



Since the beginning of his papacy 13 March 2013, Pope Francis has brought his own unique gifts and emphasis to the Church. What is the vision that our Holy Father is giving us for Respect Life work? If one only reads Francis through what is reported of him in the world, we are likely to receive a distorted view. There is indeed a kind of “virtual Pope Francis” that has been created in the minds of many, compared to who Pope Francis is.

Should We Speak Up?

Four months into his papacy Francis was asked in an interview:

Patricia Zorzan: Speaking on behalf of the Brazilians: society has changed, young people have changed, and in Brazil we have seen a great many young people. You did not speak about abortion, about same-sex marriage. In Brazil a law has been approved which widens the right to abortion and permits marriage between people of the same sex. Why did you not speak about this?

Pope Francis: **The Church has already spoken quite clearly on this. It was unnecessary to return to it,** just as I didn't speak about cheating, lying, or other matters on which the Church has a clear teaching!

Patricia Zorzan: But the young are interested in this ...

Pope Francis: Yes, though it wasn't necessary to speak of it, but rather of the positive things that open up the path to young people. Isn't that right! Besides, young people know perfectly well what the Church's position is.

Patricia Zorzan: What is Your Holiness' position, if we may ask?

Pope Francis: The position of the Church. **I am a son of the Church.**

(Apostolic Journey to Rio de Janeiro on the Occasion of the XXVIII World Youth Day, Press Conference of Pope Francis during the Return Flight, 28 July 2013)

Clearly Francis adheres to the Church with regard to pro-life issues, but he hasn't always chosen to speak on certain hard teachings of the Church that the culture of death opposes. Why is that?

“We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible. I have not spoken much about these things, and I was reprimanded for that. But **when we speak about these issues, we have to talk about them in a context.** The teaching of the church, for that matter, is clear and I am a son of the church, but it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time.”

(Interview with Pope Francis, Antonio Spadaro, S.J., editor in chief of La Civiltà Cattolica, the Italian Jesuit journal, 21 September 2013)

He says we don't have to talk about these things all the time. If we take that out of context we might think we should never talk about abortion. But that is not so. Reading Pope Benedict helps clarify:

“I remember, when I used to go to Germany in the 1980s and '90s, that I was asked to give interviews and I always knew the questions in advance. They concerned the ordination of women, contraception, abortion and other such constantly recurring problems.

“If we let ourselves be drawn into these discussions, the Church is then identified with certain commandments and prohibitions. **We give the impression that we are moralists with a few antiquated convictions and not even a hint of the true greatness of the faith appears.** I therefore consider it essential

always to highlight the greatness of our faith, a commitment from which we must not allow such situations to divert us.”

(Benedict XVI, Address at the Conclusion of the Meeting of the Holy Father with the Bishops of Switzerland, 9 November 2006)

There is a misconception that the Church is a church of rules. If we only talk about morality, though it is true, we give others no context for choosing to live their life differently. We always have to be pro-life, but if people don't know there is a God that loves them, the morality that is a consequence of His love will be difficult for them to accept. Only Christ is the reason to change. When we talk in a very secular world, we must bring them the core of the gospel: God loves you, he has a plan for you, he wants you to be happy. He even came to die for you, he has sent the Holy Spirit to help you in your life. These are very important moral issues, but when we are out in the world, we need to bring them also the heart of the gospel.

Proclamation in a missionary style focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things: this is also what fascinates and attracts more, what makes the heart burn, as it did for the disciples at Emmaus. We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel. ... There is nothing more solid, deep and sure than this proclamation. Then you have to do catechesis. Then you can draw even a moral consequence.

(Interview with Pope Francis, Antonio Spadaro, S.J., editor in chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Italian Jesuit journal, 21 September 2013)

Yes, there is constant pressure around us from a world that wants to do away with faith and morality. Even the pope can feel it.

Do you feel pressured?

“There is pressure. ... And afterwards, there are the problems they create for you, with what I said or didn't say ... The mass media also grab a word from over there and take it out of context. [gave example of speaking to the elderly and subsequent reports the Pope is ill] ... There is nothing you can do against that enemy.”

(Pope Francis, Interview with Argentinian Journalist Juan Berretta, 24 May 2015)

But this pressure cannot prevent us from speaking out, as our Holy Father himself has, as we will soon see.

Even as he insists that we begin our proclamation with the Gospel, in his exhortation on evangelization, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he included a significant passage on abortion and the value of the human person.

213. Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are **unborn children, the most defenceless and innocent among us**. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. Frequently, as a way of ridiculing the Church's effort to defend their lives, attempts are made to present her position as ideological, obscurantist and conservative. Yet this **defence of unborn life is closely linked to the defence of each and every other human right**. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defence of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. Reason alone is sufficient to recognize the inviolable value of each single human life, but if we also look at the issue from the standpoint of faith, “every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offence against the creator of the individual”. [176]

214. Precisely because this involves the internal consistency of our message about the value of the human person, **the Church cannot be expected to change her position on this question**. I want to be completely honest

in this regard. This is not something subject to alleged reforms or “modernizations”. It is not “progressive” to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life. On the other hand, it is also true that we have done little to adequately accompany women in very difficult situations, where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish, especially when the life developing within them is the result of rape or a situation of extreme poverty. Who can remain unmoved before such painful situations?

(Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 213-214, 24 November 2013)

The fundamental message that stands behind why abortion is wrong is the value of the human person.

Value of the Human Person

Every person we meet has been made in the image and likeness of God. God’s plan for them is to be baptized and receive the sacraments as his beloved sons and daughters. Even those we strongly dislike, those who disagree with us and even hate us back, we are to love as our brothers and sisters. Consider, Francis says, that the first crime was brother against brother!

“The first sin, the original sin, according to Genesis, was Adam and Eve’s disobedience. They sinned by violating their relationship with God their Creator when they tried to place themselves above God. The second sin was Cain’s violation of his relationship with Abel. Out of jealousy, he murdered his brother. The first crime, therefore, was fratricide. Every taking of an innocent life – whether it is called abortion, murder, or euthanasia – whether it is called crime or starvation or war – is, in fact, fratricide, is it not? How can we fail to recognize that we are brothers and sisters, since we all have the same Father? How can we fail to recognize that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our brother? By his Cross and Resurrection, he repaired a broken humanity and continually offers everyone the promise of salvation!”

(Press Conference Presenting the Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 47th World Day of Peace, 1 January 2014, 12 December 2013)

Every taking of innocent human life is a continuation of that first crime of brother against brother. Pope Francis has great concern for every human person as members of the human family. That is why Francis speaks about the poor so often, calling us to see their worth. As we are loved, they are loved. We have worth, they have worth. It is only out of this fundamental understanding that we are each brothers and sisters of a loving Father, that we can begin to see through our inadequate solutions and the sinfulness and selfness of the world.

And the Holy Father can become quite passionate about this. For example, consider these off-the-cuff words:

“I will have this address distributed to you and permit myself to say a few things that are in my heart and that the words of His Eminence [Cardinal Erdo] have brought to the surface. What has happening today in Europe? What is going on in the heart of our mother Europe? Is she still our mother Europe, or grandma Europe? Is she still fertile? Has she fallen into sterility?...

“Cardinal Erdo talked about the discarding of children and the elderly. And it’s true. But now there is also the discarding of a whole generation of young people. I don’t know if it is only in Europe, or in Europe and in the developed countries, that there is talk of 75 million from the age of twenty-five and down. But it’s a whole generation. ... Europe has discarded its children. A bit triumphantly. I remember that when I was studying in one country the clinics that did abortions then prepared everything to send it to cosmetic factories ... Makeup made with the blood of innocents. And this was something to brag about, because it was progressive: the rights of the women, the woman has the right over her body.

“I don’t know about here in Italy, I don’t want to say because I’m not sure, but what will happen when the state is unable to pay the pensions because there aren’t enough young people working ... And the elderly – I’ve said this about Latin America, about my country, but I believe it’s a universal problem or of many countries or some other continents – the elderly are discarded with stealth euthanasia. The social services cover medical treatment up to a point, and then you’re on your own!

“A Europe weary with disorientation. And I don’t want to be a pessimist, but let’s tell the truth: after food, clothing, and medicine, what are the most important expenditures? Cosmetics and ... little animals [pets]. They don’t have children, but their affection goes to the little cat, to the little dog. And this is the second expenditure after the three main ones. The third is the whole industry to promote sexual pleasure. So it’s food, medicine, clothing, cosmetics, little animals, and the life of pleasure. Our young people feel this. They see this, they live this.”

(Pope Francis, Off-the-Cuff Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Council of the Bishops’ Conferences of Europe, CCEE, 3 October 2014 [NB: Since these words were not in the official text, they cannot be found in the published version on the Vatican Website, but rather were transcribed by one who was present.]

One can hear his concern for the whole generation that has been discarded before birth, and for especially the young who must grow up in a disoriented world. He has also pointed out the contradictions inherent in a world that recognizes the value of only some people rather than all.

“Curiously,” some countries have very strict laws even punishing fathers or mothers who spank their children, but at the same time “have laws allowing them to kill their children before they are born. Those are the contradictions we live with now.”

“Pero curiosamente esos paises, que incluso castigan al padre o a la madre que le pega al menor, tienen leyes que les permiten matar a los chicos antes de que nazcan. Esas son las contradicciones que vivimos ahora.”

[This is from a section of the interview that was not published, but is in the full transcript. That is why the original language is given. He said this in response to question about a story he told in a General Audience, 20 May 2015, when he was disciplined by his teacher and mother in the fourth grade for saying a bad word.]

(Pope Francis, Interview with Argentinian Journalist Juan Berretta, 24 May 2015)

Instead every person has a fundamental right to life.

“We know that human life is sacred and inviolable. Every civil right rests on the recognition of the first and fundamental right, that of life, which is not subordinate to any condition, be it quantitative, economic or, least of all, ideological.”

“One of the gravest risks our epoch faces, amid the opportunities offered by a market equipped with every technological innovation, is the divorce between economics and morality, the basic ethical norms of human nature are increasingly neglected. It is therefore necessary to express the strongest possible opposition to every direct attack on life, especially against the innocent and defenseless, and the unborn in a mother’s womb is the example of innocence par excellence. Let us remember the words of the Second Vatican Council: “Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes” (Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, n. 51).

“We spoke of children: there are so many! But I would also like to speak about their grandparents, the other side of life! Because we must also take care of our grandparents, for both babies and grandparents are the hope of a people: children and young people because they will carry it forward, they will carry the people forward; and grandparents, because they have the wisdom of history, they are the memory of a people. To protect life in an age when babies and grandparents enter this “throw-away” culture and become thought of as disposable material. No! Children and grandparents are the hope of a people!”

(Address of Pope Francis to the Italian Pro-Life Movement, 11 April 2014)

Throw-Away Culture

We have heard our culture referred to as a “culture of death” and now Pope Francis has added another image: the throw-away culture.

“The youth become part of the throwaway culture and all of us know that today, in this empire of the god money, things are thrown away and people are thrown away, children are thrown away, because they are unwanted, because they kill them before they are born, the elderly are thrown away – I’m speaking of the world in general – because they don’t produce anymore. In some countries there is legal euthanasia, but in so many others there is a hidden, covered up euthanasia. ... This throwaway culture is doing damage to all of us; it always takes away hope. ... Hope endures suffering, it’s hardworking, it’s fruitful, it gives us work and it saves us from the throwaway culture. ... We began with the word hope and I want to conclude with another word ... the culture of encounter. Please do not have an ‘un-encounter’ among us. Let us go accompanying each other ...”

(Pope Francis, Off-the-Cuff Address to Youth, Cuba, 20 September 2015)

“How many women and men religious consume – and I repeat the verb, consume – their lives caressing ‘rubbish,’ caressing those that the world throws away, that the world despises, that the world wishes didn’t exist, those who the world today – with methods and new analyses that we have, when it’s foreseen that one can come with a degenerative illness, it’s proposed to ‘send them back’ before they’re born. The smallest.”

(Pope Francis, Off-the-Cuff Homily at Vespers with Priests and Religious, Cuba, 20 September 2015)

“The predominant school of thought sometimes leads to “false compassion” which holds that it is a benefit to women to promote abortion; an act of dignity to perform euthanasia; a scientific breakthrough to “produce” a child, considered as a right rather than a gift to be welcomed; or to using human lives as laboratory animals, allegedly in order to save others. Instead, the compassion of the Gospel is what accompanies us in times of need, that compassion of the Good Samaritan, who “sees”, “has compassion”, draws near and provides concrete help (cf. Lk 10:33). Your mission as doctors places you in daily contact with so many forms of suffering. I encourage you to take them on as “Good Samaritans”, caring in a special way for the elderly, the infirm and the disabled. Faithfulness to the Gospel of life and respect for life as a gift from God sometimes require brave choices that go against the current, which in particular circumstances may become points of conscientious objection. This faithfulness brings with it many social consequences. We are living in a time of experimentation with life. But it is harmful experimentation. Making children, rather than accepting them as a gift, as I said. Playing with life. Be careful, because this is a sin against the Creator: against God the Creator, who created things this way. Many times in my life as a priest, I have heard objections. “Tell me, why, for example, does the Church oppose abortion? Is it a religious problem?” — “No, no. It’s not a religious problem” — “Is it a philosophical problem?” — “No, it’s not a philosophical problem”. It is a scientific problem, because there is a human life there and it is not licit to eliminate a human life to resolve a problem. “But no, the modern school of thought...”. — “Listen, in the old and the modern schools of thought, the word kill means the same thing!”. The same is true for euthanasia. We all know that with so many elderly people in this throw-away culture, euthanasia is being performed in secret. There is also another. And this is saying to God: “No, I will end life, as I see fit”. A sin against God the Creator: think hard about this.

(Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Commemorative Conference of the Italian Catholic Physicians’ Association on the Occasion of its 70th Anniversary of Foundation, 15 November 2014)

It is often within the context of talking about a culture that is willing to throw away people in order to live a certain way that Pope Francis will discuss abortion or contraception. Contraception and abortion are considered good and necessary by the world out of fear that the number of humans on earth is harmful to our world.

“I have heard it said by some that families with many children and the birth of many children are among the causes of poverty. That opinion seems simplistic to me. I can say, we can all say, that the main cause of poverty is an economic system that excludes, always excludes: excludes children, the elderly, young people, the unemployed ... and that creates the throw-away culture we live in. We are accustomed to seeing people discarded. This is the main cause of poverty, not large families.”

(General Audience, 21 January 2015)

50. Instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate. At times, developing countries face forms of international pressure which make economic assistance contingent on certain policies of “reproductive health”. ... To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized...

123. ... In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs, what limits can be placed on human trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds and the fur of endangered species? Is it not the same relativistic logic which justifies buying the organs of the poor for resale or use in experimentation, or eliminating children because they are not what their parents wanted? This same “use and throw away” logic generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary.

(Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'* On Care for Our Common Home, 50, 117, 120, 123, 136, 24 May 2015)

Abortion and contraception is not a solution to poverty but another manifestation of the same evil: certain people denying the worth of others, often linked to a selfishness of a specific life-style. A great concern for the Pope is the imposition of such ideas by wealthy countries upon poorer countries, through, for example, refusal to give assistance unless they accept things like abortion, contraception and gender theory. This Francis calls “ideological colonization,” a topic he has referenced so much that it deserves separate consideration.

Integral Ecology

That last set of quotes comes from Pope Francis’ “environmental” encyclical. Often those who have great concern for environmental issues at the same time support abortion, as they view humans as part of the problem. Francis, on the contrary, is clear that an integral ecology includes the human person. The human person is not the problem, but the formulator of the solution.

117. Neglecting to monitor the harm done to nature and the environmental impact of our decisions is only the most striking sign of a disregard for the message contained in the structures of nature itself. When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.

120. Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion. How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties? “If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of the new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away”.[97]

136. On the other hand, it is troubling that, when some ecological movements defend the integrity of the environment, rightly demanding that certain limits be imposed on scientific research, they sometimes fail to apply those same principles to human life. There is a tendency to justify transgressing all boundaries when experimentation is carried out on living human embryos. We forget that the inalienable worth of a human being transcends his or her degree of development. In the same way, when technology disregards the great ethical principles, it ends up considering any practice whatsoever as licit. As we have seen in this chapter, a technology severed from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power.

(Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'* On Care for Our Common Home, 50, 117, 120, 123, 136, 24 May 2015)

Concern for Women

Often pro-choice supporters try to claim that pro-lifers are anti-woman. This is certainly not the case, for we see both the woman and unborn child as having the same worth and dignity, deserving of life. Francis recognizes the damage that abortion does to the women who feel pressured by difficult situations to make that choice.

“Abortion compounds the grief of many women who now carry with them deep physical and spiritual wounds after succumbing to the pressures of a secular culture which devalues God’s gift of sexuality and the right to life of the unborn. In addition, the rate of separation and divorce is high, even in many Christian families, and children frequently do not grow up in a stable home environment. We also observe with great concern, and can only deplore, an increase in violence against women and children. All these realities threaten the sanctity of marriage, the stability of life in the home and consequently the life of society as a whole. In this sea of difficulties, we bishops and priests must give a consistent witness to the moral teaching of the Gospel. I am confident that you will not weaken in your resolve to teach the truth “in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2), sustained by prayer and discernment, and always with great compassion.”

(Pope Francis’ remarks to the Bishops of South Africa, Botswana, and Swaziland, 25 April 2014)

In this Year of Mercy it was of great importance to Francis that those women, suffering from the pain of having made such a choice, be able to encounter Christ and receive his forgiveness.

“One of the serious problems of our time is clearly the changed relationship with respect to life. A widespread and insensitive mentality has led to the loss of the proper personal and social sensitivity to welcome new life. The tragedy of abortion is experienced by some with a superficial awareness, as if not realizing the extreme harm that such an act entails. Many others, on the other hand, although experiencing this moment as a defeat, believe that they have no other option. I think in particular of all the women who have resorted to abortion. I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope. The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it. May priests fulfil this great task by expressing words of genuine welcome combined with a reflection that explains the gravity of the sin committed, besides indicating a path of authentic conversion by which to obtain the true and generous forgiveness of the Father who renews all with his presence.”

(Pope Francis, Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization at the approach of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, 1 September 2015)

In the Omaha Archdiocese priests already had such permission, but his letter does highlight the truth that abortion is a grave sin that requires the reception of God’s mercy.

We need to continue to support ways to assist mothers in difficult situations so that they feel they have the freedom to bring their child into the world. A child ought not be a cause of distress for the mother, but a sign of hope.

“And here, an image comes to me. During the Wednesday audiences, when I pass by to greet the people, so many women gesture to their belly and tell me, ‘Father will you bless him or her?’ I am going to suggest something: All you women who are pregnant with hope -- because a child is hope -- in this moment, place your hand on your belly. If there are pregnant women here, you do it, and those who are listening through

radio or television. And **to each of these women, to each boy or girl who is there inside waiting, I give my blessing.** So each one, touch your belly, and I give you the blessing, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And I hope that he or she arrives healthy, that he or she grows up well, that you can raise him or her. Give a caress to the child that you are awaiting.”

(Pope Francis, Off-the-Cuff Remarks during Address to Families in Cuba, 22 September 2015)

Visit to the United States

Some are disappointed in Francis’ silence on the pro-life issues when he visited the United States. I must admit being confused why he spent so much time speaking on environmental related topics when he spoke to political leaders and not as much on preaching Jesus Christ as he has told us to do – begin with the core of the gospel. Yet we do find brief references to the dignity of every human person interspersed throughout his speeches and encounters.

“I appreciate the unfailing commitment of the Church in America to **the cause of life and that of the family, which is the primary reason for my present visit.** ...

“I encourage you, then, to confront the challenging issues of our time. Ever present within each of them is life as gift and responsibility. The future freedom and dignity of our societies depends on how we face these challenges.

“**The innocent victim of abortion,** children who die of hunger or from bombings, immigrants who drown in the search for a better tomorrow, the elderly or the sick who are considered a burden, the victims of terrorism, wars, violence and drug trafficking, the environment devastated by man’s predatory relationship with nature – at stake in all of this is the gift of God, of which we are noble stewards but not masters. It is wrong, then, to look the other way or to remain silent. No less important is the Gospel of the Family, which in the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia I will emphatically proclaim together with you and the entire Church.

(Pope Francis, Address to US Bishops, Washington, D.C., 23 September 2015)

“Let us remember the Golden Rule: ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ (Mt 7:12). ... The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to **protect and defend human life at every stage of its development.** ...

“I will end my visit to your country in Philadelphia, where I will take part in the World Meeting of Families. It is my wish that throughout my visit the family should be a recurrent theme. How essential the family has been to the building of this country!

“And how worthy it remains of our support and encouragement! Yet I cannot hide my concern for the family, which is threatened, perhaps as never before, from within and without. Fundamental relationships are being called into question, as is the very basis of marriage and the family. I can only reiterate the importance and, above all, the richness and the beauty of family life.

“In particular, **I would like to call attention to those family members who are the most vulnerable, the young.** ... At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future. Yet this same culture presents others with so many options that they too are dissuaded from starting a family.”

(Pope Francis, Address to the US Congress, Washington, D.C., 24 September 2015)

“**I thank the most important people who are here: the children.** I want to ask God to bless you. Lord, Father of all, bless this people, bless each one of them, bless families, give them what they need. I ask all of you to pray for me.”

(Pope Francis, Address to People Gathered at the National Mall, Washington, D.C., 24 September 2015; Spoken in presence of Vice President Biden, Speaker of the House Boehner, and members of Congress)

“These pillars of integral human development have a common **foundation, which is the right to life** and, more generally, what we could call the right to existence of human nature itself.

“The ecological crisis, and the large-scale destruction of biodiversity, can threaten the very existence of the human species. The baneful consequences of an irresponsible mismanagement of the global economy, guided only by ambition for wealth and power, must serve as a summons to a forthright reflection on man: ‘man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. **Man does not create himself.** He is spirit and will, but also nature’ (Benedict XVI, Address to the Bundestag, 22 September 2011, cited in *Laudato Si’*, 6). Creation is compromised ‘where we ourselves have the final word... The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any instance above ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves’ (Benedict XVI, Address to the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, 6 August 2008, cited *ibid.*). Consequently, the defence of the environment and the fight against exclusion **demand that we recognize a moral law written into human nature itself, one which includes the natural difference between man and woman (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 155), and absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions (cf. *ibid.*, 123, 136).**

“Without the recognition of certain incontestable natural ethical limits and without the immediate implementation of those pillars of integral human development, the ideal of ‘saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war’ (Charter of the United Nations, Preamble), and ‘promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom’ (*ibid.*), risks becoming an unattainable illusion, or, even worse, idle chatter which serves as a cover for all kinds of abuse and corruption, or for carrying out an **ideological colonization** by the imposition of anomalous models and lifestyles which are alien to people’s identity and, in the end, irresponsible. ...

“The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and **respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable** because they are only considered as part of a statistic. This common home of all men and women must also be built on the understanding of a certain sacredness of created nature.”

(Pope Francis, Address to the United Nations General Assembly, 25 September 2015)

We do see brief references to the respect for and sacredness of human life at every stage of development, warnings against redefining ourselves and imposing ideological colonizations, and the importance of children and the family. Certainly we are free to wonder if he should have been stronger and more explicit in his words.

Encouragement

We end with some words of encouragement Pope Francis has given to those involved in pro-life work.

“Your service in favor of the human person is important and encouraging. In fact, **the protection of life represents a critical task**, especially in a society marked by the negative logic of discarding. ... **The love of Christ urges us** (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14) to become servants of the small ones and the elderly, of every man and woman, through which the primordial right to life is recognized and protected. ... The degree of progress of a civilization is measured by its ability to protect life, especially in its most fragile stages, rather than by the spread of technological means. When we speak of man, let us never forget that attacks on the sacredness of human life. **The scourge of abortion is an attack on life.** ...”

(Pope Francis, Address to the Science and Life Association, 30 May 2015)

“I encourage you to continue in this important work in favour of life from conception to natural death ...

“**Never tire of working to protect the most vulnerable people, who have the right to be born to life**, as well as for the many who ask for a healthier and more dignified existence. There is a particular need for work at different levels and with perseverance, for the promotion and defence of the family, society’s first resource, especially in reference to the gift of children and affirming the dignity of women.”

(Address to Participants in the Italian Convention of Pro-Life Movements, 6 November 2015)