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Audience with participants in the 23rd General Assembly of the Members of the Pontifical Academy for Life

At midday today, in the Synod Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the 23rd General Assembly of the members of the Pontifical Academy for Life, underway in the Vatican from 5 to 6 October 2017, and organised as part of a workshop on the theme: *Accompanying life. New responsibilities in the technological era*.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Excellency,
Illustrious Ladies and gentlemen,

I am glad to meet you on the occasion of your annual Plenary Session, and I thank Msgr. Paglia for his greeting and his introduction. I am grateful to you for the contribution you offer and which, with the passage of time, reveals ever more clearly its value both in the advancement of scientific, anthropological and ethical knowledge, and in the service of life, in particular the care for human life and for creation, our common home.

The theme of this session of yours, "Accompanying life. New responsibilities in the technological era", is demanding yet at the same time necessary. It faces the interconnected opportunities and critical issues that appeal to global humanism, with reference to the recent technological developments of life sciences. The power of biotechnologies, which now permit manipulations of life that were unthinkable until now, poses formidable questions.

It is therefore urgent to intensify the study and exchange on the effects of such evolution of society in a technological sense to articulate an anthropological synthesis able to face this epochal challenge. The area of your qualified counsel can thus no longer be limited to the resolution of questions posed by specific situations of

ethical, social or legal conflict. The inspiration for conduct consistent with the dignity of the human person regards the theory and practice of science and technology in its overall positioning in relation to life, to its meaning and value. It is precisely from this point of view that I wish to offer you my reflection today.

1. The human creature seems today to find himself in a special passage in history in which, in the ancient yet ever new questions on the meaning of human life, its origins and its destiny, encounter each other in an unprecedented context.

The emblematic feature of this passage may be recognised, in short, in the rapid spread of a culture obsessively focused on the sovereignty of man – as species and as individual – in relation to reality. There are those who speak of *egomania*, of a very real cult of the self, on whose altar everything is sacrificed, including the dearest affections. This perspective is not harmless: it forms a subject who continually looks in the mirror, to the point of being unable to see eyes on others and on the world. The spread of this attitude has very grave consequences for all affections and bonds in life (cf. *Laudato si'*, 48).

Naturally this does not mean denying or reducing the legitimacy of individual aspiration to a quality of life and the importance of economic resources and technical means that may favour it. However, one cannot ignore the reckless materialism that characterises the alliance between economics and technology, which treats life like a resource to be exploited or discarded for power or profit.

Unfortunately, men, women and children from every part of the world experience with bitterness and pain the illusory promises of this technocratic materialism. Also because, in contradiction to the propaganda of a wellbeing that would automatically spread with the broadening of the market, we instead see the enlargement of the territories of poverty and conflict, rejection and abandonment, resentment and desperation. Authentic scientific and technological progress should instead inspire more humane policies.

Christian faith urges us to take the initiative, rejecting any concession to nostalgia and lamentation. Besides, the Church has a vast tradition of generous and enlightened minds, which have opened up the roads for science and knowledge of their age. The world needs believers who, with seriousness and joy, are creative and proactive, humble and courageous, resolutely determined to repair the fractures between generations. This fracture interrupts the transmission of life. We exalt the inspiring possibilities of youth, but who guides the young to the fulfilment of adult life? The adult condition is a life capable of responsibility and love, both towards the future generation and towards the past. The life of fathers and mothers in advanced age should be honoured for what it has generously given, not discarded for what it no longer has.

2. The source of inspiration for this resumption of initiative, yet again, is the *Word of God*, which illuminates the origin of life and its destiny.

A theology of Creation and Redemption able to translate into the words and gestures of love for every life and for all life would appear today to be more necessary than ever to accompany the path of the Church in the world in which we now live. The encyclical *Laudato si'* is like a manifesto for this resumption of God and man's outlook on the world, starting from the great account of revelation offered to us in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. It says that each one of us is a creature *wanted and loved by God for itself*, not only as an aggregate of cells, well-organised and selected through the course of the evolution of life. The whole of creation is as inscribed in the special love of God for the human being, which extends to all the generations of mothers, fathers, and their children.

The divine blessing of the origin and promise of an eternal destiny, which are the foundation of the dignity of every life, are of all and for all. The men, women and children of the earth – this is what populations are made of – are the life of the world that God loves and wishes to bring to salvation, excluding no-one.

The biblical account of Creation must always be reread anew, to appreciate all the breadth and depth of the gesture of love of God Who entrusts creation and history of the world to the alliance of man and woman.

This covenant is certainly sealed by the union of love, personal and fruitful, that marks the way of the transmission of life through marriage and the family. However, it goes well beyond this seal. The alliance of man and woman is called to take into its hands the guidance of all society. This is an invitation to responsibility for the world, in culture and politics, in work and in the economy; and also in the Church. It does not mean simply equal opportunities or mutual recognition. It means, above all, the understanding between men and women on the meaning of life and the path of peoples. The man and woman are not called upon solely to speak of love, but to speak with love of what they must do to ensure that human coexistence is realised in the light of God's love for every creature. To speak and to ally, because neither of the two – neither man by himself, nor woman alone – is able to assume this responsibility. Together they were created, in their blessed difference; together they sinned, for their presumption to supplant God; and together, with the grace of Christ, they return to God's presence, to honour the care of the world and of history that He entrusted to them.

3. In short, it is a true cultural revolution that is on the horizon in the history of our time. And the Church, first, must do her part.

From this perspective, it means first and foremost honestly acknowledging delays and shortcomings. The forms of subordination that have sadly marked the history of women must be definitively abandoned. A new beginning must be inscribed in the *ethos* of peoples, and this must make it into a renewed culture of identity and difference. The recently-advanced hypothesis of reopening the way for the dignity of the person by radically neutralising sexual difference and, therefore, the understanding between man and woman, is not right. Instead of counteracting the negative interpretations of sexual difference, which mortify its irreducible value for human dignity, it seeks in effect to cancel out such difference, proposing techniques and practices that make it irrelevant for the development of the person and for human relationships. But the utopia of the "neutral" removes both the human dignity of the sexually different constitution, and the personal quality of the generative transmission of life. The biological and psychical manipulation of sexual difference, which biomedical technology allows us to perceive as completely available to free choice – which it is not! – thus risks dismantling the source of energy that nurtures the alliance between man and woman and which renders it creative and fruitful.

The mysterious bond of the *creation of the world* with the *generation of the Son*, which is revealed in the Son Who makes Himself man in the womb of Mary – Mother of Jesus, Mother of God – for our love, will never cease to leave us awed and moved. This revelation definitively illuminates the mystery of being and the meaning of life. The image of generation radiates, from here, a *profound wisdom on life*. Inasmuch as it is received as a gift, life is exalted in the gift: *generating it regenerates us*, spending it enriches us.

It is necessary to accept the challenge posed by the intimidation of the generation of human life, almost as if it were a mortification of the woman and a threat to collective wellbeing.

The generative alliance of man and woman is a safeguard for the global humanism of men and women, not a handicap. Our history will not be renewed if we deny this truth.

4. The passion for the accompaniment of and care for life, throughout its entire individual and social lifespan, requires the rehabilitation of an *ethos* of compassion or tenderness for the generation and regeneration of the human being in its difference.

It means, first and foremost, rediscovering the sensibility for the *various ages of life*, in particular those of *children and the elderly*. All that is in them that is delicate and fragile, vulnerable and corruptible, is not a matter that ought to concern exclusively the fields of medicine and wellbeing. There are at stake parts of the soul and of human sensibility that demand to be listened to and recognised, conserved and appreciated, by individuals and community alike. A society in which all of this can only be bought and sold, bureaucratically regulated and technically predisposed, is a society that has already lost the meaning of life. It will not transmit it to young children, nor will it accord it to elderly parents. This is why, almost without realising, we now build cities that are increasingly hostile to children and communities that are ever less hospitable to the elderly, with walls with neither doors nor windows: they ought to protect but instead they suffocate.

The witness of faith in *God's mercy*, which refines and fulfils all justice, is the essential condition for the circulation of true compassion between different generations. Without it, the culture of the secular city has no chance of resisting the anaesthesia and debasement of humanism.

It is on this new horizon that I see the mission of the renewed Pontifical Academy for Life. I understand that it is difficult, but it is also exciting. I am sure that there is no lack of men and women of good will, as well as scholars of different orientations with regard to religion and with different anthropological and ethical visions of the world, who share the need to restore a more authentic wisdom of life to the attention of the people, with a view to the common good. An open and fruitful dialogue can and must be established with the many who care about the search for valid reasons for the life of man.

The Pope, and all the Church, are grateful to you for the commitment you undertake to honour. The responsible accompaniment of human life, from conception and throughout its entire course, up to its natural end, is a task of discernment and intelligence of love for free and impassioned men and women, for pastors and not for mercenaries. May God bless your aim of supporting them with science and awareness of which you are capable. Thank you, and do not forget to pray for me.
