The Christian conscience in support of the right to life

Tot de 13e Algemene Vergadering Pauselijke Academie voor het Leven: "The Christian conscience in support of the right to life"

24 februari 2007
Paus Benedictus XVI

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a true joy for me to receive the Members of the Pontifical Academy for Life in this Audience, held on the occasion of the 13th General Assembly, and those who are participating at this Congress on the theme: "The Christian conscience in support of the right to life".

I greet Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán, the Archbishops and Bishops present, brother priests, the Congress speakers and all of you, gathered from various countries. I greet in particular, Archbishop Elio Sgreccia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, whom I thank for the kind words addressed to me and for the work he does together with the Vice-President, the Chancellor and the Board of Directors who carry out the delicate and vast tasks of the Pontifical Academy.

The theme to which you have called the participants' attention, and therefore also that of the Ecclesial Community and of public opinion, is very significant: the Christian conscience, in fact, has an internal need to nourish and strengthen itself with the multiple and profound motivations that work in favour of the right to life.

It is a right that must be sustained by all, because it is the first fundamental right of all human rights. The Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* strongly affirms this: "Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. Rom 2: 14-15) the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree. Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded" (n. 2).

The same Encyclical recalls that "believers in Christ must defend and promote this right, aware as they are of the wonderful truth recalled by the Second Vatican Council: "By his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being' (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22). This saving event reveals to humanity not only the boundless love of God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (Jn 3: 16), but also the incomparable value of every human person" (ibid.).

Therefore, the Christian is continually called to be ever alert in order to face the multiple attacks to which the right to life is exposed. In this he knows that he can count on motives that are deeply rooted in the natural law and that can therefore be shared by every person of upright conscience.

In this perspective, above all after the publication of the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, much has been done to make the subject matter of these motivations better known in the Christian community and in civil society, but it must be admitted that the attacks on the right to life throughout the world have broadened and multiplied, also assuming new forms.

The pressures to legalize abortion are increasing in Latin American countries and in developing countries, also with recourse to the liberalization of new forms of chemical abortion under the pretext of safeguarding reproductive health: policies for demographic control are on the rise, notwithstanding that they are already recognized as dangerous also on the economic and social plane.

At the same time, the interest in more refined biotechnological research is growing in the more developed countries in order to establish subtle and extensive eugenic methods, even to obsessive research for the "perfect child", with the spread of artificial procreation and various forms of diagnosis tending to ensure good selection.

A new wave of discriminatory eugenics finds consensus in the name of the presumed well-being of the individual, and laws are promoted especially in the economically progressive world for the legalization of euthanasia.

All of this comes about while, on another front, efforts are multiplying to legalize cohabitation as an alternative to matrimony and closed to natural procreation.

In these situations the conscience, sometimes overwhelmed by the powerful collective media, is insufficiently vigilant concerning the gravity of the problems at play, and the power of the strongest weakens and seems to paralyze even people of good will.

For this reason it is necessary to appeal to the conscience, and in particular, to the Christian conscience. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, "Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right" (n. 1778).

From this definition it emerges that the moral conscience, to be able to judge human conduct rightly, above all must be based on the solid foundation of truth, that is, it must be enlightened to know the true value of actions and the solid criteria for evaluation. Therefore, it must be able to distinguish good from evil, even where the social environment, pluralistic culture and superimposed interests do not help it do so.

The formation of a true conscience, because it is founded on the truth, and upright, because it is determined to follow its dictates without contradictions, without betrayal and without compromises, is a difficult and delicate undertaking today, but indispensable.

Unfortunately, many factors hinder this undertaking. In the first place, in the current phase of secularization, called post-modern and marked by disputable forms of tolerance, not only is the rejection of Christian tradition growing, but distrust for the capacity of reason to perceive the truth also distances us from the taste for reflection.

According to some, for individual conscience to be unbiased it must free itself both from references to tradition and those based on human reason.

Hence, the conscience, which as an act of reason aims at the truth of things, ceases to be light and becomes a simple screen upon which the society of the media projects the most contradictory images and impulses.

One must be re-educated to the desire to know authentic truth, to defend one's own freedom of choice in regard to mass behaviour and the lures of propaganda, to nourish passion for moral beauty and a clear conscience. This is the delicate duty of parents and educators who assist them; and it is the duty of the Christian community with regard to its faithful.

Concerning the Christian conscience, its growth and nourishment, one cannot be content with fleeting contact with the principal truths of faith in infancy, but a programme of accompaniment is necessary along the various stages of life, opening the mind and the heart to welcome the fundamental duties upon which the existence of the individual and the community rest.

Only in this way will it be possible to prepare youth to comprehend the values of life, love, marriage and the family. Only in this way can they be brought to appreciate the beauty and the sanctity of the love, joy and responsibility of being parents and collaborators of God in giving life.

In the absence of a continuous and qualified formation, the capacity for judgment of the problems posed by biomedicine in the areas of sexuality, new-born life, procreation, and also in the way to treat and care for patients and the weaker sectors of society, becomes even more problematic.

It is certainly necessary to speak about the moral criteria that regard these themes with professionals, doctors and lawyers, to engage them to elaborate a competent judgment of conscience, and if need be, also a courageous objection of conscience, but an equal need rises from the basic level for families and parish communities in the process of the formation of youth and adults.

Under this aspect, next to Christian formation, whose aim is the knowledge of the Person of Christ, of his Word and Sacraments in the itinerary of faith of children and adolescents, one must consistently fuse the discourse on moral values that regard the body, sexuality, human love, procreation, respect for life at every moment, at the same time with valid and precise motives, reporting behaviour contrary to these primary values.

In this specific field the work of priests must be opportunely flanked by the commitment of lay educators, also specialists, dedicated to the duty to guide the ecclesial reality with their knowledge enlightened by faith.

Therefore, I ask the Lord to send among you, dear brothers and sisters, and among those dedicated to science, medicine, law and politics, witnesses endowed with true and upright consciences in order to defend and promote the “splendour of the truth” and to sustain the gift and mystery of life.

I trust in your help dearest professionals, philosophers, theologians, scientists and doctors. In a society at times chaotic and violent, with your cultural qualifications, by teaching and by example, you can contribute to awakening in many hearts the eloquent and clear voice of conscience.

The Second Vatican Council teaches us that “man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 16). The Council has offered wise directives so that “the faithful should learn to distinguish carefully between the rights and the duties which they have as belonging to the Church and those which fall to them as members of the human society”, and “they will strive to unite the two harmoniously, remembering that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since not even in temporal business may any human activity be withdrawn from God’s dominion” (*Lumen Gentium,* n. 36).

For this very reason the Council exhorts lay believers to welcome “what is decided by the Pastors as teachers and rulers of the Church”, and then recommends that “Pastors… should recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. They should willingly use their prudent advice” and concludes that “[m]any benefits for the Church are to be expected from this familiar relationship between the laity and the Pastors” (cf. *Lumen Gentium,* n. 37).

When the value of human life is at stake, this harmony between the magisterial function and the committed laity becomes singularly important: life is the first good received from God and is fundamental to all others; to guarantee the right to life for all and in an equal manner for all is the duty upon which the future of humanity

depends. The importance of your study meeting emerges also from this perspective.

I entrust the work and the results to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, whom the Christian tradition hails as the true “Mother of all the living”. May she assist and guide you! To seal this wish I willingly impart to all of you, to your families and collaborators, the Apostolic Blessing.

Over de Natuurwet

Tot deelnemers aan het Internationale Congres over de Natuurwet

Paus Benedictus XVI
12 februari 2007

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, Esteemed Professors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with particular pleasure that I welcome you at the beginning of the Congress’ work in which you will be engaged in the following days on a theme of considerable importance for the present historical moment, namely, the natural moral law.

I thank Bishop Rino Fisichella, Rector Magnificent of the Pontifical Lateran University, for the sentiments expressed in the address with which he has introduced this meeting.

There is no doubt that we are living in a moment of extraordinary development in the human capacity to decipher the rules and structures of matter, and in the consequent dominion of man over nature.

We all see the great advantages of this progress and we see more and more clearly the threat of destruction of nature by what we do.

There is another less visible danger, but no less disturbing: the method that permits us to know ever more deeply the rational structures of matter makes us ever less capable of perceiving the source of this rationality, creative Reason. The capacity to see the laws of material being makes us incapable of seeing the ethical message contained in being, a message that tradition calls lex naturalis, natural moral law.

This word for many today is almost incomprehensible due to a concept of nature that is no longer metaphysical, but only empirical. The fact that nature, being itself, is no longer a transparent moral message creates a sense of disorientation that renders the choices of daily life precarious and uncertain.

Naturally, the disorientation strikes the younger generations in a particular way, who must in this context find the fundamental choices for their life.

It is precisely in the light of this contestation that all the urgency of the necessity to reflect upon the theme of natural law and to rediscover its truth common to all men appears. The said law, to which the Apostle Paul refers (cf. Rom 2: 14-15), is written on the heart of man and is consequently, even today, accessible.

This law has as its first and general principle, “to do good and to avoid evil”. This is a truth which by its very

evidence immediately imposes itself on everyone. From it flows the other more particular principles that regulate ethical justice on the rights and duties of everyone.

So does the principle of respect for human life from its conception to its natural end, because this good of life is not man's property but the free gift of God. Besides this is the duty to seek the truth as the necessary presupposition of every authentic personal maturation.

Another fundamental application of the subject is freedom. Yet taking into account the fact that human freedom is always a freedom shared with others, it is clear that the harmony of freedom can be found only in what is common to all: the truth of the human being, the fundamental message of being itself, exactly the lex naturalis.

And how can we not mention, on one hand, the demand of justice that manifests itself in giving unicuique suum and, on the other, the expectation of solidarity that nourishes in everyone, especially if they are poor, the hope of the help of the more fortunate?

In these values are expressed unbreakable and contingent norms that do not depend on the will of the legislator and not even on the consensus that the State can and must give. They are, in fact, norms that precede any human law: as such, they are not subject to modification by anyone.
The natural law, together with fundamental rights, is the source from which ethical imperatives also flow, which it is only right to honour.

In today's ethics and philosophy of Law, petitions of juridical positivism are widespread. As a result, legislation often becomes only a compromise between different interests: seeking to transform private interests or wishes into law that conflict with the duties deriving from social responsibility.

In this situation it is opportune to recall that every juridical methodology, be it on the local or international level, ultimately draws its legitimacy from its rooting in the natural law, in the ethical message inscribed in the actual human being.

Natural law is, definitively, the only valid bulwark against the arbitrary power or the deception of ideological manipulation. The knowledge of this law inscribed on the heart of man increases with the progress of the moral conscience.

The first duty for all, and particularly for those with public responsibility, must therefore be to promote the maturation of the moral conscience. This is the fundamental progress without which all other progress proves non-authentic.

The law inscribed in our nature is the true guarantee offered to everyone in order to be able to live in freedom and to be respected in their own dignity.

What has been said up to this point has very concrete applications if one refers to the family, that is, to "the intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state… established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws" (Gaudium et Spes, n. 48).

Concerning this, the Second Vatican Council has opportunely recalled that the institution of marriage has been "confirmed by the divine law", and therefore "this sacred bond… for the good of the partner, of the children and of society no longer depends on human decision alone" (ibid.).

Therefore, no law made by man can override the norm written by the Creator without society becoming dramatically wounded in what constitutes its basic foundation. To forget this would mean to weaken the family, penalizing the children and rendering the future of society precarious.

Lastly, I feel the duty to affirm yet again that not all that is scientifically possible is also ethically licit. Technology, when it reduces the human being to an object of experimentation, results in abandoning the weak subject to the arbitration of the stronger. To blindly entrust oneself to technology as the only guarantee of progress, without offering at the same time an ethical code that penetrates its roots in that same reality under study and development, would be equal to doing violence to human nature with devastating consequences for all.

The contribution of scientists is of primary importance. Together with the progress of our capacity to dominate nature, scientists must also contribute to help understand the depth of our responsibility for man and for nature entrusted to him.

On this basis it is possible to develop a fruitful dialogue between believers and non-believers; between theologians, philosophers, jurists and scientists, which can offer to legislation as well precious material for personal and social life.

Therefore, I hope these days of study will bring not only a greater sensitivity of the learned with regard to the natural moral law, but will also serve to create conditions so that this theme may reach an ever fuller awareness of the inalienable value that the lex naturalis possesses for a real and coherent progress of private life and the social order.

With this wish, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer for you and for your academic commitment to research and reflection, while I impart to all with affection the Apostolic Blessing.

De pastorale en geestelijke bijstand aan mensen met een ongeneeslijke ziekte

Bij gelegenheid van de 15e Wereld Dag voor de Zieken, 11 februari 2007

Paus Benedictus XVI
8 december 2006

1. Dierbare Broeders en Zusters,
Op 11 februari 2007, wanneer de Kerk de liturgische gedachtenis van Onze Lieve Vrouwe van Lourdes viert, zal de Vijftiende Werelddag van de Zieken in Seoel, Korea, worden gevierd. Een aantal vergaderingen, conferenties, pastorale ontmoetingen en liturgische vieringen zullen met vertegenwoordigers van de Kerk in Korea, gezondheidszorgpersoneel, de zieken en hun families plaatsvinden. Nogmaals richt de Kerk zich tot hen die lijden en vraagt om aandacht voor ongeneeslijk zieken, waarvan velen in een terminale fase zijn. Zij bevinden zich op ieder continent, in het bijzonder op plaatsen waar de armoede en de ontbering immense ellende en zorg veroorzaken. Bewust van dit lijden, zal ik geestelijk aanwezig zijn bij de Wereld Dag van de Zieken, verenigd met hen die elkaar ontmoeten om te spreken over de situatie van de ongeneeslijk zieken in onze wereld en de inspanningen van Christelijke gemeenschappen aan te moedigen in hun getuigenis van de tederheid en genade

van de Heer.

2
De ziekte brengt onvermijdelijk een ogenblik van crisis en nuchtere confrontatie met de eigen persoonlijke situatie. De vooruitgang in de gezondheidswetenschappen geeft vaak de noodzakelijke middelen om deze uitdaging, op zijn minst met betrekking tot zijn fysieke aspecten, tegemoet te treden. Het menselijke leven heeft echter intrinsieke beperkingen, en vroeg of laat eindigt zijn leven met de dood. Dit is een ervaring waartoe elk menselijk wezen wordt geroepen, en één waarop hij of zij moet worden voorbereid. Ondanks de vooruitgang van de wetenschap, kan niet voor elke ziekte een behandeling gevonden worden, en daarom ontmoeten we in de ziekenhuizen, hospices en verzorgings- en verpleegtehuizen over de hele wereld het lijden van onze vele broeders en zusters die ongeneeslijk ziek of terminaal zijn. Bovendien ervaren vele miljoenen mensen in onze wereld nog ongezonde levensomstandigheden en de gebrekkige toegang tot de hoogstnodige medische middelen, vaak slechts alleen van minimale aard, met het resultaat dat het aantal mensen dat “ongeneeslijk” beschouwd wordt nog steeds toeneemt.

3
De Kerk wenst de ongeneeslijke en terminale patiënten te steunen door op te roepen tot de juiste sociale politiek, dat kan helpen om de oorzaken van vele ziekten te elimineren en aan te sporen tot een betere zorg voor de stervenden en voor hen, waarvoor geen medische remedie beschikbaar is. Er is een behoefte om een beleid te bevorderen dat tot voorwaarden leidt waarbij mensen zelfs ongeneselijke ziekten op een waardige manier kunnen dragen en op een waardige manier kunnen sterven. Hier is het noodzakelijk om nogmaals te beklemtonen dat er behoefte is aan palliatieve zorgcentra die integrale zorg verstrekken, die de zieken de menselijke hulp en de geestelijke begeleiding geven die ze nodig hebben. Dit is een recht dat iedere mens heeft, een recht waartoe iedereen gehouden is deze te verdedigen.

Hier zou ik de inspanningen van hen willen aanmoedigen die dagelijks werken om ervoor te zorgen dat ongeneeslijke en terminale zieken, samen met hun families, adequate en liefdevolle zorg ontvangen. Naar het voorbeeld van de barmhartige Samaritaan heeft de Kerk altijd een bijzondere zorg voor zwakkeren getoond. Door haar individuele leden en instellingen blijft zij de lijdende en stervende bijstaan, en streeft er daarbij naar om hun waardigheid op deze significante ogenblikken van het menselijk bestaan te bewaren. Veel van deze personen – professioneel personeel in de gezondheidszorg, pastoraal werkenden en vrijwilligers – en instellingen over de hele wereld dienen onophoudelijk de zieken, in de ziekenhuizen en in palliatieve zorgcentra, op straat, in huisvestingsprojecten en parochies.

4
Dan wil ik mij richten tot mijn dierbare broeders en zusters die aan ongeneeslijke en terminale ziekten lijden. Ik moedig u aan om het lijden van de gekruisigde Christus te overwegen, en verenigd met Hem zich tot de Vader te wenden in het volle vertrouwen dat elk leven, en uw leven in het bijzonder, in Zijn handen is. Vertrouw dat uw lijden, verenigd met die van Christus, voor de behoeften van de Kerk en de wereld vruchtbaar zal blijken te zijn. Ik vraag de Heer om uw geloof in Zijn liefde te versterken, vooral tijdens deze beproevingen die u ervaart. Het is mijn hoop dat, waar u ook bent, u altijd de geestelijke aanmoediging en de sterkte zult vinden die nodig is om uw geloof te voeden en u dichter bij de Vader van het Leven te brengen. Door haar priesters en pastorale werkers, wil de Kerk u bijstaan en staat aan uw kant, u helpend in uw uur van nood en daarmee stelt zij Christus eigen liefdevolle genade tegenwoordig voor hen die lijden.

Samenvattend vraag ik de kerkelijke gemeenschappen over de hele wereld, en in het bijzonder die gewijd zijn aan de dienst aan de zieken, om met de hulp van Maria, Salus Infirmorum, de effectieve getuigen te zijn van de liefhebbende zorg van God onze Vader. Moge de Gezegende Maagd, onze Moeder, hen die ziek zijn troosten en

iedereen ondersteunen die hun leven, als de barmhartige Samaritaan, hebben gewijd aan het genezen van de fysieke en geestelijke wonden van hen die lijden. Verenigd met elk van u in gedachten en gebed, verleen ik van harte mijn Apostolische Zegen als belofte van sterkte en vrede in de Heer.

Vanuit het Vaticaan, 8 december 2006

Paus Benedictus XVI

Volgende pagina: oorspronkelijke Engelse tekst

Papal Message for World Day of the Sick

"The Need for More Palliative Care Centers"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
On 11 February 2007, when the Church keeps the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Fifteenth World Day of the Sick will be celebrated in Seoul, Korea. A number of meetings, conferences, pastoral gatherings and liturgical celebrations will take place with representatives of the Church in Korea, health care personnel, the sick and their families. Once again the Church turns her eyes to those who suffer and calls attention to the incurably ill, many of whom are dying from terminal diseases. They are found on every continent, particularly in places where poverty and hardship cause immense misery and grief. Conscious of these sufferings, I will be spiritually present at the World Day of the Sick, united with those meeting to discuss the plight of the incurably ill in our world and encouraging the efforts of Christian communities in their witness to the Lord's tenderness and mercy.

Sickness inevitably brings with it a moment of crisis and sober confrontation with one's own personal situation. Advances in the health sciences often provide the means necessary to meet this challenge, at least with regard to its physical aspects. Human life, however, has intrinsic limitations, and sooner or later it ends in death. This is an experience to which each human being is called, and one for which he or she must be prepared. Despite the advances of science, a cure cannot be found for every illness, and thus, in hospitals, hospices and homes throughout the world we encounter the sufferings of our many brothers and sisters who are incurably and often terminally ill. In addition, many millions of people in our world still experience in sanitary living conditions and lack access to much-needed medical resources, often of the most basic kind, with the result that the number of human beings considered "incurable" is greatly increased.

The Church wishes to support the incurably and terminally ill by calling for just social policies which can help to eliminate the causes of many diseases and by urging improved care for the dying and those for whom no medical remedy is available. There is a need to promote policies which create conditions where human beings can bear even incurable illnesses and death in a dignified manner. Here it is necessary to stress once again the need for more palliative care centers which provide integral care, offering the sick the human assistance and spiritual accompaniment they need. This is a right belonging to every human being, one which we must all be committed to defend.

Here I would like to encourage the efforts of those who work daily to ensure that the incurably and terminally ill, together with their families, receive adequate and loving care. The Church, following the example of the Good Samaritan, has always shown particular concern for the infirm. Through her individual members and institutions, she continues to stand alongside the suffering and to attend the dying, striving to preserve their dignity at these significant moments of human existence. Many such individuals — health care professionals, pastoral agents and volunteers — and institutions throughout the world are tirelessly serving the sick, in hospitals and in palliative care units, on city streets, in housing projects and parishes.

I now turn to you, my dear brothers and sisters suffering from incurable and terminal diseases. I encourage you to contemplate the sufferings of Christ crucified, and, in union with him, to turn to the Father with complete trust that all life, and your lives in particular, are in his hands. Trust that your sufferings, united to those of Christ, will prove fruitful for the needs of the Church and the world. I ask the Lord to strengthen your faith in his love, especially during these trials that you are experiencing. It is my hope that, wherever you are, you will always find the spiritual encouragement and strength needed to nourish your faith and bring you closer to the Father of Life. Through her priests and pastoral workers, the Church wishes to assist you and stand at your side, helping you in your hour of need, and thus making present Christ's own loving mercy towards those who suffer.

In conclusion, I ask ecclesial communities throughout the world, and particularly those dedicated to the service of the infirm, to continue, with the help of Mary, Salus Infirmorum, to bear effective witness to the loving concern of God our Father. May the Blessed Virgin, our Mother, comfort those who are ill and sustain all who have devoted their lives, as Good Samaritans, to healing the physical and spiritual wounds of those who suffer. United to each of you in thought and prayer, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of strength and peace in the Lord.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2006

Benedictus PP. XVI

Over de vooruitgang van de wetenschap

Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the members of the Pontifical Academy Of Sciences



Vaticaan, 6 november 2006
Monday, 6 November 2006

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to greet the members of Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the occasion of this Plenary Assembly, and I thank Professor Nicola Cabibbo for his kind words of greeting in your name. The theme of your meeting – "Predictability in Science: Accuracy and Limitations" – deals with a distinctive attribute of modern science. Predictability, in fact, is one of the chief reasons for science's prestige in contemporary society. The establishment of the scientific method has given the sciences the ability to predict phenomena, to study their development, and thus to control the environment in which man lives.

This increasing 'advance' of science, and especially its capacity to master nature through technology, has at times been linked to a corresponding 'retreat' of philosophy, of religion, and even of the Christian faith. Indeed, some have seen in the progress of modern science and technology one of the main causes of secularization and materialism: why invoke God's control over these phenomena when science has shown itself capable of doing the same thing? Certainly the Church acknowledges that "with the help of science and technology…, man has

extended his mastery over almost the whole of nature", and thus "he now produces by his own enterprise benefits once looked for from heavenly powers" (Gaudium et Spes, 33). At the same time, Christianity does not posit an inevitable conflict between supernatural faith and scientific progress. The very starting-point of Biblical revelation is the affirmation that God created human beings, endowed them with reason, and set them over all the creatures of the earth. In this way, man has become the steward of creation and God's "helper". If we think, for example, of how modern science, by predicting natural phenomena, has contributed to the protection of the environment, the progress of developing nations, the fight against epidemics, and an increase in life expectancy, it becomes clear that there is no conflict between God's providence and human enterprise. Indeed, we could say that the work of predicting, controlling and governing nature, which science today renders more practicable than in the past, is itself a part of the Creator's plan.

Science, however, while giving generously, gives only what it is meant to give. Man cannot place in science and technology so radical and unconditional a trust as to believe that scientific and technological progress can explain everything and completely fulfil all his existential and spiritual needs. Science cannot replace philosophy and revelation by giving an exhaustive answer to man's most radical questions: questions about the meaning of living and dying, about ultimate values, and about the nature of progress itself. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council, after acknowledging the benefits gained by scientific advances, pointed out that the "scientific methods of investigation can be unjustifiably taken as the supreme norm for arriving at truth", and added that "there is a danger that man, trusting too much in the discoveries of today, may think that he is sufficient unto himself and no longer seek the higher values" (ibid., 57).

Scientific predictability also raises the question of the scientist's ethical responsibilities. His conclusions must be guided by respect for truth and an honest acknowledgment of both the accuracy and the inevitable limitations of the scientific method. Certainly this means avoiding needlessly alarming predictions when these are not supported by sufficient data or exceed science's actual ability to predict. But it also means avoiding the opposite, namely a silence, born of fear, in the face of genuine problems. The influence of scientists in shaping public opinion on the basis of their knowledge is too important to be undermined by undue haste or the pursuit of superficial publicity. As my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, once observed: "Scientists, precisely because they 'know more', are called to 'serve more'. Since the freedom they enjoy in research gives them access to specialized knowledge, they have the responsibility of using that knowledge wisely for the benefit of the entire human family" (Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 11 November 2002).

Dear Academicians, our world continues to look to you and your colleagues for a clear understanding of the possible consequences of many important natural phenomena. I think, for example, of the continuing threats to the environment which are affecting whole peoples, and the urgent need to discover safe, alternative energy sources available to all. Scientists will find support from the Church in their efforts to confront these issues, since the Church has received from her divine founder the task of guiding people's consciences towards goodness, solidarity and peace. Precisely for this reason she feels in duty bound to insist that science's ability to predict and control must never be employed against human life and its dignity, but always placed at its service, at the service of this and future generations.

There is one final reflection that the subject of your Assembly can suggest to us today. As some of the papers presented in the last few days have emphasized, the scientific method itself, in its gathering of data and in the processing and use of those data in projections, has inherent limitations that necessarily restrict scientific predictability to specific contexts and approaches. Science cannot, therefore, presume to provide a complete, deterministic representation of our future and of the development of every phenomenon that it studies. Philosophy and theology might make an important contribution to this fundamentally epistemological question by, for example, helping the empirical sciences to recognize a difference between the mathematical inability to

predict certain events and the validity of the principle of causality, or between scientific indeterminism or contingency (randomness) and causality on the philosophical level, or, more radically, between evolution as the origin of a succession in space and time, and creation as the ultimate origin of participated being in essential Being.

At the same time, there is a higher level that necessarily transcends all scientific predictions, namely, the human world of freedom and history. Whereas the physical cosmos can have its own spatial-temporal development, only humanity, strictly speaking, has a history, the history of its freedom. Freedom, like reason, is a precious part of God's image within us, and it can never be reduced to a deterministic analysis. Its transcendence vis-à-vis the material world must be acknowledged and respected, since it is a sign of our human dignity. Denying that transcendence in the name of a supposed absolute ability of the scientific method to predict and condition the human world would involve the loss of what is human in man, and, by failing to recognize his uniqueness and transcendence, could dangerously open the door to his exploitation.

Dear friends, as I conclude these reflections, I once more assure you of my close interest in the activities of this Pontifical Academy and of my prayers for you and your families. Upon all of you I invoke Almighty God's blessings of wisdom, joy and peace.

Stamcellen: welke toekomst voor therapie ?

Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the participants in the symposium on the theme: "Stem cells: what future for therapy?" organized by the Pontifical Academy For Life

Vaticaan, 16 september 2006
Hall of the Swiss, Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 16 September 2006

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

I address a cordial greeting to you all. This meeting with you, scientists and scholars dedicated to specialized research in the treatment of diseases that are a serious affliction to humanity, is a special comfort to me.

I am grateful to the organizers who have promoted this Congress on a topic that has become more and more important in recent years. The specific theme of the Symposium is appropriately formulated with a question open to hope: "Stem cells: what future for therapy?".

I thank Bishop Elio Sgreccia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, for his kind words, also on behalf of the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC), an association that has cooperated in organizing the Congress and is represented here by Prof. Gianluigi Gigli, outgoing President, and Prof. Simon de Castellvi, President-elect.

When science is applied to the alleviation of suffering and when it discovers on its way new resources, it shows two faces rich in humanity: through the sustained ingenuity invested in research, and through the benefit

announced to all who are afflicted by sickness.

Those who provide financial means and encourage the necessary structures for study share in the merit of this progress on the path of civilization.

On this occasion, I would like to repeat what I said at a recent Audience: “Progress becomes true progress only if it serves the human person and if the human person grows: not only in terms of his or her technical power, but also in his or her moral awareness” (cf. General Audience, 16 August 2006).

In this light, somatic stem-cell research also deserves approval and encouragement when it felicitously combines scientific knowledge, the most advanced technology in the biological field and ethics that postulate respect for the human being at every stage of his or her existence.

The prospects opened by this new chapter in research are fascinating in themselves, for they give a glimpse of the possible cure of degenerative tissue diseases that subsequently threaten those affected with disability and death.

How is it possible not to feel the duty to praise all those who apply themselves to this research and all who support the organization and cover its expenses?

I would like in particular to urge scientific structures that draw their inspiration and organization from the Catholic Church to increase this type of research and to establish the closest possible contact with one another and with those who seek to relieve human suffering in the proper ways.

May I also point out, in the face of the frequently unjust accusations of insensitivity addressed to the Church, her constant support for research dedicated to the cure of diseases and to the good of humanity throughout her 2,000-year-old history.

If there has been resistance – and if there still is – it was and is to those forms of research that provide for the planned suppression of human beings who already exist, even if they have not yet been born. Research, in such cases, irrespective of efficacious therapeutic results is not truly at the service of humanity.

In fact, this research advances through the suppression of human lives that are equal in dignity to the lives of other human individuals and the lives of the researchers themselves.

History itself has condemned such a science in the past and will condemn it in the future, not only because it lacks the light of God but also because it lacks humanity.

I would like to repeat here what I already wrote some time ago: Here there is a problem that we cannot get around; no one can dispose of human life. An insurmountable limit to our possibilities of doing and of experimenting must be established. The human being is not a disposable object, but every single individual represents God’s presence in the world (cf. J. Ratzinger, God and the World, Ignatius Press, 2002).

In the face of the actual suppression of the human being there can be no compromises or prevarications. One cannot think that a society can effectively combat crime when society itself legalizes crime in the area of conceived life.

On the occasion of recent Congresses of the Pontifical Academy for Life, I have had the opportunity to reassert the teaching of the Church, addressed to all people of good will, on the human value of the newly conceived child, also when considered prior to implantation in the uterus.

The fact that you at this Congress have expressed your commitment and hope to achieve new therapeutic results from the use of cells of the adult body without recourse to the suppression of newly conceived human

beings, and the fact that your work is being rewarded by results, are confirmation of the validity of the Church's constant invitation to full respect for the human being from conception. The good of human beings should not only be sought in universally valid goals, but also in the methods used to achieve them.

A good result can never justify intrinsically unlawful means. It is not only a matter of a healthy criterion for the use of limited financial resources, but also, and above all, of respect for the fundamental human rights in the area of scientific research itself.

I hope that God will grant your efforts – which are certainly sustained by God who acts in every person of good will and for the good of all – the joy of discovering the truth, wisdom in consideration and respect for every human being, and success in the search for effective remedies to human suffering.

To seal this hope, I cordially impart an affectionate Blessing to all of you, to your collaborators and to your relatives, as well as to the patients who will benefit from your ingenuity and resourcefulness and the results of your work, with the assurance of my special remembrance in prayer.

Het menselijke embryo in de pre-implantatiefase

Address to the participants at the 12th General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy For Life and congress on "The Human Embryo In The Pre-Implantation Phase"

Clementine Hall
27 February 2006
Pope Benedict XVI

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

I address a respectful and cordial greeting to everyone on the occasion of the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life and the International Congress on: "The human embryo in the pre-implantation phase", which has just begun.

I greet in particular Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragàn, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, as well as Bishop Elio Sgreccia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, whom I thank for the kind words with which he has presented clearly the special interest of the themes treated on this occasion, and I greet Cardinal-elect Carlo Caffarra, a long-standing friend.

Indeed, the study topic chosen for your Assembly, "The human embryo in the pre-implantation phase", that is, in the very first days subsequent to conception, is an extremely important issue today, both because of the obvious repercussions on philosophical-anthropological and ethical thought, and also because of the prospects applicable in the context of the biomedical and juridical sciences.

It is certainly a fascinating topic, however difficult and demanding it may be, given the delicate nature of the subject under examination and the complexity of the epistemological problems that concern the relationship between the revelation of facts at the level of the experimental sciences and the consequent, necessary anthropological reflection on values.

As it is easy to see, neither Sacred Scripture nor the oldest Christian Tradition can contain any explicit treatment of your theme. St Luke, nevertheless, testifies to the active, though hidden, presence of the two infants.

He recounts the meeting of the Mother of Jesus, who had conceived him in her virginal womb only a few days earlier, with the mother of John the Baptist, who was already in the sixth month of her pregnancy: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leapt in her womb” (Lk 1: 41).

St Ambrose comments: Elizabeth “perceived the arrival of Mary, he (John) perceived the arrival of the Lord the woman, the arrival of the Woman, the child, the arrival of the Child” (Comm. in Luc. 2: 19, 22-26).

Even in the absence of explicit teaching on the very first days of life of the unborn child, it is possible to find valuable information in Sacred Scripture that elicits sentiments of admiration and respect for the newly conceived human being, especially in those who, like you, are proposing to study the mystery of human procreation.

The sacred books, in fact, set out to show God’s love for every human being even before he has been formed in his mother’s womb.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jer 1: 5), God said to the Prophet Jeremiah. And the Psalmist recognizes with gratitude: “You did form my inward parts, you did knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for you are fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are your works! You know me right well” (Ps 139[138]: 13-14).
These words acquire their full, rich meaning when one thinks that God intervenes directly in the creation of the soul of every new human being.

God’s love does not differentiate between the newly conceived infant still in his or her mother’s womb and the child or young person, or the adult and the elderly person. God does not distinguish between them because he sees an impression of his own image and likeness (Gn 1: 26) in each one.
He makes no distinctions because he perceives in all of them a reflection of the face of his Only-begotten Son, whom “he chose… before the foundation of the world…. He destined us in love to be his sons… according to the purpose of his will” (Eph 1: 4-6).

This boundless and almost incomprehensible love of God for the human being reveals the degree to which the human person deserves to be loved in himself, independently of any other consideration – intelligence, beauty, health, youth, integrity, and so forth. In short, human life is always a good, for it “is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory” (Evangelium Vitae, n. 34).

Indeed, the human person has been endowed with a very exalted dignity, which is rooted in the intimate bond that unites him with his Creator: a reflection of God’s own reality shines out in the human person, in every person, whatever the stage or condition of his life.

Therefore, the Magisterium of the Church has constantly proclaimed the sacred and inviolable character of every human life from its conception until its natural end (cf. ibid., n. 57). This moral judgment also applies to the origins of the life of an embryo even before it is implanted in the mother’s womb, which will protect and nourish it for nine months until the moment of birth: “Human life is sacred and inviolable at every moment of existence, including the initial phase which precedes birth” (ibid., n. 61).

I know well, dear scholars, with what sentiments of wonder and profound respect for the human being you carry out your demanding and fruitful work of research precisely on the origin of human life itself it is a mystery on whose significance science will be increasingly able to shed light, even if it will be difficult to decipher it completely.

Indeed, as soon as reason succeeds in overcoming a limit deemed insurmountable, it will be challenged by other limits as yet unknown. Man will always remain a deep and impenetrable enigma.

In the fourth century, St Cyril of Jerusalem already offered the following reflection to the catechumens who were preparing to receive Baptism: “Who prepared the cavity of the womb for the procreation of children? Who breathed life into the inanimate fetus within it? Who knit us together with bones and sinews and clothed us with skin and flesh (cf. Jb 10: 11), and as soon as the child is born, causes the breast to produce an abundance of milk? How is it that the child, in growing, becomes an adolescent, and from an adolescent is transformed into a young man, then an adult and finally an old man, without anyone being able to identify the precise day on which the change occurred?”.

And he concluded: “O Man, you are seeing the Craftsman you are seeing the wise Creator” (Catechesi Battesimale, 9, 15-16).

At the beginning of the third millennium these considerations still apply. They are addressed not so much to the physical or physiological phenomenon as rather to its anthropological and metaphysical significance. We have made enormous headway in our knowledge and have defined more clearly the limits of our ignorance but it always seems too arduous for human intelligence to realize that in looking at creation, we encounter the impression of the Creator.

In fact, those who love the truth, like you, dear scholars, should perceive that research on such profound topics places us in the condition of seeing and, as it were, touching the hand of God. Beyond the limits of experimental methods, beyond the boundaries of the sphere which some call meta-analysis, wherever the perception of the senses no longer suffices or where neither the perception of the senses alone nor scientific verification is possible, begins the adventure of transcendence, the commitment to “go beyond” them.

Dear researchers and experts, I hope you will be more and more successful, not only in examining the reality that is the subject of your endeavour, but also in contemplating it in such a way that, together with your discoveries, questions will arise that lead to discovering in the beauty of creatures a reflection of the Creator.

In this context, I am eager to express my appreciation and gratitude to the Pontifical Academy for Life for its valuable work of “study, formation and information” which benefits the Dicasteries of the Holy See, the local Churches and scholars attentive to what the Church proposes on their terrain of scientific research and on human life in its relations with ethics and law.

Because of the urgency and importance of these problems, I consider the foundation of this Institution by my venerable Predecessor, John Paul II, providential. I therefore desire to express with sincere cordiality to all of you, the personnel and the members of the Pontifical Academy for Life, my closeness and support.

With these sentiments, as I entrust your work to Mary’s protection, I impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

The Human Person Is at the Heart of the Whole Social Order

Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the members of the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and of Social Sciences, which are located in the Casina Pio IV in the Vatican Gardens.

21-11-2005
Pope Benedict XVI

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to extend my warm greetings to all those taking part in this important gathering. In a special way I wish to thank Professor Nicola Cabibbo, president of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and Professor Mary Ann Glendon, president of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, for their words of welcome. I am also happy to greet Cardinal Angelo Sodano, secretary of state, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini and Cardinal Georges Cottier, who has always been very dedicated to the work of the Pontifical Academies.

I am particularly pleased that the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences has chosen “the concept of the person in social sciences” as the subject to be examined this year. The human person is at the heart of the whole social order and consequently at the very center of your field of study. In the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, the human person “signifies what is most perfect in nature” (S.Th., I, 29, 3). Human beings are part of nature and, yet, as free subjects who have moral and spiritual values, they transcend nature. This anthropological reality is an integral part of Christian thought, and responds directly to the attempts to abolish the boundary between human sciences and natural sciences, often proposed in contemporary society.

Understood correctly, this reality offers a profound answer to the questions posed today concerning the status of the human being. This is a theme which must continue to be part of the dialogue with science. The Church’s teaching is based on the fact that God created man and woman in his own image and likeness and granted them a superior dignity and a shared mission towards the whole of creation (cf. Genesis 1 and 2).

According to God’s design, persons cannot be separated from the physical, psychological or spiritual dimensions of human nature. Even though cultures change over time, to suppress or ignore the nature that they claim to “cultivate” can have serious consequences. Likewise, individuals will only find authentic fulfillment when they accept the genuine elements of nature that constitute them as persons.

The concept of person continues to bring about a profound understanding of the unique character and social dimension of every human being. This is especially true in legal and social institutions, where the notion of “person” is fundamental. Sometimes, however, even when this is recognized in international declarations and legal statutes, certain cultures, especially when not deeply touched by the Gospel, remain strongly influenced by group-centered ideologies or by an individualistic and secularist view of society. The social doctrine of the Catholic Church, which places the human person at the heart and source of social order, can offer much to the contemporary consideration of social themes.

It is providential that we are discussing the subject of the person as we pay particular honor to my venerable predecessor, Pope John Paul II. In a way, his undisputed contribution to Christian thought can be understood as a profound meditation on the person. He enriched and expanded the concept in his encyclicals and other writings. These texts represent a patrimony to be received, collected and assimilated with care, particularly by the Pontifical Academies.

It is, therefore, with gratitude that I avail myself of this occasion to unveil this sculpture of Pope John Paul II, flanked by two memorial inscriptions. They remind us of the Servant of God’s special interest in the work of your Academies, especially the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, founded by him in 1994. They also point to his enlightened readiness to reach out in a dialogue of salvation to the world of science and culture, a desire which is entrusted in a particular way to the Pontifical Academies. It is my prayer that your activities will continue to produce a fruitful interchange between the Church’s teaching on the human person and the sciences and social sciences which you represent. Upon all present on this significant occasion, I invoke abundant divine blessings.

Het menselijke genoom

Address of his holiness Benedict XVI to the participants at the 20th international conference organized by the Pontifical Council For Health Pastoral Care on the theme of the Human Genome

Pope Benedict XVI
19 November 2005

Your Eminence, Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I address my cordial greeting to you all, with a special thought of gratitude to Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán for the kind greeting he has expressed on behalf of those present.

I offer a special greeting to the Bishops and priests who are taking part in this Conference as well as the speakers, who have certainly made a highly qualified contribution to the problems addressed in these days: their reflections and suggestions will be the subject of an attentive evaluation by the competent ecclesial bodies.

Placing myself in the pastoral perspective proper to the Pontifical Council that has sponsored this Conference, I would like to point out that today, especially in the area of breakthroughs in medical science, the Church is being given a further possibility of carrying out the precious task of enlightening consciences, in order to ensure that every new scientific discovery will serve the integral good of the person, with constant respect for his or her dignity.

In underlining the importance of this pastoral task, I would like first of all to say a word of encouragement to those in charge of promoting it.

The contemporary world is marked by the process of secularization. Through complex cultural and social events, it has not only claimed a just autonomy for science and the organization of society, but has all too often also obliterated the link between temporal realities and their Creator, even to the point of neglecting to safeguard the transcendent dignity of human beings and respect for human life itself.

Today, however, secularization in the form of radical secularism no longer satisfies the more aware and alert minds. This means that possible and perhaps new spaces are opening up for a profitable dialogue with society and not only with the faithful, especially on important themes such as those relating to life.

This is possible because, in peoples with a long Christian tradition, there are still seeds of humanism which the disputes of nihilistic philosophy have not yet reached. Indeed, these seeds tend to germinate more vigorously, the more serious the challenges become.

Believers, moreover, know well that the Gospel is in an intrinsic harmony with the values engraved in human nature. Thus, God’s image is deeply impressed in the soul of the human being, the voice of whose conscience it is far from easy to silence.

With the Parable of the Sower, Jesus in the Gospel reminds us that there is always good ground on which the

seed may fall, spring up and bear fruit. Even people who no longer claim to be members of the Church or even those who have lost the light of faith, nonetheless remain attentive to the human values and positive contributions that the Gospel can make to the good of the individual and of society.

It is particularly easy to become aware of this by reflecting on the topic of your Conference: the people of our time, whose sensitivity, moreover, has been heightened by the terrible events that have clouded the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, easily understand that human dignity cannot be identified with the genes of the human being's DNA and is not diminished by the possible presence of physical differences or genetic defects.

The principle of "non-discrimination" on the basis of physical or genetic factors has deeply penetrated consciences and is formally spelled out in the charters of human rights. The truest foundation of this principle lies in the dignity inherent in every human person because he or she is created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1: 26).

What is more, a serene analysis of scientific data leads to a recognition of the presence of this dignity in every phase of human life, starting from the very moment of conception. The Church proclaims and proposes this truth not only with the authority of the Gospel, but also with the power that derives from reason. This is precisely why she feels duty bound to appeal to every person of good will in the certainty that the acceptance of these truths cannot but benefit individuals and society.

Indeed, it is necessary to preserve ourselves from the risks of a science and technology that claim total autonomy from the moral norms inscribed in the nature of the human being.

There are many professional bodies and academies in the Church that are qualified to evaluate innovations in the scientific environment, particularly in the world of biomedicine; then there are doctrinal bodies specifically designated to define the moral values to be safeguarded and to formulate norms required for their effective protection; lastly, there are pastoral Dicasteries, such as the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, whose task is to ensure that the Church's pastoral presence is effective.

This third task is not only invaluable with regard to an ever more adequate humanization of medicine, but also in order to guarantee a prompt response to the expectations by each individual of effective spiritual assistance.

Consequently, it is necessary to give pastoral health care a new impetus. This implies renewal and the deepening of the pastoral proposal itself. It should take into account the growing mass of knowledge spread by the media and the higher standard of education of those they target.

We cannot ignore the fact that more and more frequently, not only legislators but citizens too are called to express their thoughts on problems that can be described as scientific and difficult. If they lack an adequate education, indeed, if their consciences are inadequately formed, false values or deviant information can easily prevail in the guidance of public opinion.

Updating the training of pastors and educators to enable them to take on their own responsibilities in conformity with their faith, and at the same time in a respectful and loyal dialogue with non-believers, is the indispensable task of any up-to-date pastoral health care. Today, especially in the field of the applications of genetics, families can lack adequate information and have difficulty in preserving the moral autonomy they need to stay faithful to their own life choices.

In this sector, therefore, a deeper and more enlightened formation of consciences is necessary. Today's scientific discoveries affect family life, involving families in unexpected and sensitive decisions that require responsible treatment. Pastoral work in the field of health care thus needs properly trained and competent

advisers.

This gives some idea of the complex and demanding management needed in this area today.
In the face of these growing needs in pastoral care, as the Church continues to trust in the light of the Gospel and the power of Grace, she urges those responsible to study a proper methodology in order to help individuals, families and society, combining faithfulness and dialogue, theological study and the ability for mediation.

In this, she sets great store especially by the contribution of all, such as you who are gathered here to take part in this International Conference and who have at heart the fundamental values that support human coexistence. I gladly take this opportunity to express to you all my grateful appreciation for your contribution in a sector so important for the future of humanity.

With these sentiments, I invoke from the Lord an abundance of enlightenment on your work, and as a testimony of my esteem and affection, I impart a special Blessing to you all.