



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO A CONGRESS ORGANIZED
BY THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE
ON THE JUSTNESS OF "XENOTRANSPLANTS"**

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I warmly greet each one of you on the occasion of this study meeting, promoted by the Pontifical Academy for Life in order to examine the delicate problem related to the lawfulness of transplanting animal organs to human beings. I direct a special greeting to the dear Bishop Elio Sgreccia, Vice President of the Academy and leader of your group.

The goal of your work is, first of all, of human interest, since it is prompted by the necessity of resolving the problem of the grave insufficiency of human organs which are suitable for transplants: it is known that such an insufficiency means the death of a high percentage of sick people on waiting lists, who could be saved by the transplant. The transplants could prolong a life which is still good.

2. Certainly the passing of animal organs and tissues to people through transplants implies new problems of a scientific and ethical nature. You have raised these problems with responsibility and competence, simultaneously taking to heart the benefit and the dignity of the human person, the possible medical risks, which are not always quantifiable or foreseeable, the attentive consideration for animals, which is always a duty even when they are operated on for the greater good of man, who is a spiritual being in the image of God.

In these sectors, science is a necessary guide and valuable light. Scientific research must nevertheless be placed in the right perspective, being directed to the good of man and the safeguarding of his health.

3. Anthropology and ethics, in their turn, are ever more called to intervene in order to offer a necessary and complementary contribution, defining values and criteria to follow and, at the same time, establishing the conditions for an harmonious ordering of priorities, which must exist among them.

It is recognized more and more, as is clear from your very presence and from the composition of your group, that the alliance between science and ethics enriches both the branches of knowledge and calls them to converge when it comes to lending their help to everyone and to society.

The precautions and the clear conditions for progress in transplanting animal organs, which you have highlighted, are the fruit of the dialogue and of the convergence.

4. Rational reflection, confirmed by faith, discovers that God the creator has placed man at the summit of the visible world and at the same time has entrusted to him the task of directing his own way, with respect for his dignity, toward the true good of his fellow human beings.

The Church, therefore, will always offer the proper support and help to those who search for the authentic good of the human person with the effort of reason, illumined by faith: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (*Fides et ratio*, Intro.).

In expressing to you my appreciation for the work you have carried out and for the efforts accomplished with generosity and in a spirit of service to suffering humanity, I invoke on you, your families and the persons with whom you carry out your research the blessings of the God of all knowledge and of every goodness.

From the Vatican, 1 July 2001