



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE SYMPOSIUM
ON CARDIOLOGY HELD IN ROME**

*Consistory Hall
Tuesday, 30 May 1989*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet you on the eve of the programme “*European-American Cardiology in Rome*”, sponsored by the American College of Cardiology, the European Society of Cardiology, the “*Società Italiana di Cardiologia*” and the “*Associazione Nazionale dei Medici, Cardiologi, Ospedalieri*”. You have chosen the Cardiology Institute of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart as the site of your Symposium. In doing so, you honour an institution which carries on its research concerning the latest medical issues in the light of the human and Christian principles which govern the preservation and advancement of human life and its quality.

The presence of so many experts in cardiology inspires great hope for the progress of research and scientific reflection in the important areas of the prevention, diagnosis and therapy of cardiac disease. It also remonstrates your awareness of the need for effective collaboration in coordinating scientific and technological advances for the ultimate benefit of those you serve.

2. Throughout the ages, the human heart has been regarded as more than simply one physical organ among others. *In the Scriptures*, the word “*heart*” refers to the source of life itself, not merely physical life (Cfr. *Gen.* 18, 5), but also the *life of the soul as it lies open to God* (*ISam.* 16, 7; *1Petr.* 3, 4). It is the heart which characterizes the individual in his relations with God and with others (*Matth.* 5, 8; 15, 19). In biblical language, the heart is the abyss (*Ps.* 64, 6) which conceals the fathomless mysteries of human desires, motivations and yearnings. When God wishes to assure his people that he will bring them to himself and grant them every blessing and fulfilment, he

promises them a new heart. As the Lord says through the Prophet Ezechiel: “I will give you a new heart, and a new Spirit will I put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ez. 36, 26).

In effect, the Scriptures bear witness to the universal perception that *knowledge of the human heart unveils the mystery of man himself and his place in the world*. In a striking way, recent progress in cardiology has reflected the truth of his ancient conviction. The latest advances in the fields of prevention, diagnosis, therapy and transplant technique, when seen from a higher perspective, have all served to further the cause of human life and its sublime dignity. This, of course, has always been medicine’s highest aspiration: to serve life, in all of its nobility, as a gift to be accepted and lived to the full at every moment. Were it not for this goal, the most sophisticated surgical methods would no longer be truly medical, but reduced to mere techniques and nothing more.

3. The topics which your Symposium will discuss reveal the extent to which *medicine* is, and must always be, *both a science and an art*. Its scientific aspect stands out in the diagnostic and therapeutic technology which so many of you have helped to develop. But no less important is another aspect of the topics which you will discuss: medicine is an art, and your medical expertise must depend upon an inspiration derived from a higher awareness that all that you do aims at the betterment of your fellow men and women, and seeks to serve their well-being.

This vocation to service is what ennobles your scientific research and directs it to its ultimate goal: the healing of your brothers and sisters who suffer. As healers of the heart, you have often experienced the delicate balance between fear and hope, physical pain and spiritual tranquillity which is felt by so many of your patients. You know the truth of an observation I made in my Apostolic Letter on the meaning of human suffering: “As important and indispensable as institutions are, no institution can ever replace the human heart, human compassion, human love or human initiative when it comes to dealing with the sufferings of another. This is true of physical sufferings, but it is even more true when it comes to dealing with the many kinds of moral suffering, and primarily when it is the soul that is suffering” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Salvifici Doloris*, 29).

4. Ladies and Gentlemen: the learned Societies to which you belong were founded with goals that are eminently humanitarian. They serve their purpose best when they foster a blending of service and love, professional skill and human sensitivity, and lead to a deeper awareness of the mystery of man himself – man who is a finite being and yet a creature of God, subject to frailty and yet destined to immortality, physically weak yet sustained by hope in a life beyond death. May the desire to serve the ultimate good of others inspire all the proceedings of your Symposium, and upon all of you I invoke the blessings of God our Heavenly Father.

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