



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF PAUL VI  
TO THE DELEGATIONS OF MEDICAL DOCTORS  
OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY\***

*Friday, 24 November 1972*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The plenary Assembly that gathers you in Rome, at the present head quarters of your Committee, has brought us this morning a visit which gives us great pleasure. We greet in you the qualified representatives of the Order of physicians of the various countries of the European Community. We are happy to express to you the deep esteem we feel for those whose vocation it is to cure and comfort, and for their science and art. We are well aware that the medical profession calls for growing recourse to the assistance of jurists and experts. Assuring all of you of our cordial sympathy, we are anxious to declare to you the interest we take work of your permanent Committee and the specific support that can give your noble task.

While the European Community laboriously pursues its work of unification on the economic, cultural and political planes, you endeavour actively, in your multiple working groups, to share your experiences and your cares, and what is more to establish a certain international order calculated to protect both your profession and the patients it wishes to serve. Thus you are studying, among other things, problems concerning the teaching and practice of medicine, the equivalence of diplomas within the countries of the Common Market, the permanent training of physicians and their free circulation, access of migrant physicians to functions in the public sector, the maintenance of a certain general medicine, making uniform the social security legislations, and more fundamentally, all questions medical ethics. Such an international organization seems to us likely to promote real human progress. It can encourage healthy emulation in this immense field in which the ingeniousness of researchers and the technical implementation of medical care must not flag. It permits a collaboration which has already yielded its fruit. Medical services and institutions will thus be able to benefit from a more advanced and more homogeneous

development in the very different regions of this old Europe, without forgetting the most deprived countries of the Third World.

Finally and above all, together you are becoming more deeply aware of the professional problems raised by the medical art, as well as the ethical requirements it demands. Thus you can encourage one another, through a sound discipline, such as exists in the Order of physicians of every nation, to respect the aims of medical assistance and see that they are respected; to prevent, to relieve, to cure. This is what our Predecessor Pius XII called; on receiving the members of the world medical Association, “the code of honour of the doctor and that of his duties” (A.A.S., 46 -1954- p.595).

But as he himself already wished; this medical law needs to be asserted, defended, promoted, specified, on the international plane, with regard to all the new questions that medical research and its applications raise for man.

Really human solutions certainly require today additional imagination, organization, conscience, courage and generosity. Is it necessary to add that these new; questions cannot weaken in any way the noble medical ideal which, in the great multi-millenary tradition expressed by Hippocrates, makes the physician the defender of all human life? To violate, this principle would constitute a dreadful regression; the fatal consequences of which you are better able to evaluate than anyone.

Consequently, the body of physicians that you represent, acting with the competence characteristic of it and according to the positive principles that must guide its disinterested action in the service of people, can bear witness to these exigencies before the highest political authorities responsible for the common good. This is what brings you to present to the member States of the European Common Market the opinions and recommendations drawn up by your Committee. How could we fail to wish that these initiatives may contribute to the progress of hygiene, legislation and morals?

In this gigantic mobilization to come to the help of sick people or guarantee their health, doctors will always find warm support from the Church. Throughout the course of history, as you know, a host of Christians and Christian institutions have instinctively considered care of the sick, a privileged part of their ministry, as a chosen exercise of their charity. Was not Christ greeted as the one who “took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (cf. Mt. 8, 17)?

Even more than this concrete collaboration in medical assistance, the Church offers the world a complete vision of man. In her eyes, man remains a frail being, it is true, all the more so in that he is marked by sin; but nevertheless he is the centre and the peak of creation; his body itself, created by God and called to glory, calls for respect and care (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 14). The whole human person is, for Christian faith, clad in a dignity that forbids reducing it to an object.

Through the medium of, and beyond, its physical, emotional and intellectual activities, it is capable of establishing with others interpersonal relations of marvellous depth. What is more, it can get into touch, through the highest part of the soul, with God Himself, or rather become the temple, of his presence and the place where the action, of his Spirit is unfolded. This tells us the mystery that surrounds the human person and the respect with which every doctor of the body or of the soul must approach it.

With all the more reason a man who is suffering enjoys, in our eyes as believers, particular consideration. He is not just a brother in humanity that Christ asks us to love like ourselves; or rather its he loved us. He is a suffering Member of Jesus Christ: he shows us the face of Him who, though the Son of God, became familiar with our sufferings and took them on himself, to free us from all servitude. How can we hesitate, then, to meet him, to help him, to give him relief, to walk with him in the trying conditions of our earthly life? Evangelical love, the taste for which Christ gave the world, becomes an incomparable source of energy in the service of the sick. Even if our hands were powerless to cure the body, who can tell the benefit of this love, addressed to the very heart of people?

May these considerations encourage Christians to work boldly, with all men of goodwill, at the progress of medicine and medical legislation! Be assured, all of you, of our ardent wishes, for the pursuit and fruitfulness of your work. In testimony of our esteem and our confidence, we willingly implore the Blessings of Him who is the Author of Life on each of you and on those who are dear to you.

---

\*ORa n.49 p.9.