is no obligation to have recourse in all circumstances to every possible remedy and that, in some specific cases, it is permissible to refrain from their use (cf. AAS XLIX [1957], 1027-1033). Consequently, it is morally licit to decide not to adopt therapeutic measures, or to discontinue them, when their use does not meet that ethical and humanistic standard that would later be called "due proportion in the use of remedies" (cf. [CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration on Euthanasia](#), 5 May 1980, IV: AAS LXXII [1980], 542-552). The specific element of this criterion is that it considers "the result that can be expected, taking into account the state of the sick person and his or her physical and moral resources" (ibid.). It thus makes possible a decision that is morally qualified as withdrawal of "overzealous treatment".

Such a decision responsibly acknowledges the limitations of our mortality, once it becomes clear that opposition to it is futile. "Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2278). This difference of perspective restores humanity to the accompaniment of the dying, while not attempting to justify the suppression of the living. It is clear that not adopting, or else suspending, disproportionate measures, means avoiding overzealous treatment; from an ethical standpoint, it is completely different from euthanasia, which is always wrong, in that the intent of euthanasia is to end life and cause death.

Needless to say, in the face of critical situations and in clinical practice, the factors that come into play are often difficult to evaluate. To determine whether a clinically appropriate medical intervention is actually proportionate, the mechanical application of a general rule is not sufficient. There needs to be a careful discernment of the moral object, the attending circumstances, and the intentions of those involved. In caring for and accompanying a given patient, the personal and relational elements in his or her life and death - which is after all the last moment in life - must be given a consideration befitting human dignity. In this process, the patient has the primary role. The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes this clear: "The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able" (loc. cit.). The patient, first and foremost, has the right, obviously in dialogue with medical professionals, to evaluate a proposed treatment and to judge its actual proportionality in his or her concrete case, and necessarily refusing it if such proportionality is judged lacking. That evaluation is not easy to make in today's medical context, where the doctor-patient relationship has become increasingly fragmented and medical care involves any number of technological and organizational aspects.

It should also be noted that these processes of evaluation are conditioned by the growing gap in healthcare possibilities resulting from the combination of technical and scientific capability and economic interests. Increasingly sophisticated and costly treatments are available to ever more limited and privileged segments of the population, and this raises questions about the sustainability of healthcare delivery and about what might be called a systemic tendency toward growing inequality in health care. This tendency is clearly visible at a global level, particularly when different continents are compared. But it is also present within the more wealthy countries, where access to healthcare risks being more dependent on individuals' economic resources than on their actual need for treatment.

In the complexity resulting from the influence of these various factors on clinical practice, but also on medical culture in general, the supreme commandment of responsible closeness, must be kept uppermost in mind, as we see clearly from the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37). It could be said that the categorical imperative is to never abandon the sick. The anguish associated with conditions that bring us to the threshold of human mortality, and the difficulty of the decision we have to make, may tempt us to step back from the patient. Yet this is where, more than anything else, we are called to show love and closeness, recognizing the limit that we all share and showing our solidarity. Let each of us give love in his or her own way—as a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a brother or sister, a doctor or a nurse. But give it! And even if we know that we cannot always guarantee healing or a cure, we can and must always care for the living, without ourselves shortening their life, but also without futilely resisting their death. This approach is reflected in palliative care, which is proving most important in our culture, as it opposes what makes death most terrifying and unwelcome—pain and loneliness.

Within democratic societies, these sensitive issues must be addressed calmly, seriously and thoughtfully, in a way open to finding, to the extent possible, agreed solutions, also on the legal level. On the one hand, there is a need to take into account differing world views, ethical convictions and religious affiliations, in a climate of openness and dialogue. On the other hand, the state cannot renounce its duty to protect all those involved, defending the fundamental equality whereby everyone is recognized under law as a human being living with others in society. Particular attention must be paid to the most vulnerable, who need help in defending their own interests. If this core of values essential to coexistence is weakened, the possibility of agreeing on that recognition of the other which is the condition for all dialogue and the very life of society will also be lost. Legislation on health care also needs this broad vision and a comprehensive view of what most effectively promotes the common good in each concrete situation.

In the hope that these reflections may prove helpful, I offer you my cordial good wishes for a serene and constructive meeting. I also trust that you will find the most appropriate ways of addressing these delicate issues with a view to the good of all those whom you meet and those with whom you work in your demanding profession.

May the Lord bless you and the Virgin Mary protect you.