



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE

Monday, 24 February 2003

Dear Members of the Pontifical Academy for Life,

1. The celebration of your Assembly gives me the joyful opportunity to greet you and to offer my appreciation for the intense dedication which the Academy for Life shows for the study of new problems, particularly in the field of bioethics.

I would like to say a special "thank you" to your President, Prof. Juan de Dios Vial Correa, for his kind words of greeting and to your Vice-President, Bishop Elio Sgreccia, who is zealous and energetic in his dedication to the task entrusted to him. I warmly greet the members of the Board of Governors and the speakers for this significant meeting.

2. In the work of your *Assembly*, with a detailed programme offering complementary reflections, you have wished to address *the topic of biomedical research* from the perspective of reason illumined by faith. This perspective does not restrict the field of observation, but rather extends it, since the light of Revelation comes to the aid of reason to offer a fuller understanding of what is intrinsic to human dignity. Is it not the human being, as scientist, who promotes research? Often the human being is the subject on whom the experiments are carried out. In every case, the results of biomedical research are at the service of the human being.

It is a recognized fact that improvements in the medical treatment of disease *primarily depend on progress in research*. In this way above all, medicine has been able to make a decisive contribution in wiping out lethal epidemics and in treating serious illness successfully, notably improving in many parts of the developed world, the duration and quality of life.

We must all, believers and non-believers, acknowledge and express sincere support for these efforts in biomedical science that are not only designed to familiarize us with the marvels of the human body, but also to encourage worthy standards of health and life for the peoples of our planet.

3. Furthermore, the Catholic Church wishes to express *gratitude* to so many scientists who are dedicated to biomedical research. In fact, the Magisterium has frequently asked their help for solutions to sensitive moral and social problems and from them has received convincing and effective collaboration.

Here I especially wish to mention Pope Paul VI's invitation to researchers and scientists in his Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, to make a contribution "to the welfare of marriage and the family" by seeking "to explain more thoroughly the various conditions favouring *a proper regulation of births*" (n. 24). I make my own his invitation, stressing its *permanent application*, which is made even more timely by the pressing need to find "natural" solutions for the problems of *conjugal infertility*.

In the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, I myself appealed to Catholic intellectuals to be active in the leading centres where culture is formed so as to introduce into society, in a concrete way, a *new culture of life* (cf. n. 98). With this in mind, I founded your Academy for Life, "to study and to provide information and training about the principal problems of law and biomedicine pertaining to the promotion and protection of life, especially in the direct relationship they have with Christian morality and the directives of the Church's Magisterium" (Apostolic Letter given *Motu proprio*, *Vitae mysterium*, 11 February 1994, n. 4; *ORE*, 9 March 1994, p. 3).

In the area of biomedical research, the Academy for Life can therefore be *a point of reference and enlightenment*, not only for Catholic researchers, but also for all who desire to work in this sector of biomedicine for the true good of every human being.

4. I therefore renew my heartfelt appeal so that scientific and biomedical research, *resist every temptation to human manipulation*, dedicate itself firmly to exploring ways and means to sustain human life, to treat disease and to solve the new problems that arise in the biomedical domain. *The Church respects and supports scientific research* when it has a genuinely humanist orientation, avoiding any form of instrumentalization or destruction of the human being and keeping itself free from the slavery of political and economic interests. In presenting the moral orientations dictated by natural reason, the Church is convinced that she offers a precious service to scientific research, doing her utmost for the true good of the human person. In this perspective, she recalls that, not only the *aims*, but also *the methods and means* of research must always respect the dignity of every human being, at every stage of his development and in every phase of experimentation.

Today perhaps more than in other ages, given the enormous developments of the experimental

biotechnologies that deal with the human being, scientists must be aware of *the insuperable limits* that the protection of the life, the integrity and dignity of every human being impose upon their research. I have often returned to this subject because I am convinced, with regard to certain results and claims of experimentation on human beings, that no one can remain silent, and especially not the Church, whose present silence would in the future be condemned by history and even by the devotees of science themselves.

5. I would like to address a special word of encouragement to *Catholic scientists* so that they may make a competent and professional contribution in the sectors where help is more urgently needed for the solution to problems that affect human life and health.

I especially direct my appeal to the institutes and universities endowed with the title of "Catholic", that they endeavour to measure up to the high standard of the spiritual values that presided over their beginnings. We need a true and just movement of thought, and a new culture of a high ethical character and of unexceptional scientific value to promote a genuinely human and effectively free progress in research.

6. One last observation is necessary: there is an increasingly urgent need to fill *the very serious and unacceptable gap* that separates the developing world from the developed in terms of the capacity to develop biomedical research for the benefit of health-care assistance and to assist peoples afflicted by chronic poverty and dire epidemics. I think especially of the tragedy of AIDS, which is very serious in many African countries.

It is essential to realize that to leave these peoples without the resources of science and culture means to condemn them to poverty, financial exploitation and the lack of health care structures, and also to commit an injustice and fuel a long term threat for the globalized world. To value endogenous human resources means to guarantee the balance of health care and, in short, to contribute to the peace of the whole world. Thus the relevant moral dimension of biomedical scientific research necessarily opens to the dimension of justice and international solidarity.

7. I hope that the Pontifical Academy for Life, that begins its 10th year, will take this message to heart and will ensure that it reaches all researchers, believers and non-believers, and contribute in this way to the mission of the Church in the new millennium.

To support this special service, that is dear to my heart and necessary for humanity today and tomorrow, I invoke upon you and upon your work the constant help of God and the protection of Mary, Seat of Wisdom. As a pledge of heavenly light, I gladly impart to you, to your family members and colleagues, my Apostolic Blessing.

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