



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE 14th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ORGANIZED
BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PASTORAL ASSISTANCE
TO HEALTH-CARE WORKERS**

Friday 19 November 1999

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your participation in the International Conference which the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers wished to dedicate this year to reflection on the relationship between the economy and health: a theme that is so timely and problematic, for it involves both the formulation of national policies and the Church's task of evangelization.

I greet Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán and I thank him for the kind words he addressed to me a short while ago on behalf of you all. I extend a cordial welcome to the staff of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers, as well as to the distinguished scholars, researchers and representatives of the States and Governments which have wished to honour this important symposium with their presence and their scholarly contribution.

In order to identify concrete lines of action, you have addressed the question not from a merely technical standpoint, but in a scientifically organized and structured way. Your reflection starts from the horizon of faith. It is in fact by beginning with the Word of God, bearer of integral salvation for all mankind, that the economy-health relationship is best considered, both globally and in its various scientific aspects.

A better understanding of this situation, which in itself is so complex and of global importance, is certainly fostered by the serious interdisciplinary approach that you have so opportunely chosen. You wished to consider the relationship of the economy and health in the light both of its historical development and of the Church's social doctrine, theology and morality. And all this in the spirit of

a constructive ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

2. Moreover, your reflection does not lack a subsequent practical goal: you have proposed lines of action capable of improving the existing relationship between the economy and health at all levels: economic, social, political, cultural and religious. You have thus tried to respond to the question of what action to take, at the global level and in every country, to implement in the most human and Christian way the relationship between the economy and health.

This is a disturbing question which this conference must raise with all people of good will, particularly those who at the world level and in every individual country have the greatest responsibility in this area.

In fact, it is intolerable that limited economic resources, so often experienced at the present time, should in fact have repercussions mainly on the weaker sectors of the population and on the less well-off areas of the world, depriving them of necessary health care. In the same way these limitations cannot be allowed to deny health care to some age groups or situations of particular frailty and weakness, such as newborn life, old age, serious disability, terminal illnesses. Every human person, created in the image and likeness of God and called to share in his divine life, has the right to be able to sit at the table of the common feast and enjoy the benefits of progress, science, technology and medicine.

3. In the same way, it is important to acquire a more adequate vision of health based on an anthropology which respects the person in his entirety. Far from being identified with the simple absence of illness, such a concept of health must aim at full harmony and a healthy equilibrium at the physical, psychic, spiritual and social levels (cf. *Message for the Eighth World Day of the Sick*, n. 13).

On the basis of this new vision of the economy and health, a more positive mutual relationship between them can be achieved. It is not the Church's task to define which economic models and which health systems can work out the best economy-health relationship, but it is her mission to do everything possible so that, in the context of so-called "globalization", this issue is addressed and resolved in the light of those ethical values that promote respect for and the defence of the dignity of every human person, beginning with the weakest and poorest.

4. It is with deep sorrow that we must note that the gap between situations of wealth that is even excessive and poverty even to the point of destitution, rather than decreasing, tends to be ever wider (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 14). This is a fact that has very heavy and sometimes tragic repercussions precisely on the economy-health relationship.

Fortunately in this situation there is a growing awareness of the dignity of every human person and of radical human interdependence; as a result there is a greater sense of the need for solidarity. It

is only with this perspective that one can overcome a vision that puts too much stress on economic concerns and too little on health issues, and move beyond the many unjust disparities that exist in the economy-health relationship.

For Christians, in particular, solidarity becomes a virtue that leads to love and is constantly nourished by it, resulting in attitudes of friendship and support, including the care of the sick. The supreme reference-point remains Trinitarian communion, from which the Christian knows he must draw inspiration for his own life in order to achieve a relationship of genuine love, particularly for his weaker brethren, which include the sick.

5. To them I now wish to address a special word of affection, which I extend to their families who are concerned about their health and to all who serve them with generosity and solidarity. To each of them I wish to express again the Church's loving closeness and to assure them of her tireless commitment to building a more just and fraternal society.

I especially call upon political leaders and international bodies that, when addressing the relationship of the economy and health, they may be guided solely by the search for the common good.

I ask the pharmaceutical industry never to let financial gain prevail over the consideration of human values, but to be sensitive to the needs of those who do not enjoy social security, carrying out effective programmes to help the poorest and most marginalized. We must work to reduce and, if possible, eliminate the differences between the various continents, urging the more advanced countries to make available to the less developed their experience, technology and some of their economic wealth.

May the dawn of the third millennium see our planet, with all its resources, more conformed to God's plan, so that no one will feel excluded from the care owed to his person and his health, with respect for the equal dignity of all.

To the Virgin Mary, model of the Church and of reconciled mankind, I entrust the fruit of your work, so that by her maternal intercession the longing for justice and peace in the heart of every person may be fulfilled.

My Blessing to you all!