

PRESENTING THE JOHN-PAUL II ACADEMY FOR HUMAN LIFE AND FAMILY (JHRLF)

By Josef Seifert, President
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In October 2017, a new JOHN PAUL II ACADEMY FOR HUMAN LIFE AND THE FAMILY (JHRLF) has been set up to serve the same goals as the original Pontifical Academy for Life, founded 1994 by Saint Pope John-Paul II for the interdisciplinary study and defense of human life in all its stages. (1)

Already in 1981, Pope John Paul II had founded a Pontifical Institute of Marriage and Family, to study the cradle of human life: marriage and the family. JHRLF will take up the study both of human life and of marriage and the human family.

It has been founded by a few former members of the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV) including a former Professor of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family.

Jointly with a change of the statutes of the PAV effected by Pope Francis in 2016, it had pleased His Holiness to dismiss all members of the previous PAV in order to create a new Academy for Life. Some of the members of the original PAV have been reappointed in the new PAV for terms of maximally 5 years, others not.

But as we, members who have not been reappointed, most of whom have been ordinary PAV members (*ad vitam*), have made a commitment to promote the lofty goals of the PAV Saint Pope John Paul II established in order to unfold the splendor of truth about life and family, we feel a strong calling to live our commitment to life and family by founding this new lay Academy.

While the founding members and most other members of the JHRLF are believing Catholics who were and are deeply committed to the PAV and its goals, as formulated by Saint John Paul II, and expressed in its original statutes and Oath, and wish to render, by this new Academy, a service to the Catholic Church's Magisterium and to the Catholic faithful, the ACADEMY is a lay non-governmental organization that will remain independent of civil and religious organizations.

The Catholics united in this new Academy are fully faithful to the authentic Magisterium and perennial doctrine of the Catholic Church. They also fully acknowledge that the teaching authority of the Catholic Church does not only extend to the revealed truths that no man could know without God's Revelation

and without faith, but also to many metaphysical, anthropological, and ethical truths open to the understanding of human reason. Yet, while Catholic members of this Academy fully submit, by an obedience of faith, to the entire deposit of faith and moral doctrine the Church presents to us, they understand that the “wing”, as *Fides et Ratio* says, to rise up to know and to explain the eternal anthropological and ethical truths that belong to the natural law and its foundation, is human reason more than faith. The Popes themselves emphasized this. For this reason, the Academy also stands open to non-Catholics.

For the same reason of the importance of the “wing of reason”, Pope John Paul II directed an appeal to philosophers and to men and women of all branches of human knowledge to explain the moral truths the Church teaches in *Humanae Vitae*, *Familiaris Consortio*, *Veritatis Splendor*, *Evangelium Vitae* and others, by means of human reason and thus make them better understood by Catholics as well as by all men and women of goodwill.

But does not all of this sound like the JAHLF being a really old-fashioned Institution that does not realize the tremendous developments of Church doctrine and Church morals? Do we not sound, already for the name we have chosen, wholly oblivious of the fact that a huge general change in social consciousness and ethical formation has taken place, such that we cannot defend the old ethical teachings of the Church, such as *Humanae Vitae*, as if we still lived 50 years ago and as if nothing had happened that calls for big reforms and changes?

One hears these days many voices that claim that the actual situation of human society has so profoundly changed that many actions that have been called intrinsically evil or gravely sinful by *Familiaris Consortio* or *Humanae Vitae* can no longer be called so. Especially if one takes into account the two subjective factors on which, according to Thomas Aquinas and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a mortal sin depends, namely sufficient ethical knowledge and possession of free will, one might conclude that in today’s climate many adulterers, active homosexuals, perpetrators of abortions, etc. no longer commit serious or mortal sins anymore because they lack the subjective conditions for sin, acting only against the objective matter at hand, while their subjective conscience justifies them. Such a possibility has always been recognized but there are serious issues about what is our correct attitude and what is the adequate pastoral towards such grave sinners who lack subjective conditions of mortal sin.

Since more than half a century, and especially since the attack against *Humanae Vitae*, many voices of Catholic Moral Theologians are not content with a new emphasis on subjective conscience that would justify committing adultery,

homosexual relations, or even abortion *subjectively*. These moral theologians wanted us to admit that situations are often such that we must admit that there are *objectively speaking no general rules that condemn whole classes of actions* as morally wrong. These voices pretend that the times of the old rigid moral rules are over, We cannot claim anymore that adultery, homosexual relations, contraception, abortion or euthanasia are intrinsically wrong *under all circumstances*. Sometimes God himself wants us to continue to commit in our concrete situation acts such as adultery, because leaving our new partner might lead us to greater sins and cause greater evils. Wake up, they say. Do not fool yourselves. We live in a time very different from fifty years ago and have come to understand the Holy Ghost leads us in different directions. Between *Humanae Vitae* and *Veritatis Splendor* many, indeed a majority of moral theologians, have promoted this so-called ethical proportionalism that may justify any actions if the sum-total of goods that follow from them seem a lesser evil than any alternative course of actions. 25 years ago, Saint Pope John Paul II has condemned this view as a grave error and has defended anew forcefully the 2000 years old teaching of the Gospels and of the tradition of the Church, that there are many intrinsically bad acts such as contraception, abortion, or euthanasia. No good effects of these actions and not any situations can ever justify them. This teaching is of the natural law and has also been propounded by Socrates, Cicero, and many pagan philosophers.

Thus, against all social or historical pressures of the spirit of our time that wants us to water down or to deny entirely the truth that there are intrinsically evil acts, we in JAHLF never want to give in to such pressure and false teachings. Also *we* know that we should take into account in our words and writings the changed moral taste of our time, in order to reach those who live in errors, but we know even more certainly that we must never compromise the truth by adapting our moral judgments to the ethical opinions dominant today, if these are false. Rather we should do everything in our power that a society that deviates most grievously from the eternal moral truth adapts itself to truth. For us, taking into account the change of social climate in which we live can only mean that we must seek new ways to make men understand and live the same old, nay eternal truths that can never change. We must adapt people to the truth, not the truth to people.

Let me give you an example of the truly tremendous social change we live in: now in the United States and in Europe a physician can be fired from his position in a hospital or a health insurance center because he refuses to commit an abortion, or to make at least referrals to a colleague who performs them. Only a big change of cultural climate can explain, how it was possible that even a

former President of the Pontifical Academy of Life selected by a previous Pope, and quite a few hand-picked members of the new Pontifical Academy of Life defend abortions under some circumstances. All of this shows a *huge* social change in the world and in the Church.

Just consider the incredible contrast between the present moral climate shaped by the 1973 Supreme Court decision (and the present legal situation regarding abortion in most countries) and the following statements of the American Medical Association from just 100 years before:

[Committee on Criminal Abortion: Report on criminal abortion. AMA Transactions 1871; 22:239-258.] -

[The abortionist is] "An enemy in the camp... as hideous a view of moral deformity as the evil spirit could present... a class of men... who cling to a noble profession only to dishonor it; men who seek not to save, but to destroy; men known not only to the profession, but to the public, as abortionists.... Yes, it is false brethren we have most to fear; men who are false to their profession, false to principle, false to honor, false to humanity, false to God.... (p. 240).

It was generally supposed that the foetus becomes animated at the period of quickening; but this idea is exploded. Physiology considers the foetus as much a living being immediately after conception as at any other time before delivery... Indeed, no other doctrine appears to be consonant with reason or physiology but that which admits the embryo to possess vitality from the very moment of conception.... (p. 250).

it matters not at what stage of [embryological] development his victim may have arrived - it matters not how small or how apparently insignificant it may be - it [abortion] is a murder, a foul, unprovoked murder; and its blood, like the blood of Abel, will cry from earth to Heaven for vengeance.... (p. 251).

For it is at this late date in the nineteenth century a doubtful question whether or not the profession of medicine, with all its boasted intelligence, with all the aids and appliances which science and art can bestow- it is doubtful, with such a disgusting caudal appendage as the abortionist attached to it, whether that profession is an advantage or a disadvantage, whether it is a blessing or a curse, to the human family.... (p. 256) and yet these monsters of iniquity [abortionists] are permitted to stalk abroad in open day, carrying worse than contagion with them, poisoning

wherever they are permitted to touch, invading the very sources of life, and fattening on the blood of their victims. And yet the profession of medicine remains inactive... that profession, in the face of these evils, tolerates in its midst these men, who, with corrupt hearts and blood-stained hands, destroy what they cannot reinstate, corrupt souls, and destroy the fairest fabric that God has ever created, and yet all this is done under the aegis, under the cloak, of that profession.... (p. 257).

In conclusion...

Resolved, That we repudiate and denounce the conduct of abortionists, and that we will hold no intercourse with them either professionally or otherwise, and that we will, whenever an opportunity presents, guard and protect the public against the machinations of these characters by pointing out the physical and moral ruin which follows in their wake...

Resolved, That it becomes the duty of every physician in the United States... to resort to every honorable and legal means in his power to crush out from among us this pest of society; and, in doing so, he but elevates himself and

his profession to that eminence and moral standard for which God has designed it..." (p. 258). (2)

Our task in this Academy is exactly this: rejecting any of the horrible evils and errors which shape modern society and have even entered the doors of the sanctuary of the Church, by the clear exposition of, and by living, the truth about human life and the family. This entails also calling abortion 'murder' and not 'interruption' or 'termination of pregnancy,' abstaining from dishonest names that obscure the truth. Acting and speaking in this way, whether a member is a medical doctor, a philosopher, a psychiatrist, a journalist, or a priest, he or she will elevate himself or herself and their profession to that eminence and moral standard for which God has designed them. Our task, yes, is to speak the truth to a very changed society, but the truth remains exactly the same. And these truths the American Medical Association stated so forcefully 100 years ago, are just as true today and can also be seen by human reason because they belong to natural law.

While the Academy also welcomes theologians, priests, bishops and Cardinals and hopes that they also will shed light on Church teachings and those truths about marriage, family, and life that are known only by faith, the anthropological

and ethical issues that will be the main concern of our new Academy are more the domain of RATIO than of FIDES.

For this reason, faith, let alone pertaining to the Catholic Church, is neither necessary nor enough to gain access to those truths the Academy seeks to clarify. On the one hand, also many ancient pagans, such as Hippocrates, Socrates and Cicero, and many members of other religions, gained deep insights into these truths. On the other hand, many Catholics, even very deeply believing ones, commit grave ethical errors and fall into confusion when it comes to the issues JAHLEF wants to clarify. Let us add that many Catholics, among them numerous Catholic Moral Theologians, openly reject the natural law as well as the Magisterium of the Church when it expounds the natural law through some solemn teachings, such as those formulated in *Humanae Vitae*, *Evangelium Vitae*, or *Veritatis Splendor*.

The JAHLEF adheres to all these truths, but seeks to understand and explain them always better by means of human reason.

Another reason why the Academy's members cannot content themselves with adhering to moral truths declared by the Magisterium is the following one. Many truths about human life and death have not yet been declared by the Church. Think, for example, of "brain death" definitions used to extract organs, on which the Church has not yet made any official declaration, but only unofficial pronouncements, some of which contain serious problems. Hence the investigations of our Academy extend far beyond those parts of the natural law that have been declared by the Catholic Church.

Thus, the condition of becoming a member of this Academy is not the Catholic faith but the recognition of the fundamental truths about human life, the human family, and the natural moral law, both those explicitly taught by the Church in *Humanae Vitae* and other documents, and those not so taught. These truths can be understood by all men, because these laws are inscribed into every man's heart. All members of this Academy shall explicitly consent to the most basic ones of these truths by taking an Oath. But they should not content themselves with affirming those truths which they affirm solemnly; they should also share in the work of the Academy of explaining them better, on all levels of experience, in simple and straight-forward ways or in subtle and differentiated treatises, at University and at Kindergarten level. They should also not content themselves with recognizing all those most basic truths they have affirmed in an oath but also many others that pertain to human life and family.

The Academy should explain these truths that are part of the natural law in terms of human experience and human reason, foremost by means of philosophy, but also by that common sense and sense of truth that is the fruit of a *sensus veritatis* or a *sensus fidei*, which often non-academics possess in a far superior way than academics. Where it is possible and useful, the new Academy for life will also use medical science, psychiatry, psychology, and others to confirm the possibility of living in accordance with these truths and to show concrete methods of applying these truths in real life.

The service the JAHLF intends to present to the Church, besides a study and explanation of the most important anthropological and ethical truths about human life, human death, and about the family, also includes overcoming those grave philosophical and ethical errors that infect many state laws, hospitals and universities, including schools of Catholic theology that divorce their ethics not only from religious faith but also from human RATIO, and from those truths of logic and philosophy without which a “pure faith” degenerates into an irrationality that expresses itself in the formula that $2 \times 2 = 5$.

In the face of the false theological, philosophical and scientific opinions, and the many horrific assaults against human life and family inside and outside the Catholic Church, the ACADEMY seeks to appraise the effects of biomedical, social and health developments, together with the impact of religious, political and philosophical truth and erroneous ideas on life and the natural family. Special attention will be paid to the critique of all kinds of materialist and evolutionist metaphysics that seeks to replace the knowledge of the free creative and personal God, who is the source of human life and human soul, by materialist and evolutionary theories of human life that see its origin in molecules, necessity, and chance. Such a philosophy or atheist religion denies the most important truths about the human person, and the dignity of man created in the image and likeness of God. It will also inevitably apply eugenic or transhumanist idols and errors to bioethics and undermine morality without even admitting properly ethical categories.

Obviously, the ACADEMY will also critically examine anti-life and gender ideology and their roots, as well as refute the claims of the many false and contrived “human rights” that have nothing to do with, or even negate, the real human rights. A specially widespread and dangerous case of such a pseudo-human right is the alleged “human right of each woman” to contraception and abortion, propagated so vociferously by many politicians and international organizations of population control worldwide.

In this context, the JAHLF will also carefully and critically investigate the concept and false interpretations of “reproductive health” and other false notions of health that lead to countless murders of the unborn and to many other evils.

Being dedicated to the defense of innocent human life (and prescinding here from the complex issues of whether direct or, applying the principle of double effect, only indirect killing in self-defense, war, and capital punishment, are legitimate), JAHLF will likewise address the question of biological human death, once so simple and clear, but now a major object of dispute with tremendous ethical consequences depending on how human death is being explained. Regarding this, particular attention will be given to a critical examination of the notion and application of “brain death”. “Brain death” definitions used to extract organs contain a number of errors about which several members of this Academy have reflected and written much.

"Brain death" is a deceptive manipulation of the word “death” that was chiefly invented to extract healthy organs from still living persons, (babies, children, and young adults), because vital organs from a truly dead body (cadaver) are not suitable for transplantation.

John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI clearly taught, and it belongs also to natural law, that "you must not kill one life to save another".

"As long as the soul has not departed from the body, the person is alive." One cannot decide that a person is truly dead while the heart is beating with circulatory and/or respiratory functions remaining actually, or potentially (for example, in a frozen state) intact.

The ACADEMY will scientifically, philosophically and theologically explore the overwhelming multitude of reasons why the identification of so-called “brain death” with actual human death, or with its criterion, is erroneous, and why those organ explantations, experimentations, or other actions that ignore this truth, are intrinsically wrong.

In this respect, the Academy hopes that, for example, respective of “brain death” definitions and explanations of organs, the results of its research will offer important novelty to the present discussion and become part of Catholic teaching and of the moral teachings of other religions. The truth about “brain death” and many other anthropological and ethical truths have not yet been declared in any Church document, but pertain to the respect for every human life and to the transmission and protection of human life in Marriage and Family. Therefore, the ACADEMY sees one of its important tasks in providing the rational, ethical, and

anthropological foundations for future magisterial documents about death and transplantation medicine that need the hard work of human RATIO and science entrusted to the Academy.

To assure that all members of the JAHLEF are united in these goals, all its members will take the Oath of the Servants of Life and Family, in conformity with the teachings of Natural Law, which coincide largely with the teachings of the authentic Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church. (To speak of a large and not a complete coincidence between Catholic moral teaching and the natural law has two good reasons: 1. Inasmuch as the Catholic Moral teaching about life and family includes many ethical truths that refer to the reality and need of the sacrament of marriage and others, it goes beyond natural law and does not coincide with it. On the other hand, in as much as countless parts of natural ethics have not been expressed or codified in Church teachings, natural law goes beyond the already realized contents of the moral teachings of the Church.)

The JOHN-PAUL II ACADEMY FOR HUMAN LIFE AND FAMILY does likewise not restrict its understanding of human life to mere biological human life. It recognizes and affirms the reality of the soul of man that stands at the origin of human life. Therefore, JAHLEF also occupies itself, quite generally speaking, with the metaphysical and anthropological foundations of ethical truth.

For this reason, the John Paul II ACADEMY FOR HUMAN LIFE AND THE FAMILY will likewise explore the ultimate value of human life residing in eternal life, and in this respect will also integrate the highest truths about man seen by Socrates and Plato.

For the reason of also considering the relation of human life to God and eternal life, and their link to ethical questions such as euthanasia, infertility treatment, artificial insemination, etc., this Academy will in like manner address those moral dimensions of human and medical action that can only be understood when relating human life, moral life, and eternal life to God. These dimensions of ethics are also in principle open to unaided human reason.

They are lost sight of completely, however, not only in a materialist and evolutionist, but also in an atheist world-view that considers man the supreme lord over his own actions. Consequently, this Academy will reject also many pro-life acts, such as artificial insemination or methods of generating human life in the laboratory, or life-saving transplants that kill the organ-donor (falsely declared "brain dead") and thus ignore the rights of the Creator over human life and death, in addition to any other immoral means of generating or

manipulating human life that bring guilt on human souls and endanger their eternal life.

Regarding the transcendent dimensions of human life and death, however, the Academy will not exclusively rely on human philosophy, because only God could reveal, and has revealed to us, the most important truths about eternal life and resurrection. Therefore, inasmuch as divine revelation is necessary to illumine the supreme mysteries of human life and family, the John Paul II ACADEMY FOR HUMAN LIFE AND THE FAMILY will also draw on the divine wisdom about eternal life that the Catholic Church teaches and that is unattainable by human reason alone. For this reason, it will also have theologians as members who help to understand the specifically religious truths regarding the matters of life, marriage, and the human family.

The same applies to the investigation of those ways of caring for the old, the sick, and the dying that are linked to religious dimensions of the moral life revealed through Christ, especially in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount and the sacraments.

As this Academy will explore the transcendent dimensions of the value and good of human life, it will also speak, from a philosophical and theological point of view, of the moral and spiritual dimensions of death and dying, often ignored in palliative medicine and hospital care.

The Academy's aim is to clarify, to teach and to spread that part of the truth about man and about God that serves human life and the natural family, and, through serving these, serves and glorifies God.

1 By the motu proprio *Vitae Mysterium* on February 11, 1994.

2 1859 - [Committee on Criminal Abortion: Report on criminal abortion. *AMA Transactions* 1859;12:75-78.]