



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE**

Clementine Hall

Monday, 25 June 2018 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to offer all of you my greetings, beginning with your President, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, whom I thank for his presentation of the programme of this General Assembly, in which the question of human life will be considered in relation to today's globalized world. I also greet Cardinal Sgreccia, who at ninety years of age is still youthful and enthusiastic in working for life. Thank you, Your Eminence, for all that you have done, and continue to do, in this area.

The wisdom that must inspire your approach to "human ecology" demands a consideration of the *ethical and spiritual quality of life at each of its phases*. Think of human life at its conception, human life growing in the womb, life newly born, life as a child, a teenager, an adult... Think of life that has grown old and is ready to pass away – and eternal life! Life that is family and community, life that prays and hopes. Life that is frail and sick, wounded, insulted, humiliated, marginalized and cast aside. All this is human life, the life of human persons who live on God's earth and share our common home with every living creature. In our life-science laboratories, we study life with instruments that enable us to explore life's physical, chemical and mechanical aspects. This activity is important and cannot be neglected, but it needs to be part of a broader and deeper perspective, one that concentrates specifically on human life – the life that entered this world with the miracle of speech and thought, affections and spirit. Today, it is fair to ask what attention the *human wisdom of life* receives from the natural sciences. What political culture inspires us to nurture and protect real human life? Life's finest work is giving birth to new persons, fostering their spiritual and creative qualities, introducing them into the love found in the family and the community, caring for weakness and hurt... to say nothing of initiating them into the life of God's children, in Jesus Christ.

When we give children over to poverty, the poor to hunger, the persecuted to war, and the elderly to abandonment, do we not ourselves do the “dirty work” of *death*? Where does this dirty work of death come from? It comes from *sin*. Evil tries to convince us that death is the end of everything, that we have come into this world by chance and that our fate is to end up in nothingness. If we exclude “the other” from our thinking, our lives become self-centred and a mere consumer commodity. Narcissus, who in ancient mythology loved only himself and ignored the good of others, is foolish but does not realize it. In a way, he is the source of that contagious spiritual virus that turns us into reflections in a mirror who see ourselves alone and nothing else. We become blind to life and its power – to life as a gift received from others, a gift that in turn must be passed on responsibly.

The *global vision of bioethics* that you have drawn from the Christian vision and are preparing to re-propose in the field of social ethics and worldwide humanism, will strive with greater commitment and rigour to break free from complicity with the dirty work of death that draws its strength from sin. It will be able to bring us back to the covenant with the grace that God has destined to be part of our lives. This bioethics will not begin with a consideration of sickness and death in order to reach an understanding of the meaning of life and the worth of the individual. Rather, it will begin with a profound belief in the *irrevocable dignity of the human person*, as loved by God – the dignity of *each* person, in *every* phase and condition of existence – as it seeks out those forms of love and care that are concerned for the vulnerability and frailty of each individual.

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

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

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

In the texts and instruction given in *Christian and ecclesiastical programmes of formation*, these themes of the ethics of human life will need to be given their proper place within a global anthropology, and not be confined to the limit-questions of morality and law. It is my hope that a conversion to the centrality of an integral human ecology, that is, of a harmonious and comprehensive understanding of the human condition, will find strong support and positive resonance in your work in the areas of intellectual, civic and religious life.

A global bioethics calls us to engage with wisdom in a profound and objective discernment of the *value of individual and community life*, which must be protected and promoted *even in the most difficult circumstances*. We also state strongly that, without the adequate support of a *responsible human closeness*, purely legal regulations and technical support cannot, by themselves, ensure conditions and relationships consonant with the dignity of the person. A vision of globalization that, left to its own devices, tends to increase and deepen inequalities, calls for an ethical response that promotes justice. Attention to social, economic, cultural and environmental factors that affect health is part of this commitment, and becomes a concrete way to implement the right of every people “to share, on a basis of equality and solidarity, in the enjoyment of goods intended for all.” (Saint John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei socialis*, 21).

Finally, the culture of life must look more deeply into the “serious question” of life’s “*ultimate destination*.” This means highlighting with greater clarity whatever directs man’s existence towards *a horizon that surpasses him*: each person is freely called “as a daughter or son to intimacy with God and a share in his happiness... The Church teaches that hope in a life to come does not take away from the importance of the duties of this life on earth, but rather adds to it by giving new motives for fulfilling those duties” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 21). We need to question more deeply the ultimate purpose of life, in a way that makes us capable of restoring dignity and meaning to the mystery of its deepest and most sacred affections. Human life, beautiful beyond words yet frightfully fragile, points us beyond ourselves. We *are* infinitely more than *what we can do* by ourselves. Yet human life is also incredibly tenacious, certainly due to some mysterious grace from on high, in its bold invocation of justice and the final victory of love. And capable too – as it

hopes against all hope – of sacrificing for life to the very end. Acknowledging and appreciating this faithfulness and dedication to life gives rise in us to gratitude and a sense of responsibility, and it encourages us to offer our knowledge and our experience generously to the whole human community. Christian wisdom must re-propose, with passion and boldness, that *the human race is destined to life in God*, who has promised to open to the love of life, beyond death, the infinite horizon of loving bodies of light, where tears will be no more. And to amaze them eternally with the unfading beauty of all those “visible and invisible” things hidden in the womb of the Creator. Thank you.