



Table Discussion Starters for Christian Anthropology: Man in the Modern World

*Taken from Pope Francis' October 5, 2017 Address to the
Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life*

- “Human beings seem now to find themselves at a special juncture in their history, in uncharted territory, as they deal with questions both old and new regarding the meaning of human life, its origin and destiny. The key feature of this moment is, in a word, the rapid spread of a culture obsessively centered on the mastery of human beings – individually and as a species – over reality. Some have even spoken of an *egolatriy*, a worship of the self, on whose altar everything is sacrificed, even the most cherished human affections. This approach is far from harmless, for it induces people to gaze constantly in the mirror, to the point of being unable to turn their eyes away from themselves and towards others and the larger world. The spread of this approach has extremely grave effects on every affection and relationship in life”
 - What are the most conspicuous manifestations of this *egolatriy* in the culture of young adults in the US today?
 - What are the first steps in the evangelization of those who worship themselves?

- “Today, there is great need of a theology of creation and redemption capable of finding expression in words and acts of love for each life and the whole of life, in order to accompany the Church’s pilgrim path in this world. The Encyclical *Laudato Si’* is one sign of this renewed attention to the way God and man regard our world, starting from the revelation found in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. There we learn that each of us is a creature *willed and loved by God for his or her own sake*, not merely a combination of cells organized and selected by a process of evolution. All creation is in some way part of God’s special love for human creatures, a love extending to every generation of mothers, fathers and children. God’s original blessing and his promise of an eternal destiny are the basis of the dignity of every life; they are meant for everyone. The men, women and children who make up the peoples of the earth are the life of the world that God loves and desires to save, without exception. The biblical account of creation needs to be read and reread, in order to appreciate the breadth and depth of the loving action of the God who entrusts creation and history to the covenant of man and woman.”
 - How do God and people today regard our world similarly? How do God and people today regard our world differently?
 - Where are the aspects of the breadth and depth of God’s loving action in the biblical account of Creation that faithful Catholics need to read and re-read?

- “The covenant between man and woman is called to be a guiding force for society as a whole. We are invited to be responsible for the world, in the realms of culture and politics, in the world of work and economic life, as well as in the Church. This is not merely a matter of equal opportunities or mutual appreciation. It involves the way men and women understand the very meaning of life and human progress. They are called not only to speak to one another *about* love, but to speak *with* love

about what needs to be done so that the human community can take shape in the light of God's love for all his creatures.”

- How is the family meant to guide society as a whole, to guide politics, culture, work and the economy?
- How ought this be done today effectively — with the wisdom of evangelical “serpents” — in an age when there are so much confusion about the family and “families”?
- **“A new start must be made in the ethos of peoples, and this can be achieved through a new culture of identity and difference. The recent proposal to advance the dignity of a person by radically eliminating sexual difference and, as a result, our understanding of man and woman, is not right. Instead of combatting wrongful interpretations of sexual difference that would diminish the fundamental importance of that difference for human dignity, such a proposal would simply eliminate it by proposing procedures and practices that make it irrelevant for a person’s development and for human relationships. But the utopia of the “neuter” eliminates both human dignity in sexual distinctiveness and the personal nature of the generation of new life. The biological and psychological manipulation of sexual difference, which biomedical technology can now make appear as a simple matter of personal choice – which it is not! – runs the risk of dismantling the energy source that feeds the covenant between man and woman, making it creative and fruitful.”**
 - How have you experienced, in your professional work situation, in your family, among your friends, the promotion of the “utopia of the ‘neuter?’”
 - How can we positively advance a “new culture of identity and difference”?
- **“A fervent concern to accompany and care for life requires, in the history of individuals and societies, a constantly renewed ethos of compassion and tender love for the birth and rebirth of humanity, in all its differences. We need first to become sensitive once more to the *different stages of life*, especially of *children and the elderly*. Their frailties, their infirmities and their vulnerability are not exclusively the concern of medicine and health care. They also have to do with the soul and with human needs that must be recognized and taken into account, protected and esteemed, by individuals and the community alike. A society that considers these things as buyable and sellable, bureaucratically regulated and technically managed, is one that has already lost its sense of the meaning of life. It will no longer pass on that meaning to its young, or revere it in its aging parents. Almost without realizing it, we have now started to build cities increasingly unfriendly to children and communities increasingly unwelcoming to the elderly. They have walls but no windows or doors; meant to protect, they in fact stifle. Faith’s witness to *God’s mercy*, which refines and perfects all justice, is an essential condition for the growth of compassion between generations. Without that mercy, the culture of the secular city is defenceless before the deadening and decay of the human spirit.”**
 - What are the particular needs of the soul for children and the elderly that must be protected and esteemed?
 - How is a clear sense of the “meaning of life” supposed to influence for the better bureaucratic systems of health care and medicine?
 - Have you seen particularly timely examples of intergenerational mercy — or can you imagine them — that could defend the secular city before the “deadenning and decay of the human spirit?”