



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE WORLD CONGRESS OF
GYNAECOLOGICAL ENDOSCOPY**

Saturday, 21 June 1997

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to extend a cordial welcome to each one of you who have come to Rome from the five continents to take part during these days in the *World Congress of Gynaecological Endoscopy*. I especially greet Prof. Carlo Romanini, Director of the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the University of Rome-Tor Vergata, and I thank him for his kind words on behalf of those present.

With your Convention, you have wished to emphasize the contribution that the application of the extraordinary developments of science can make to the quality of human life, at the same time stressing the profound meanings present in your scientific and professional activity. In fact, gynaecological endoscopy brings you daily to the very threshold of the mystery of life, which the scientist is called to approach with a humble and trusting soul, resisting every temptation to manipulate it.

During your intense days of study, you have had the opportunity to examine the prospects opened by the encounter between scientific research and the "Gospel of life" and, overcoming the restrictions of specialized areas of responsibility, you carefully examined all the aspects based in the originality of the human person. Your research thus assumed a strong cognitive value, because of the global anthropological and ethical vision in which it was carried out.

And rightly so. In fact, science, separated from the authentic values that define the person, can deteriorate to the level of an experimental exercise, to satisfy the law of supply and demand.

Instead of responding to man's deep needs, it is then limited to producing partial solutions for his immediate requirements. Thus the intimate connection which links man's activity with the depths of his being created in God's image is cut short.

2. The historical task that unites believers and men of goodwill in scientific research, consists in promoting, beyond all juridical convention, whatever favours human dignity. Those who have the gift of faith know that there is a creative act of God at every person's origin, a plan of love that awaits fulfilment. This fundamental truth, accessible even with the limited power of reason, permits one to catch a glimpse of the very lofty mission inscribed in human sexuality: it is, in fact, called to co-operate with the creative power of God.

Precisely in this co-operation human freedom finds its highest expression and its insurmountable limit. Hence derives also the particular significance of your professional and scientific activity, aimed at studying the secrets of nature in order to decipher their profound truth, thus making the choices it inspires concretely possible. By diverging from predominant ideologies, this path often exposes one to misunderstanding and marginalization and therefore demands constant fidelity to the truth of God and the truth of man. But it is also a path, which by forming mentalities open to the truth, becomes an eminent exercise of love.

3. For all this a clear assumption of ethical responsibility is necessary. In our time this commitment can often be difficult especially in the face of the "attacks, affecting life in its earliest and in its final stages, attacks which present new characteristics with respect to the past and which raise extraordinarily serious questions. It is not only that in generalized opinion these attacks tend no longer to be considered as 'crimes'; paradoxically they assume the nature of 'rights'..." (Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, n. 11). The ethical question is thus situated in the area of culture and at the root of personal and collective life.

Faced with the temptation of autonomy and appropriation, the Church reminds people today that "man's life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life" (*ibid.* n. 39), and that life is such when it is spread and given: in fraternity, in solidarity, in generating new lives, in the supreme witness of martyrdom; before the temptation of self-destructive denial, it reminds us that "life is always a good" (*ibid.* n. 34).

This prospect, which is not beyond rational investigation, finds fullness of light in Christian revelation. In fact, on the path of faith man can perceive an authentic possibility for good and for life precisely in the realities of suffering and death, that pass dramatically through his life. In the disfigured face of the Crucified One he then recognizes the likeness of God; in his Cross, the tree of life.

4. After centuries of a gradual separation between faith and culture, the results of modernity, for certain aspects worrying, challenge believers to take on a leading and prophetic role and become

a driving force for the construction of the civilization of the third millennium.

Christian faith does not consider anxiety about man's future contingent or transitory. In the perspective of the eschatological goal, it spurs believers to commit themselves in this world to a development respectful of every human dimension, because "The glory of God is the living man" (St Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20:7).

It is necessary therefore to determine, in the renewed relationship between faith, social practice and scientific research, professional features suited to the requirements of our time and to man's perennial values, capable of achieving the integration between faith and life. Indeed, "the Gospel of life is for the whole of human society. To be actively pro-life is to contribute to the renewal of society through the promotion of the common good" (Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, n. 101).

Distinguished professors, on the threshold of the third millennium I renew my invitation to you to become champions of the civilization of love, supporting the training process of your young students and assistants so that the front in defence of life is reinforced and extended.

With these wishes, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you and to those who work with you in this important scientific field.

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