



Over orgaandonatie

To the participants of the international Congress “A Gift for Life. Considerations on Organ Donation.”

Sponsored by the Pontifical Academy for Life, the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, and the Italian National Transplant Center



7 november 2008

Pope Benedict XVI

Venerated brothers in the episcopate, brothers and sisters,

Organ donation is a unique testimony of charity. In a time such as ours, frequently marked by various forms of egotism, it is more and more urgent to understand how it is necessary to enter into the logic of gratitude to correctly understand life. There exists, in fact, a responsibility of love and charity that commits oneself to make one's own life a gift for others, if one truly seeks one's own fulfillment. As Lord Jesus taught us, only by given one's life, can you save it (cf. Luke 9:24).

Greetings to all those present, in particular to Senator Maurizio Sacconi, Italy's labor minister; and I thank Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Academy for Life, for the words he addressed to me, illustrating the deep significance of this encounter and presenting the synthesis of the work of the congress.

Together with him, I also thank the president of the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, and the director of the Italian National Transplant Center, underlining with appreciation the value of the collaboration of these organizations in the area of organ transplants, which has been debated in your days of work and study.

The history of medicine shows evidence of the great advances that have been made in giving more dignity each day to people who suffer. Tissue and organ transplants represent a great conquest of medical science, and are certainly signs of hope for those suffering serious, and often grave, illnesses.

If we turn our gaze to the entire world, it is easy to confirm the numerous and complex cases in which, thanks to the technique of organ transplantation, many people have overcome extremely grave illnesses, and in them the joy of life has been restored. This would never have happened if the commitment of the doctors and the competence of the researchers had not been able to count upon the generosity and altruism of those who have donated organs.

Unfortunately, the problem of the lack of available vital organs is not a theoretical one, but a considerably practical one; one can see this in the long waiting list of those whose only hope for survival is linked to the small number of non-useful donations.

It is useful, above all in this context, to reflect on this advancement of science so that the multiplication of transplant petitions don't change around the ethical principles upon which it rests. As I said in my first encyclical, the body can never be considered as a mere object (cf. “Deus Caritas Est,” No. 5); to do otherwise would impose on it the logic of the market. The body of each person, together with the spirit that is given to each one individually, constitutes an inseparable unity upon which is impressed the image of God himself. To prescind from this dimension brings to mind points of view that are incapable of understanding the totality of the mystery present in each person. It is necessary, then, that priority must be given to respect for the dignity



of the human person and the protection of individual identity.

Regarding the technique of organ transplants, this means that one can only donate if this act doesn't put one's own health and identity in serious danger, and if it is done for a valid moral and proportionate reason. Any reasons for the buying and selling of organs, or the adoption of utilitarian and discriminatory criteria, would clash in such a way with the meaning of gift that they would be invalidated, qualifying them as illicit moral acts. Abuses in transplants and organ trafficking, which frequently affect innocent persons, such as children, must find the scientific and medical community united in a joint refusal. They should be decidedly condemned as abominable.

The same ethical principle must be reiterated in the case of the creation and destruction of human embryos destined for therapeutic objectives. The very idea of considering the embryo as "therapeutic material" contradicts the cultural, civil and ethical foundations on which the dignity of the person rests.

With frequency, organ transplantation takes place as a completely gratuitous gesture on the part of the family member who has been certifiably pronounced dead. In these cases, informed consent is a precondition of freedom so that the transplant can be characterized as being a gift and not interpreted as a coercive or abusive act. In any case, it is useful to remember that the various vital organs can only be extracted "ex cadavere" [from a dead body], which possesses its own dignity and should be respected. Over recent years science has made further progress in ascertaining the death of a patient. It is good, then, that the achieved results receive the consensus of the entire scientific community in favor of looking for solutions that give everyone certainty. In an environment such as this, the minimum suspicion of arbitrariness is not allowed, and where total certainty has not been reached, the principle of caution should prevail.

For this it is useful to increment interdisciplinary research and study in such a way that the public is presented with the most transparent truth on the anthropologic, social, ethical and legal implications of a transplant. In these cases respect for the life of the donor should be assumed as the primary criterion, in such a way so that the extraction of the organs only take place after having ascertained the patient's true death (cf. Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 476).

The act of love, which is expressed with the gift of one's own vital organs, is a genuine testament of charity that knows how to look beyond death so that life always wins. The recipient should be aware of the value of this gesture that one receives, of a gift that goes beyond the therapeutic benefit. What they receive is a testament of love, and it should give rise to a response equally generous, and in this way grows the culture of gift and gratitude.

The path that must be followed, until science discovers new and more advanced possible therapies, needs to be that of the formation and diffusion of a culture characterized by solidarity and that opens itself to others without excluding anyone. Organ transplants that are in line with ethic of giving require the commitment of all sides to invest every possible effort in formation and information, so as to increasingly awaken consciences to a problem that directly affects the lives of so many.

It would be necessary, then, to overcome prejudices and misunderstanding, dispel suspicions and fears and substitute them with certainties and guarantees, so as to create in all people an awareness, ever more widespread, of the great gift of life.

Wishing that each one of you continues your own commitment with due competence and professionalism, I invoke the help of God over the working sessions of the congress and impart to all of you, from the heart, my blessing.



Translation by ZENIT

Over evolutie en schepping

To the members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the occasion of their plenary assembly

31 October 2008

Pope Benedict XVI

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to greet you, the members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly, and I thank Professor Nicola Cabibbo for the words he has kindly addressed to me on your behalf.

In choosing the topic Scientific Insight into the Evolution of the Universe and of Life, you seek to focus on an area of enquiry which elicits much interest. In fact, many of our contemporaries today wish to reflect upon the ultimate origin of beings, their cause and their end, and the meaning of human history and the universe.

In this context, questions concerning the relationship between science's reading of the world and the reading offered by Christian Revelation naturally arise. My predecessors Pope Pius XII and Pope John Paul II noted that there is no opposition between faith's understanding of creation and the evidence of the empirical sciences. Philosophy in its early stages had proposed images to explain the origin of the cosmos on the basis of one or more elements of the material world. This genesis was not seen as a creation, but rather a mutation or transformation; it involved a somewhat horizontal interpretation of the origin of the world. A decisive advance in understanding the origin of the cosmos was the consideration of being qua being and the concern of metaphysics with the most basic question of the first or transcendent origin of participated being. In order to develop and evolve, the world must first be, and thus have come from nothing into being. It must be created, in other words, by the first Being who is such by essence.

To state that the foundation of the cosmos and its developments is the provident wisdom of the Creator is not to say that creation has only to do with the beginning of the history of the world and of life. It implies, rather, that the Creator founds these developments and supports them, underpins them and sustains them continuously. Thomas Aquinas taught that the notion of creation must transcend the horizontal origin of the unfolding of events, which is history, and consequently all our purely naturalistic ways of thinking and speaking about the evolution of the world. Thomas observed that creation is neither a movement nor a mutation. It is instead the foundational and continuing relationship that links the creature to the Creator, for he is the cause of every being and all becoming (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.45, a. 3).

To "evolve" literally means "to unroll a scroll", that is, to read a book. The imagery of nature as a book has its roots in Christianity and has been held dear by many scientists. Galileo saw nature as a book whose author is God in the same way that Scripture has God as its author. It is a book whose history, whose evolution, whose "writing" and meaning, we "read" according to the different approaches of the sciences, while all the time presupposing the foundational presence of the author who has wished to reveal himself therein. This image also helps us to understand that the world, far from originating out of chaos, resembles an ordered book; it is a cosmos. Notwithstanding elements of the irrational, chaotic and the destructive in the long processes of change in the cosmos, matter as such is "legible". It has an inbuilt "mathematics". The human mind therefore can engage not only in a "cosmography" studying measurable phenomena but also in a "cosmology" discerning the



visible inner logic of the cosmos. We may not at first be able to see the harmony both of the whole and of the relations of the individual parts, or their relationship to the whole. Yet, there always remains a broad range of intelligible events, and the process is rational in that it reveals an order of evident correspondences and undeniable finalities: in the inorganic world, between microstructure and macrostructure; in the organic and animal world, between structure and function; and in the spiritual world, between knowledge of the truth and the aspiration to freedom. Experimental and philosophical inquiry gradually discovers these orders; it perceives them working to maintain themselves in being, defending themselves against imbalances, and overcoming obstacles. And thanks to the natural sciences we have greatly increased our understanding of the uniqueness of humanity's place in the cosmos.

The distinction between a simple living being and a spiritual being that is capax Dei, points to the existence of the intellective soul of a free transcendent subject. Thus the Magisterium of the Church has constantly affirmed that "every spiritual soul is created immediately by God – it is not 'produced' by the parents – and also that it is immortal" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 366). This points to the distinctiveness of anthropology, and invites exploration of it by modern thought.

Distinguished Academicians, I wish to conclude by recalling the words addressed to you by my predecessor Pope John Paul II in November 2003: "scientific truth, which is itself a participation in divine Truth, can help philosophy and theology to understand ever more fully the human person and God's Revelation about man, a Revelation that is completed and perfected in Jesus Christ. For this important mutual enrichment in the search for the truth and the benefit of mankind, I am, with the whole Church, profoundly grateful".

Upon you and your families, and all those associated with the work of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, I cordially invoke God's blessings of wisdom and peace.

Als genezen niet mogelijk is

To the participants of the National Congress of the Italian Surgery Society

20 October 2008

Pope Benedict XVI

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you at this special Audience on the occasion of the National Congress of the Italian Surgery Society. I address my cordial greeting to each and every one of you, with a special word of thanks to Prof. Gennaro Nuzzo for his words expressing your common sentiments and describing the Congress' work on a theme of fundamental importance. Indeed, your National Congress is focused on this promising and demanding declaration: "For surgery that respects the patient". Today, in a time of great technological progress, there is rightly talk of the need to humanize medicine, developing those aspects of the doctor's approach that best correspond to the dignity of the patient under treatment. The specific mission that qualifies your medical and surgical profession consists in fulfilling three objectives: to cure the patient or at least endeavour to intervene effectively to prevent the development of the disease, to alleviate the painful symptoms that accompany it, especially in the advanced stages and to attend to all the sick person's human expectations.

In the past, it sufficed to alleviate the suffering of the sick person since it was impossible to prevent the disease from running its course and even less to cure it. In the past century, the developments of science and surgical



technology have made it possible to intervene ever more successfully in the sick person's case. Thus today a cure, which in many cases had previously been only a marginal possibility, is usually an achievable prospect to the point that it attracts the almost exclusive attention of contemporary medicine. However, this situation has created a new risk: that of abandoning the patient as soon as the impossibility of obtaining appreciable results becomes apparent. On the other hand, it remains true that even when a cure can no longer be hoped for much can be done for the patient. His suffering can be alleviated, and above all, it is possible to accompany him on his way, improving the quality of his life as much as possible. This is not something to be underestimated, because every individual patient, even one who is incurable, bears an inherent unconditional value, a dignity to be honoured, that constitutes the indispensable basis of every medical intervention. Respect for human dignity, in fact, demands unconditional respect for every individual human being, born or unborn, healthy or sick, whatever his condition.

In this perspective the relationship of mutual trust that is built up between the doctor and the patient is of prime importance. It is thanks to this relationship of trust that the doctor, listening to the patient, can reconstruct his clinical history and understand how he copes with his illness. Furthermore, it is in the context of this relationship based on reciprocal esteem and the sharing of realistic goals to be pursued that a therapeutic programme can be defined: a plan that can lead to daring life-saving interventions or to the decision to abide by the ordinary means that medicine offers. What the doctor communicates to the patient, directly or indirectly, verbally or non-verbally, comes to exercise a significant influence over him. It can motivate, sustain or mobilize him and even strengthen his physical and mental resources; or on the contrary, it can weaken him and frustrate his efforts and thus even reduce the effectiveness of the treatments he is undergoing. The aim must be a real therapeutic partnership with the patient, based on the specific clinical practice that permits the doctor to perceive the most appropriate means of communication suited to the individual patient. This strategy for communication will aim above all to sustain also with respect for the truth hope, an essential element in the therapeutic context. It is good not to forget that it is these human qualities, in addition to professional competence in the strict sense, which the patient appreciates in his doctor. The patient wishes to be seen in a kindly manner, not merely examined; he wants to be listened to, not merely subjected to sophisticated diagnoses; he wants to be certain that he is in the mind and heart of the doctor treating him.

The insistence with which today the patient's individual autonomy is emphasized must also be geared to promoting an approach to the sick person which, rightly, does not consider him an antagonist but rather an active and responsible collaborator in his treatment. Any attempt to intrude from the outside in this delicate doctor-patient relationship must be viewed with suspicion. On the one hand, it is undeniable that the patient's self-determination should be respected, but without forgetting that the individualistic exaltation of autonomy ends by leading to a non-realistic and certainly impoverished interpretation of human reality. On the other, the physician's professional responsibility should lead him to suggest a treatment that strives for the true good of the patient, in the awareness that in his professional capacity he is usually able to evaluate the situation better than the patient himself.

Illness, on the other hand, is manifested within a precise human history and casts a shadow on the future of the patient and his family milieu. In the context of today's advanced technology the patient risks being to some extent "confiscated". Indeed, he finds himself overwhelmed by rules and practices that are often completely foreign to his way of being. In the name of the requirements of science and technology and the organization of health-care assistance, his habitual lifestyle is turned upside down. It is very important instead not to exclude from the therapeutic relationship the patient's normal environment and, in particular, his family. For this, it is essential to encourage in his relatives a sense of responsibility with regard to their family member: this is an important element in order to avoid the further alienation which the latter almost inevitably suffers if he is



entrusted to highly technological medical treatment devoid of sufficient human feeling.

Therefore, dear surgeons, you are charged with the considerable responsibility for offering surgery that is truly respectful of the sick person. This in itself is a fascinating task but at the same time very demanding. Precisely because of his mission as Pastor the Pope is close to you and supports you with his prayers. With these sentiments, as I wish you every success in your work, I gladly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and to your loved ones.

Over de encycliek “*Humanae Vitae*” (2)

Message of his Holiness Benedict XVI on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*

Pope Benedict XVI
2 october 2008

To Mons. Livio Melina, President of the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family

I learned with joy that the Pontifical Institute of which you are President and the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart have opportunely organized an International Congress on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the publication of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, an important Document that treats one of the essential aspects of the vocation to marriage and the specific journey of holiness that results from it. Indeed, having received the gift of love, husband and wife are called in turn to give themselves to each other without reserve. Only in this way are the acts proper and exclusive to spouses truly acts of love which, while they unite them in one flesh, build a genuine personal communion. Therefore, the logic of the totality of the gift intrinsically configures conjugal love and, thanks to the sacramental outpouring of the Holy Spirit, becomes the means to achieve authentic conjugal charity in their own life.

The possibility of procreating a new human life is included in a married couple's integral gift of themselves. Since, in fact, every form of love endeavours to spread the fullness on which it lives, conjugal love has its own special way of communicating itself: the generation of children. Thus it not only resembles but also shares in the love of God who wants to communicate himself by calling the human person to life. Excluding this dimension of communication through an action that aims to prevent procreation means denying the intimate truth of spousal love, with which the divine gift is communicated: “If the mission of generating life is not to be exposed to the arbitrary will of men, one must necessarily recognize insurmountable limits to the possibility of man's domination over his own body and its functions; limits which no man, whether a private individual or one invested with authority, may licitly surpass” (*Humanae Vitae*, n. 17). This is the essential nucleus of the teaching that my Venerable Predecessor Paul VI addressed to married couples and which the Servant of God John Paul II, in turn, reasserted on many occasions, illuminating its anthropological and moral basis.

Forty years after the Encyclical's publication we can understand better how decisive this light was for understanding the great “yes” that conjugal love involves. In this light, children are no longer the objective of a human project but are recognized as an authentic gift, to be accepted with an attitude of responsible generosity toward God, the first source of human life. This great “yes” to the beauty of love certainly entails gratitude, both of the parents in receiving the gift of a child, and of the child himself, in knowing that his life originates in such a great and welcoming love.



It is true, moreover, that serious circumstances may develop in the couple's growth which make it prudent to space out births or even to suspend them. And it is here that knowledge of the natural rhythms of the woman's fertility becomes important for the couple's life. The methods of observation which enable the couple to determine the periods of fertility permit them to administer what the Creator has wisely inscribed in human nature without interfering with the integral significance of sexual giving. In this way spouses, respecting the full truth of their love, will be able to modulate its expression in conformity with these rhythms without taking anything from the totality of the gift of self that union in the flesh expresses. Obviously, this requires maturity in love which is not instantly acquired but involves dialogue and reciprocal listening, as well as a special mastery of the sexual impulse in a journey of growth in virtue.

In this perspective, knowing that the Congress is also taking place through an initiative of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, I am likewise eager to express in particular my appreciation for all that this university institution does to support the International Paul VI Institute for Research in Human Fertility and Infertility for Responsible Procreation (ISI), which it gave to my unforgettable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, thereby desiring to make, so to speak, an institutionalized response to the appeal launched by Pope Paul VI in paragraph n. 24 of the Encyclical, to "men of science". A task of the ISI, in fact, is to improve the knowledge of the natural methods for controlling human fertility and of natural methods for overcoming possible infertility. Today, "thanks to the progress of the biological and medical sciences, man has at his disposal ever more effective therapeutic resources; but he can also acquire new powers, with unforeseeable consequences, over human life at its very beginning and in its first stages" (Instruction on respect for human life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation, *Donum vitae*, n. 1). In this perspective, "many researchers are engaged in the fight against sterility. While fully safeguarding the dignity of human procreation, some have achieved results which previously seemed unattainable.

"Scientists therefore are to be encouraged to continue their research with the aim of preventing the causes of sterility and of being able to remedy them so that sterile couples will be able to procreate in full respect for their own personal dignity and that of the child to be born" (*ibid.*, n. 8). It is precisely this goal that is proposed by the ISI Paul VI and by other similar centres, with the encouragement of the ecclesiastical authority.

We may ask ourselves: how is it possible that the world today, and also many of the faithful, find it so difficult to understand the Church's message which illustrates and defends the beauty of conjugal love in its natural expression? Of course, in important human issues the technical solution often appears the easiest. Yet it actually conceals the basic question that concerns the meaning of human sexuality and the need for a responsible mastery of it so that its practice may become an expression of personal love. When love is at stake, technology cannot replace the maturation of freedom. Indeed, as we well know, not even reason suffices: it must be the heart that sees. Only the eyes of the heart succeed in understanding the proper needs of a great love, capable of embracing the totality of the human being. For this, the service that the Church offers in her pastoral care of marriages and families must be able to guide couples to understand with their hearts the marvellous plan that God has written into the human body, helping them to accept all that an authentic process of maturation involves.

The Congress that you are celebrating therefore represents an important moment of reflection and care for couples and families, offering them the results of years of research in both the anthropological and ethical dimensions, as well as that which is strictly scientific, with regard to truly responsible procreation. In this light I can only congratulate you and express the hope that this work will bear abundant fruit and contribute to supporting couples on their way with ever greater wisdom and clarity, encouraging them in their mission to be credible witnesses of the beauty of love in the world. With these hopes, as I invoke the Lord's help on the work of the congress, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all.



From the Vatican, 2 October 2008

Benedictus PP. XVI

Over de encycliek “*Humanae Vitae*” (1)

Tot de deelnemers aan het internationale congres georganiseerd door de Pauselijke Lateraanse Universiteit ter gelegenheid van de 40e verjaardag van de encycliek “*Humanae Vitae*”

10 mei 2008

Paus Benedictus XVI

Geëerde broeders in het bisschopsambt en het priesterschap, geliefde broeders en zusters,

Met bijzonder genoegen verwelkom ik u aan het einde van uw werkzaamheden, gedurende welke u zich hebt ingezet om na te denken over de verantwoordelijkheid en het respect voor het verschijnen van nieuw menselijk leven, een oud en toch steeds nieuw probleem. Ik verwelkom in het bijzonder Mgr. Rino Fisichella, de rector magnificus van de pontificale Universiteit van Lateranen, die dit internationale congres heeft georganiseerd en ik dank hem voor de begroetingswoorden die hij tot mij heeft willen richten. Mijn groet strekt zich ook uit tot de illustere inleiders en docenten en tot alle deelnemers, die deze dagen van intensieve arbeid door hun bijdragen hebben verrijkt. Uw bijdrage past op doeltreffende wijze in de zeer grote hoeveelheid literatuur die de laatste tientallen jaren tot ontwikkeling gekomen is over dit thema, dat tegelijk zo controversieel en zo beslissend is voor de toekomst van de mensheid.

Het tweede Vaticaans Concilie heeft zich reeds in de Constitutie *Gaudium et Spes* tot de wetenschappers gericht en hen uitgenodigd hun krachten te bundelen om hun kennis bijeen te voegen en te komen tot een goed gefundeerde zekerheid betreffende de voorwaarden die een “gezonde regeling van de menselijke voortplanting” kunnen bevorderen (GS, n.52). Mijn vereerde voorganger, de dienaar Gods Paulus VI, publiceerde op 25 juli 1968 de encycliek *Humanae Vitae*. Dit document werd snel een teken van tegenspraak. Het bevestigde opnieuw de continuïteit van de leer en de overlevering van de kerk, als uitwerking van een moeilijke beslissing en was een duidelijk teken van moed. Deze tekst die vaak slecht begrepen is en op dubbelzinnige wijze geïnterpreteerd, heeft veel discussie opgeroepen, ook al omdat hij stond aan het begin van een periode van protest die het leven van generaties heeft bepaald. Veertig jaar na de publicatie toont dit leerstuk niet alleen nog steeds op onwrikbare wijze zijn waarachtigheid, maar toont ook het heldere inzicht, waarmee het probleem werd aangepakt. Inderdaad, de huwelijksliefde werd erin beschreven, als centraal een gegeven in een alomvattend proces dat door de scheiding tussen ziel en lichaam overschrijdt en dat niet slechts van het gevoel afhankelijk is, dat vaak vluchtig en kwetsbaar is, maar betrokken is op de eenheid van de persoon en de wederzijdse overgave van de echtgenoten. Zij bieden zichzelf aan en ontvangen elkaar in een belofte van trouwe en exclusieve liefde, die ontstaat uit een authentieke en vrije keuze. Hoe zou een dergelijke liefde zich kunnen afsluiten voor de gave van het leven? Het leven is altijd een onschatbare gave; telkens wanneer we die gave voor ogen zien, ervaren we de kracht van de scheppende werking van God, die vertrouwen in de mens heeft en hem op deze manier roept om aan de toekomst te bouwen met de kracht van de hoop.

Het leergezag van de Kerk kan zich niet onttrekken aan de taak om op steeds vernieuwde en verdiepende wijze voortdurend na te denken over de fundamentele beginselen van het huwelijk en de voortplanting. Wat gisteren waar was, blijft vandaag evenzeer waar. De waarheid die in *Humanae vitae* wordt uitgedrukt verandert niet,



integendeel: juist in het licht van de nieuwe wetenschappelijke ontdekkingen wordt haar lering meer actueel en nodigt ze uit om na te denken over haar intrinsieke waarde. Het sleutelwoord om op samenhangende wijze in die lering door te dringen blijft de liefde. Zoals ik geschreven heb in mijn eerste Encycliek *Deus caritas est*: “De mens wordt pas werkelijk zichzelf als lichaam en ziel elkaar vinden in diepgaande eenheid. [...]. Maar het zijn noch alleen de geest, noch het lichaam die liefhebben: het is de mens, de persoon, die liefheeft als ondeelbaar schepsel, waarvan lichaam en ziel deel uitmaken” (n 5). Als deze eenheid ontbreekt, gaat ook de waarde van de persoon verloren en vervalt men in het grote gevaar het lichaam te beschouwen als iets dat men kan kopen of verkopen (cf. *ibid.*). In een cultuur waarin het hebben het zijn heeft overvleugeld, dreigt het menselijke leven zijn waarde te verliezen. Als de beleving van de seksualiteit een verslaving wordt die de partner wil onderwerpen aan eigen verlangens en belangen zonder rekening te houden met het levensritme van de beminde persoon, dan moet allereerst de waardigheid van de menselijke persoon verdedigd worden en niet alleen het ware begrip van de liefde. Als gelovigen kunnen we ons nooit veroorloven dat de overheersing van de techniek de hoedanigheid van de liefde en de geheiligde aard van het leven zou ontkrachten.

Het is niet toevallig dat Jezus, wanneer hij over de menselijke liefde spreekt, verwijst naar wat God bij het begin van de schepping tot stand bracht. Zijn onderricht verwijst naar de vrije daad waarmee de Schepper niet alleen de rijkdom van Zijn liefde heeft willen uitdrukken, welke liefde openbloeit door zich aan allen te geven, neen, de Schepper heeft evenzeer een paradigma willen vaststellen waarnaar het handelen van de mensheid zich moet richten. In de vruchtbaarheid van de echtelijke liefde nemen de man en de vrouw deel aan de scheppingsdaad van de Vader en maken duidelijk dat er aan de basis van hun huwelijksleven een authentiek “ja” ligt, dat in wederkerigheid wordt uitgesproken en werkelijk beleefd, terwijl het steeds open blijft staan voor het leven. Dit woord van de Heer is onwrikbaar in zijn diepe waarheid en kan niet worden uitgewist door verschillende theorieën die elkaar in de loop van de jaren zijn opgevolgd en elkaar zelfs hebben tegengesproken. De natuurwet, die aan de basis ligt van de erkenning van de werkelijke gelijkwaardigheid tussen de personen en de volken, dient erkend te worden als de bron waarop ook de relatie tussen de echtgenoten geïnspireerd moet zijn, bij hun verantwoordelijkheid om nieuwe kinderen voort te brengen. Het doorgeven van het leven is vastgelegd in de natuur en de wetten daarvan blijven als een ongeschreven norm waaraan allen zich dienen te houden. Elke poging om de blik van dit principe af te wenden blijft steriel en draagt geen vruchten.

Het is hoog tijd dat we een samenhang herontdekken, die altijd vruchtbaar is geweest als ze gerespecteerd werd; zij plaatst de rede en de liefde op de voorgrond. Een scherpzinnige leraar als Willem van Saint-Thierry wist woorden te schrijven waarvan wij aanvoelen dat ze voor onze tijd nog even geldig zijn: “Als de rede de liefde voorlicht en de liefde de rede verlicht, als de rede zich omzet in liefde en de liefde zich laat vasthouden binnen de grenzen van de rede, dan kunnen deze beide iets groots tot stand brengen”. (Wezen en grootheid van de liefde n 21, 8). Wat is dat “iets groots” waaraan wij kunnen bijdragen? Dat is het uitdragen van de verantwoordelijkheid tegenover het leven, die de gave waarmee elk zich aan de ander geeft vruchtbaar maakt. Het is de vrucht van een liefde die nadenkt en in volkomen vrijheid weet te kiezen zonder zich overdreven voorwaarden te laten stellen door het offer dat eventueel gevraagd wordt. Daaruit wordt het wonder van het leven geboren dat de ouders in zichzelf ondervinden, wanneer ze ervaren dat er in hen en door hen iets heel bijzonders tot stand komt. Geen enkele mechanische techniek kan de liefdesdaad vervangen die de twee echtgenoten uitwisselen als teken van een geheim dat hen overstijgt en dat hen ziet als handelend en als deelnemend in de schepping.

Men ziet helaas steeds vaker trieste gebeurtenissen waarbij adolescenten betrokken zijn van wie de reacties duidelijk wijzen op een onjuiste kennis van het geheim van het leven en van de gevolgen van hun daden. De noodzaak van een juiste vorming, waarnaar ik vaak verwijs, vindt in het thema van het leven een van zijn preferente onderwerpen. Ik wens waarlijk dat men speciaal aan de jongeren heel bijzonder aandacht besteedt,



opdat ze de werkelijke zin van de liefde kunnen leren en zich daarop voorbereiden met een geschikte seksuele opvoeding, zonder zich te laten afleiden door vluchtige ideeën die het doordringen tot de essentie van de waarheid die hier aan de orde is, verhinderen. Het strekt een maatschappij die zich laat voorstaan op beginselen van vrijheid en democratie niet tot eer dat zij op het gebied van de liefde valse illusies aanpraat en bedrieglijke informatie geeft over de authentieke verantwoordelijkheden die men geroepen is op zich te nemen bij de uitoefening van de eigen seksualiteit. De vrijheid moet zich voegen naar de waarheid en de verantwoordelijkheid moet hand in hand gaan met de krachtige toewijding aan de ander en evenzeer met offerbereidheid. Zonder die elementen neemt de gemeenschap onder de mensen niet toe en blijft het risico bestaan dat men zich opsluit in een verstikkend egoïsme.

Wat de Encycliek *Humanae vitae* leert is niet gemakkelijk. Toch komt het overeen met de fundamentele structuur volgens welke het leven, sinds de schepping van de wereld altijd is doorgegeven, met eerbied voor de natuur en in overeenstemming met haar eisen. De eerbied voor het menselijke leven en de bescherming van de waardigheid van de persoon eisen van ons dat we niets onbeproefd laten opdat iedereen kan delen in de authentieke waarheid over de huwelijksliefde die op verantwoorde wijze volledig vasthoudt aan de wet die elke persoon in het hart geschreven is. Met deze gedachten geef ik u allen mijn apostolische Zegen.

Vertaling uit het Frans: dr. J.A. Raymakers

Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI To Participants In The International Congress Organized By The Pontifical Lateran University On The 40th Anniversary Of The Encyclical “Humanae Vitae”

10 May 2008

Pope Benedict XVI

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you with great pleasure at the conclusion of your Congress which has involved you in reflecting on an old and ever new problem: responsibility and respect for human life from its conception. I greet in particular Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Rector Magnificent of the Pontifical Lateran University, which organized this International Congress, and I thank him for his words of welcome. I then extend my greeting to the distinguished Speakers, the Lecturers and all the participants who have enriched these busy days of work with their contributions. Your papers fittingly contribute to the broader output on this topic – so controversial, yet so crucial for humanity’s future – which has increased in the course of the decades.

In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Council was already addressing scientists, urging them to join forces to achieve unity in knowledge and a consolidated certainty on the conditions that can favour “the proper regulation of births” (n. 52). My Predecessor of venerable memory, the Servant of God Paul VI, published his Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae* on 25 July 1968. The Document very soon became a sign of contradiction. Drafted to treat a difficult situation, it constitutes a significant show of courage in reasserting the continuity of the Church’s doctrine and tradition. This text, all too often misunderstood and misinterpreted, also sparked much discussion because it was published at the beginning of profound contestations that marked the lives of entire generations. Forty years after its publication this teaching not only expresses its unchanged truth but also reveals the farsightedness with which the problem is treated. In fact, conjugal love is described within a global process that does not stop at the division between soul and body and is not subjected to mere sentiment, often transient and precarious, but rather takes charge of the person’s unity and the total sharing of the spouses who, in their reciprocal acceptance, offer themselves in a promise of faithful and exclusive love that flows from a genuine choice of freedom. How can such love



remain closed to the gift of life? Life is always a precious gift; every time we witness its beginnings we see the power of the creative action of God who trusts man and thus calls him to build the future with the strength of hope.

The Magisterium of the Church cannot be exonerated from reflecting in an ever new and deeper way on the fundamental principles that concern marriage and procreation. What was true yesterday is true also today. The truth expressed in *Humanae Vitae* does not change; on the contrary, precisely in the light of the new scientific discoveries, its teaching becomes more timely and elicits reflection on the intrinsic value it possesses. The key word to enter coherently into its content remains “love”. As I wrote in my first Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united.... Yet it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves” (n. 5). If this unity is removed, the value of the person is lost and there is a serious risk of considering the body a commodity that can be bought or sold (cf. *ibid*). In a culture subjected to the prevalence of “having” over “being”, human life risks losing its value. If the practice of sexuality becomes a drug that seeks to enslave one’s partner to one’s own desires and interests, without respecting the cycle of the beloved, then what must be defended is no longer solely the true concept of love but in the first place the dignity of the person. As believers, we could never let the domination of technology invalidate the quality of love and the sacredness of life.

It was not by chance that Jesus, in speaking of human love, alluded to what God created at the beginning of the Creation (cf. Mt 19: 4-6). His teaching refers to a free act with which the Creator not only meant to express the riches of his love which is open, giving itself to all, but he also wanted to impress upon it a paradigm in accordance with which humanity’s action must be declined. In the fruitfulness of conjugal love, the man and the woman share in the Father’s creative act and make it clear that at the origin of their spousal life they pronounce a genuine “yes” which is truly lived in reciprocity, remaining ever open to life. This word of the Lord with its profound truth endures unchanged and cannot be abolished by the different theories that have succeeded one another in the course of the years, and at times even been contradictory. Natural law, which is at the root of the recognition of true equality between persons and peoples, deserves to be recognized as the source that inspires the relationship between the spouses in their responsibility for begetting new children. The transmission of life is inscribed in nature and its laws stand as an unwritten norm to which all must refer. Any attempt to turn one’s gaze away from this principle is in itself barren and does not produce a future.

We urgently need to rediscover a new covenant that has always been fruitful when it has been respected; it puts reason and love first. A perceptive teacher like William of Saint-Thierry could write words that we feel are profoundly valid even for our time: “If reason instructs love and love illumines reason, if reason is converted into love and love consents to be held within the bounds of reason, they can do something great” (*De Natura et dignitate amoris*, 21, 8). What is this “something great” that we can witness? It is the promotion of responsibility for life which brings to fruition the gift that each one makes of him or herself to the other. It is the fruit of a love that can think and choose in complete freedom, without letting itself be conditioned unduly by the possible sacrifice requested. From this comes the miracle of life that parents experience in themselves, as they sense the extraordinary nature of what takes place in them and through them. No mechanical technique can substitute the act of love that husband and wife exchange as the sign of a greater mystery which (as protagonists and sharers in creation) sees them playing the lead and sharing in creation.

Unfortunately, more and more often we see sorrowful events that involve adolescents, whose reactions show their incorrect knowledge of the mystery of life and of the risky implications of their actions. The urgent need for education to which I often refer, primarily concerns the theme of life. I sincerely hope that young people in particular will be given very special attention so that they may learn the true meaning of love and prepare for it with an appropriate education in sexuality, without letting themselves be distracted by ephemeral messages



that prevent them from reaching the essence of the truth at stake. To circulate false illusions in the context of love or to deceive people concerning the genuine responsibilities that they are called to assume with the exercise of their own sexuality does not do honour to a society based on the principles of freedom and democracy. Freedom must be conjugated with truth and responsibility with the force of dedication to the other, even with sacrifice; without these components the human community does not grow and the risk of enclosing itself in an asphyxiating cycle of selfishness is always present.

The teaching expressed by the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* is not easy. Yet it conforms with the fundamental structure through which life has always been transmitted since the world's creation, with respect for nature and in conformity with its needs. Concern for human life and safeguarding the person's dignity require us not to leave anything untried so that all may be involved in the genuine truth of responsible conjugal love in full adherence to the law engraved on the heart of every person. With these sentiments I impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

Olie op de wonden: een antwoord op de wonden van abortus en echtscheiding

Tot de deelnemers aan het congres georganiseerd door het Pauselijk Instituut Johannes Paulus II voor studies over huwelijk en gezin

5 april 2008

Paus Benedictus XVI

Mijne Heren Kardinalen, eerbiedwaardige broeders in het Bisschopsambt en het Priesterschap, beminde broeders en zusters!

Met grote vreugde ontmoet ik u ter gelegenheid van het internationaal congres "Olie op de wonden: een antwoord op de wonden van abortus en echtscheiding", georganiseerd door het Pauselijk Instituut Johannes Paulus II voor studies over huwelijk en gezin, in samenwerking met de Ridder van Columbus. Ik verheug me over het onderwerp waarover u deze dagen zal nadenken, omdat het zo actueel en veelzijdig is, en bijzonder voor de verwijzing naar de parabel van de goede Samaritaan (Lc. 10, 25-37) die u als sleutel gekozen heeft om de wonden van abortus en echtscheiding te bespreken, die zoveel lijden meebrengen in het leven van mensen, gezinnen en in de samenleving. Ja, op onze dagen bevinden mannen en vrouwen zich soms werkelijk beroofd en gewond, aan de kant van de weg, dikwijls zonder iemand die luistert naar hun roep om hulp en die zich om hun leed bekommert ten einde het te verlichten en te genezen. In het debat, dat dikwijls puur ideologisch verloopt, wordt soms een soort van samenzwering van stilzwijgen rond hen gecreëerd. Doch alleen in een houding van barmhartige liefde kan men tot de slachtoffers toenadering zoeken ten einde hulp te bieden en in staat te stellen zich weer op te richten en hun levensweg weer op te vatten.

In een culturele context die getekend is door toenemend individualisme, hedonisme en te dikwijls ook door gebrek aan solidariteit en aangepaste sociale steun, wordt de vrijheid van de mens er in zijn breekbaarheid toe gebracht tegenover de moeilijkheden van het leven beslissingen te nemen die tegengesteld zijn aan de onverbreekbaarheid van de huwelijksvereenkomst en aan de eerbied die men verplicht is aan het menselijk leven dat pas ontvangen werd en nog beschermd leeft in de moederschoot. Echtscheiding en abortus zijn keuzes die van nature zeker verschillend zijn, die soms gebeuren in moeilijke en dramatische omstandigheden,



die dikwijls trauma's teweegbrengen en voor de betrokkenen aan de oorsprong liggen van diep lijden. Ze maken ook onschuldige slachtoffers: het pas ontvangen en nog ongeborn kind, de kinderen die betrokken zijn bij het verbreken van de familieband. Zij houden er allemaal wonden aan over, die hun leven onuitwisbaar tekenen. Het ethisch standpunt van de Kerk ten opzichte van echtscheiding en abortus is duidelijk en door iedereen gekend: het gaat om zware fouten die in verschillende mate en los van iemands subjectieve verantwoordelijkheid, de waardigheid van de mens schaden, diep onrecht veroorzaken binnen de menselijke en sociale verhoudingen, en die God zelf beledigen, die de waarborg is van de huwelijksvereenkomst en de auteur van het leven. En nochtans heeft de Kerk, naar het voorbeeld van haar Goddelijke Meester steeds de concrete mens voor ogen, vooral de zwakste en onschuldigste, die het slachtoffer is van onrecht en zonde, en tevens die andere mannen en vrouwen die deze daden gesteld hebben en de smet en innerlijke wonde van hun fouten dragen, terwijl zij op zoek zijn naar vrede en de mogelijkheid om zich te herpakken.

De Kerk heeft als eerste plicht, met liefde en fijngevoeligheid, respect en moederlijke aandacht, toenadering te zoeken tot deze mensen, om hen de barmhartige nabijheid van God in Jezus Christus te verkondigen. Zoals de kerkvaders het leren, is Hij namelijk de ware goede Samaritaan die zich tot onze naaste maakt, olie en wijn over onze wonden giet en ons naar de herberg brengt, de Kerk, waar Hij ons laat verzorgen door ons aan Zijn bedienaars toe te vertrouwen en door zelf en vooraf voor onze genezing te betalen. Ja, het Evangelie van de liefde en het leven is ook altijd het Evangelie van de barmhartigheid dat zich richt tot de concrete en zondige mens die we zijn, om hem na al zijn vallen weer op te richten, om hem van al zijn wonden te genezen. Mijn veelgeliefde voorganger, de Dienaar Gods Johannes Paulus II, waarvan wij de derde verjaardag van zijn sterven herdacht hebben, zei bij de opening van het nieuwe heiligdom van de Goddelijke Barmhartigheid in Krakov: "Er is voor de mens geen andere bron van hoop dan Gods barmhartigheid" (1) Uit deze barmhartigheid haalt de Kerk een enorm vertrouwen in de mens en zijn bekwaamheid om zich te herpakken. Zij weet dat de menselijke vrijheid met de hulp van de genade in staat is zichzelf definitief en trouw te geven, wat het huwelijk tussen een man en een vrouw als een onverbreekelijke overeenkomst mogelijk maakt; dat de menselijke vrijheid, zelfs in de moeilijkste omstandigheden, in staat is gebaren van offerbereidheid en solidariteit te stellen om het leven van een nieuwe mens te aanvaarden. Zo kan men zien dat het "nee" dat de Kerk in morele kwesties uitspreekt en waarbij de publieke opinie eenzijdig blijft stilstaan, eigenlijk een groot "ja" aan de waardigheid van de mens is, aan zijn leven en vermogen om lief te hebben. Het is de uitdrukking van het constante vertrouwen dat mensen, ondanks hun zwakte, kunnen geven aan de hoogste roeping waarvoor zij geschapen zijn: liefhebben.

Bij dezelfde gelegenheid vervolgde Johannes Paulus II: "Dit vuur van de barmhartigheid moet doorgegeven worden aan de wereld. In Gods barmhartigheid zal de wereld vrede vinden". (2) Daarop wordt de grote opdracht geënt van de leerlingen van de Heer Jezus, die reisgezellen vinden in vele broeders, mannen en vrouwen van goede wil. Hun programma, het programma van de goede Samaritaan, is een "hart dat ziet. Dat hart ziet waar liefde nodig is en handelt ernaar". (3) In deze dagen van reflectie en dialoog, buigt u zich over de slachtoffers die gekwetst zijn door echtscheiding en abortus. U heeft eerst en vooral het leed vastgesteld, dikwijls traumatisch, dat "kinderen van echtscheiding" treft en dat hun leven zodanig tekent dat hun weg erdoor bemoeilijkt wordt. Wanneer een huwelijksvereenkomst verbroken wordt, zijn de kinderen degenen die er onvermijdelijk het meest onder lijden, zij zijn het levende teken van de onverbreekbaarheid ervan. Solidaire en pastorale bezorgdheid moet er dus voor zorgen dat de kinderen niet de onschuldige slachtoffers worden van het conflict tussen ouders die uit de echt scheiden en in de mate van het mogelijke moet hen de mogelijkheid geboden worden de band met hun ouders voort te zetten evenals met hun familiale en sociale oorsprong, wat onmisbaar is voor een evenwichtige groei, zowel psychologisch als menselijk.

U heeft ook de aandacht gevestigd op het drama van abortus, die diepe soms onuitwisbare tekens nalaat bij de vrouw die ze uitvoert en de mensen die haar omringen en die verwoestende gevolgen heeft voor gezin en



samenleving, in het bijzonder de materialistische mentaliteit van minachting voor het leven die erdoor in stand gehouden wordt. Hoeveel egoïstische medeplichtigheden liggen dikwijls aan de oorsprong van een pijnlijke beslissing die zoveel vrouwen alleen moeten nemen en waarvan zij in de ziel een kwetsuur overhouden die nooit geneest! Alhoewel hetgeen gebeurd is, een grote onrechtvaardigheid is en in zich nooit hersteld kan worden, maak ik de vermaning uit de encycliek “Evangelium Vitae” tot de mijne, die gericht is tot vrouwen die hun toevlucht namen tot abortus: “Laat u niet gaan in ontmoediging en laat de hoop niet varen. Probeer eerder te begrijpen wat er gebeurd is en bekijk het in waarheid. Als u dat nog niet gedaan heeft, open uzelf dan nederig en met vertrouwen voor berouw: de Vader van alle barmhartigheid wacht op u om u Zijn vergiffenis en vrede te schenken in het sacrament van de verzoening. U kan uw kind met dezelfde hoop toevertrouwen aan dezelfde Vader en Zijn barmhartigheid”. (4)

Ik druk mijn diepe waardering uit voor alle sociale en pastorale initiatieven die verzoening en zorg beogen voor mensen die gewond zijn door het drama van abortus en echtscheiding. Zij zijn met zoveel andere vormen van inzet, essentiële elementen voor de opbouw van deze beschaving van de liefde, waaraan de mensheid nooit zoveel nood had als vandaag.

Ik smeed de Heer, de God van barmhartigheid, dat Hij u uitnodigt Jezus, de goede Samaritaan, steeds meer na te volgen opdat Zijn Geest u zou leren met een nieuwe blik te kijken naar de realiteit van onze lijdende broeders, moge Hij u helpen met nieuwe criteria na te denken en u aanzetten edelmoedig te handelen in het perspectief van een authentieke beschaving van de liefde en het leven. Ik geef u allen een bijzondere apostolische zegen.

Noten

1. Paus Johannes Paulus II, Homilie, Kraków-Łagiewniki, Kerkwijding van het heiligdom van de Goddelijke Barmhartigheid (17 aug 2002), 1.
2. Paus Johannes Paulus II, Homilie, Kraków-Łagiewniki, Kerkwijding van het heiligdom van de Goddelijke Barmhartigheid (17 aug 2002), 5.
3. Paus Benedictus XVI, Encycliek, God is Liefde, Deus Caritas Est (25 dec 2005), 31.
4. Paus Johannes Paulus II, Encycliek, Over de waarde en de onaantastbaarheid van het menselijk leven, Evangelium Vitae (25 mrt 1995), 99.

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To participants in an international congress organized by the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family

Pope Benedict XVI
5 April 2008

Your Eminences, Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, dear Brothers and Sisters,

I meet you with great joy on the occasion of the International Congress on “‘Oil on the wounds’: A response to the ills of abortion and divorce”, promoted by the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in collaboration with the Knights of Columbus. I congratulate you on the topical and complex theme that has been the subject of your reflections in these days and in particular for the reference to the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37), which you chose as a key to approach the evils of abortion and divorce that bring so much suffering to the lives of individuals, families and society. Yes, the men and women of our day sometimes truly find themselves stripped and wounded on the wayside of the routes we take, often without anyone listening to



their cry for help or attending to them to alleviate and heal their suffering. In the often purely ideological debate a sort of conspiracy of silence is created in their regard. Only by assuming an attitude of merciful love is it possible to approach in order to bring help and enable victims to pick themselves up and resume their journey through life.

In a cultural context marked by increasing individualism, hedonism and all too often also by a lack of solidarity and adequate social support, human freedom, as it faces life's difficulties, is prompted in its weakness to make decisions that conflict with the indissolubility of the matrimonial bond or with the respect due to human life from the moment of conception, while it is still protected in its mother's womb. Of course, divorce and abortion are decisions of a different kind, which are sometimes made in difficult and dramatic circumstances that are often traumatic and a source of deep suffering for those who make them. They also affect innocent victims: the infant just conceived and not yet born, children involved in the break-up of family ties. These decisions indelibly mark the lives of all those involved. The Church's ethical opinion with regard to divorce and procured abortion is unambivalent and known to all: these are grave sins which, to a different extent and taking into account the evaluation of subjective responsibility, harm the dignity of the human person, involve a profound injustice in human and social relations and offend God himself, Guarantor of the conjugal covenant and the Author of life. Yet the Church, after the example of her Divine Teacher, always has the people themselves before her, especially the weakest and most innocent who are victims of injustice and sin, and also those other men and women who, having perpetrated these acts, stained by sin and wounded within, are seeking peace and the chance to begin anew.

The Church's first duty is to approach these people with love and consideration, with caring and motherly attention, to proclaim the merciful closeness of God in Jesus Christ. Indeed, as the Fathers teach, it is he who is the true Good Samaritan, who has made himself close to us, who pours oil and wine on our wounds and takes us into the inn, the Church, where he has us treated, entrusting us to her ministers and personally paying in advance for our recovery. Yes, the Gospel of love and life is also always the Gospel of mercy, which is addressed to the actual person and sinner that we are, to help us up after any fall and to recover from any injury. My beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, the third anniversary of whose death we celebrated recently, said in inaugurating the new Shrine of Divine Mercy in Krakow: "Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind" (17 August 2002). On the basis of this mercy the Church cultivates an indomitable trust in human beings and in their capacity for recovery. She knows that with the help of grace human freedom is capable of the definitive and faithful gift of self which makes possible the marriage of a man and woman as an indissoluble bond; she knows that even in the most difficult circumstances human freedom is capable of extraordinary acts of sacrifice and solidarity to welcome the life of a new human being. Thus, one can see that the "No" which the Church pronounces in her moral directives on which public opinion sometimes unilaterally focuses, is in fact a great "Yes" to the dignity of the human person, to human life and to the person's capacity to love. It is an expression of the constant trust with which, despite their frailty, people are able to respond to the loftiest vocation for which they are created: the vocation to love.

On that same occasion, John Paul II continued: "This fire of mercy needs to be passed on to the world. In the mercy of God the world will find peace" (ibid., p. 8). The great task of disciples of the Lord Jesus who find themselves the travelling companions of so many brothers, men and women of good will, is hinged on this. Their programme, the programme of the Good Samaritan, is a "'heart which sees'. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly" (Deus Caritas Est, n. 31). In these days of reflection and dialogue you have stooped down to victims suffering from the wounds of divorce and abortion. You have noted first of all the sometimes traumatic suffering that afflicts the so-called "children of divorce", marking their lives to the point of making their way far more difficult. It is in fact inevitable that when the conjugal covenant is broken, those who



suffer most are the children who are the living sign of its indissolubility. Supportive pastoral attention must therefore aim to ensure that the children are not the innocent victims of conflicts between parents who divorce. It must also endeavour to ensure that the continuity of the link with their parents is guaranteed as far as possible, as well as the links with their own family and social origins, which are indispensable for a balanced psychological and human growth.

You also focused on the tragedy of procured abortion that leaves profound and sometimes indelible marks in the women who undergo it and in the people around them, as well as devastating consequences on the family and society, partly because of the materialistic mentality of contempt for life that it encourages. What selfish complicity often lies at the root of an agonizing decision which so many women have had to face on their own, who still carry in their heart an open wound! Although what has been done remains a grave injustice and is not in itself remediable, I make my own the exhortation in *Evangelium Vitae* addressed to women who have had an abortion: "Do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child" (n. 99).

I express deep appreciation for all those social and pastoral initiatives being taken for the reconciliation and treatment of people injured by the drama of abortion and divorce. Together with numerous other forms of commitment, they constitute essential elements for building that civilization of love that humanity needs today more than ever.

As I implore the Merciful Lord God that he will increasingly liken you to Jesus the Good Samaritan, that his spirit will teach you to look with new eyes at the reality of the suffering brethren, that he will help you to think with new criteria and spur you to act with generous dynamism with a view to an authentic civilization of love and life, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

De begeleiding van de ongeneeslijke zieke en stervende

To the participants in the congress organized by the Pontifical Academy for Life on the theme "Close by the incurable sick person and the dying: scientific and ethical aspects"

Pope Benedict XVI
25 February 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With deep joy I offer my greeting to all of you who are taking part in the Congress of the Pontifical Academy for Life on the theme: "Close by the Incurable Sick Person and the Dying: Scientific and Ethical Aspects". The Congress is taking place in conjunction with the 14th General Assembly of the Academy, whose members are also present at this Audience. I first of all thank the President, Bishop Sgreccia, for his courteous words of greeting; with him, I thank the entire Presidency, the Board of Directors of the Pontifical Academy, all the collaborators and ordinary members, the honorary and the corresponding members. I would then like to address a cordial and grateful greeting to the relators of this important Congress, as well as to all the participants who



come from various countries of the world. Dear friends, your generous commitment and witness are truly praiseworthy.

A mere glance at the titles of the Congress reports suffices to perceive the vast panorama of your reflections and the interest they hold for the present time, especially in today's secularized world. You seek to give answers to the many problems posed every day by the constant progress of the medical sciences, whose activities are increasingly sustained by high-level technological tools.

In view of all this, the urgent challenge emerges for everyone, and in a special way for the Church enlivened by the Risen Lord, to bring into the vast horizon of human life the splendour of the revealed truth and the support of hope.

When a life is extinguished by unforeseen causes at an advanced age, on the threshold of earthly life or in its prime, we should not only see this as a biological factor which is exhausted or a biography which is ending, but indeed as a new birth and a renewed existence offered by the Risen One to those who did not deliberately oppose his Love. The earthly experience concludes with death, but through death full and definitive life beyond time unfolds for each one of us. The Lord of life is present beside the sick person as the One who lives and gives life, the One who said: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10: 10). "I am the Resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live (Jn 11: 25), and "I will raise him up on the last day" (Jn 6: 54). At that solemn and sacred moment, all efforts made in Christian hope to improve ourselves and the world entrusted to us, purified by grace, find their meaning and are made precious through the love of God the Creator and Father. When, at the moment of death, the relationship with God is fully realized in the encounter with "him who does not die, who is Life itself and Love itself, then we are in life; then we "live" (Spe Salvi, n. 27). For the community of believers, this encounter of the dying person with the Source of Life and Love is a gift that has value for all, that enriches the communion of all the faithful. As such, it deserves the attention and participation of the community, not only of the family of close relatives but, within the limits and forms possible, of the whole community that was bound to the dying person. No believer should die in loneliness and neglect. Mother Teresa of Calcutta took special care to gather the poor and the forsaken so that they might experience the Father's warmth in the embrace of sisters and brothers, at least at the moment of death.

But it is not only the Christian community which, due to its particular bonds of supernatural communion, is committed to accompanying and celebrating in its members the mystery of suffering and death and the dawn of new life. The whole of society, in fact, is required through its health-care and civil institutions to respect the life and dignity of the seriously sick and the dying. Even while knowing that "it is not science that redeems man" (Spe Salvi, n. 26), our entire society and in particular the sectors linked to medical science are bound to express the solidarity of love and the safeguard and respect of human life at every moment of its earthly development, especially when it is suffering a condition of sickness or is in its terminal stage. In practice, it is a question of guaranteeing to every person who needs it the necessary support, through appropriate treatment and medical interventions, diagnosed and treated in accordance with the criteria of medical proportionality, always taking into account the moral duty of administering (on the part of the doctor) and of accepting (on the part of the patient) those means for the preservation of life that are "ordinary" in the specific situation. On the other hand, recourse to treatment with a high risk factor or which it would be prudent to judge as "extraordinary", is to be considered morally licit but optional. Furthermore, it will always be necessary to assure the necessary and due care for each person as well as the support of families most harshly tried by the illness of one of their members, especially if it is serious and prolonged. Also with regard to employment procedures, it is usual to recognize the specific rights of relatives at the moment of a birth; likewise, and especially in certain circumstances, close relatives must be recognized as having similar rights at the moment of the terminal illness of one of their family members. A supportive and humanitarian society cannot fail to take into account the difficult conditions of



families who, sometimes for long periods, must bear the burden of caring at home for seriously-ill people who are not self-sufficient. Greater respect for individual human life passes inevitably through the concrete solidarity of each and every one, constituting one of the most urgent challenges of our time.

As I recalled in the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*: “The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through ‘compassion’ is a cruel and inhuman society” (n. 38). In a complex society, strongly influenced by the dynamics of productivity and the needs of the economy, frail people and the poorest families risk being overwhelmed in times of financial difficulty and/or illness. More and more lonely elderly people exist in big cities, even in situations of serious illness and close to death. In such situations, the pressure of euthanasia is felt, especially when a utilitarian vision of the person creeps in. In this regard, I take this opportunity to reaffirm once again the firm and constant ethical condemnation of every form of direct euthanasia, in accordance with the Church’s centuries-old teaching.

The synergetic effort of civil society and the community of believers must aim not only to ensure that all live a dignified and responsible life, but also, experience the moment of trial and death in terms of brotherhood and solidarity, even when death occurs within a poor family or in a hospital bed. The Church, with her already functioning institutions and new initiatives, is called to bear a witness of active charity, especially in the critical situations of non-self-sufficient people deprived of family support, and for the seriously ill in need of palliative treatment and the appropriate religious assistance. On the one hand, the spiritual mobilization of parish and diocesan communities, and on the other, the creation or improvement of structures dependent on the Church, will be able to animate and sensitize the whole social environment, so that solidarity and charity are offered and witnessed to each suffering person and particularly to those who are close to death. For its part, society cannot fail to guarantee assistance to families that intend to commit themselves to nursing at home, sometimes for long periods, sick people afflicted with degenerative pathologies (tumours, neuro-degenerative diseases, etc.), or in need of particularly demanding nursing care. The help of all active and responsible members of society is especially required for those institutions of specific assistance that require numerous specialized personnel and particularly expensive equipment. It is above all in these sectors that the synergy between the Church and the institutions can prove uniquely precious for ensuring the necessary help to human life in the time of frailty.

While I hope that at this International Congress, celebrated in connection with the Jubilee of the Lourdes Apparitions, it will be possible to identify new proposals to alleviate the situation of those caught up in terminal forms of illness, I exhort you to persevere in your praiseworthy commitment to the service of life in all its phases. With these sentiments, I assure you of my prayers in support of your work and accompany you with a special Apostolic Blessing.

Kerk moet orientatie aan bioethiek geven

Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Participants In The Plenary Session Of The Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith





31 January 2008

Pope Benedict XVI

Your Eminences, Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, Dear and Faithful Collaborators,

It gives me great joy to meet you on the occasion of your Plenary Assembly. I can thus express to you my sentiments of deep gratitude and cordial appreciation for the work that your Dicastery carries out at the service of the ministry of unity, entrusted in a special way to the Roman Pontiff. It is a ministry expressed primarily in terms of the unity of faith, resting on the “sacred deposit” whose principal custodian and defender is the Successor of Peter (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, n. 11). I thank Cardinal William Levada for expressing your common sentiments and for recalling the themes that have been the subject of some Documents published by your Congregation in recent years, as well as the topics that are still under examination by the Dicastery.

Last year, in particular, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published two important Documents which offered doctrinal clarification on essential aspects of the Church’s teaching and on evangelization. These clarifications are necessary if the ecumenical dialogue with the world’s religions and cultures is to progress as it should. The first Document is entitled “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church” (29 June 2007). In its formulation and language, it repropose the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, in full continuity with the doctrine of Catholic Tradition. Thus, it confirms that the one and only Church of Christ, which we confess in the Creed, has its subsistence, permanence and stability in the Catholic Church, and that therefore, the unity, indivisibility and indestructibility of Christ’s Church is in no way annulled by the separations and divisions of Christians. Alongside this fundamental doctrinal definition, the Document repropose the correct linguistic use of some ecclesiological terminology that risks being misunderstood. To this end, it calls attention to the difference that still endures among the different Christian denominations with regard to the understanding of being Church in the proper theological sense. Far from preventing authentic ecumenical commitment, this difference will encourage a realistic and fully informed discussion of the issues that still separate the Christian denominations; it will also encourage joyful recognition of the truths of faith professed in common and the need to pray without ceasing for a more deeply committed advance towards greater and ultimately full Christian unity. The consequence of fostering a theological vision which holds the unity and identity of the Church to be gifts “hidden in Christ”, reconcilable only in an eschatological perspective, would be that the Church in history would exist *de facto* in multiple ecclesial forms, and ultimately hinder and paralyze ecumenism itself.

The Second Vatican Council’s assertion that the true Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church” (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8), does not exclusively concern the relationship with the Churches and Christian Ecclesial Communities but also extends to the definition of relations with the religions and cultures of the world. In the Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* on Religious Liberty, the Second Vatican Council affirmed that “this one true religion continues to exist in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus entrusted the task of spreading it among all men” (n. 1). The Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization – the other Document, published by your Congregation in December 2007 -, confronted by the risk of persistent religious and cultural relativism, reaffirms that in the age of interreligious and intercultural dialogue the Church does not dispense with the need for evangelization and missionary activity for peoples, nor does she cease to ask men and women to accept the salvation offered to them all. Recognition of elements of truth and good in the world’s religions and the seriousness of their religious endeavours, together with dialogue and a spirit of collaboration with them for the defence and promotion of the person’s dignity and the universal moral values, cannot be understood as a limitation of the Church’s missionary task, which involves her in ceaselessly proclaiming Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14: 6).



I also ask you, dear friends, to pay special attention to the difficult and complex issues of bioethics. In fact, new biomedical technologies, do not only involve certain specialized doctors and researchers but are disseminated through the modern means of social communication, giving rise to expectations and questions in ever broader sectors of society. The Church's Magisterium certainly cannot and ought not address every scientific innovation, but has the task of reaffirming the important values at stake and of suggesting to the faithful and to all people of good will the ethical and moral principles and guidelines for new and important issues. The two fundamental criteria for moral discernment in this field are: a) unconditional respect for the human being as a person from conception to natural death; b) respect for the originality of the transmission of human life through the acts proper to spouses. After the publication in 1987 of the Instruction *Donum Vitae* which spelled out these criteria, many levelled criticism at the Magisterium of the Church for being an obstacle to science and to the true progress of humanity. However, the new problems associated, for example, with the freezing of human embryos, with embryonic reduction [selective abortion of medically implanted embryos], with pre-implantational diagnosis, with research on embryonic stem cells and with attempts at human cloning, clearly show that with extra-corporeal artificial fertilization, the barrier that served to protect human dignity has been violated. When human beings, in the weakest and most defenceless stage of their lives are selected, abandoned, killed or used as mere "biological material", how can it be denied that they are no longer being treated as "someone" but rather as "something", hence, calling into question the very concept of human dignity?

Of course, the Church appreciates and encourages the progress of the biomedical sciences which open up unprecedented therapeutic prospects until now unknown, for example, through the use of somatic stem cells, or treatment that aims to restore fertility or cure genetic diseases. At the same time, she feels duty-bound to enlighten all consciences to the only authentic progress, namely, that scientific progress truly respect every human being, whose personal dignity must be recognized since he is created in the image of God. The study of these themes, which has involved your Assembly in a special way in these days, will certainly help to encourage the formation of the consciences of a large number of our brethren, in accordance with what the Second Vatican Council stated in the Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*: "In forming their consciences the faithful must pay careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church is by the will of Christ the teacher of truth. It is her duty to proclaim and teach with authority the truth which is Christ and, at the same time, to declare and confirm by her authority the principles of the moral order which spring from human nature itself" (n. 14).

As I encourage you to persevere in your demanding and important work, on this occasion I also express my spiritual closeness to you and I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all, as a pledge of affection and gratitude.

Over stamcellen van menselijke embryo's

**Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to h.e. mr. Ji-Young Francesco Kim,
ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the Holy See**

Thursday, 11 October 2007



Vaticaan, 11 oktober 2007



Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican to accept the Letters of Credence by which the President of the Republic of Korea has appointed you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I take this occasion to renew the expression of my respect and warm affection for the Korean people, and I ask you to convey to President Roh Moo-hyun and all your fellow citizens my prayerful good wishes for the peace and prosperity of your nation.

Your Excellency has noted the remarkable growth of the Catholic Church in your country, due in no small part to the heroic example of men and women whose faith led them to lay down their lives for Christ and for their brothers and sisters. Their sacrifice reminds us that no cost is too great for persevering in fidelity to the truth. Regrettably, in our contemporary pluralist world some people question or even deny the importance of truth. Yet objective truth remains the only sure basis for social cohesion. Truth is not dependent upon consensus but precedes it and makes it possible, generating authentic human solidarity. The Church—always mindful of the truth's power to unite people, and ever attentive to mankind's irrepressible desire for peaceful coexistence—eagerly strives to strengthen concord and social harmony both in ecclesial life and civic life, proclaiming the truth about the human person as known by natural reason and fully manifested through divine revelation.

Your Excellency, the international community joins with the citizens of your country in their heightened aspirations for newfound peace on the Korean peninsula and throughout the region. I take this opportunity to reiterate the Holy See's support for every initiative that aims at a sincere and lasting reconciliation, putting an end to enmity and unresolved grievances. Genuine progress is built on attitudes of honesty and trust. I commend your country's efforts to foster fruitful and open dialogue while simultaneously working to alleviate the pain of those suffering from the wounds of division and distrust. Indeed, every nation shares in the responsibility of assuring a more stable and secure world. It is my ardent hope that the ongoing participation of various countries involved in the negotiation process will lead to a cessation of programmes designed to develop and produce weapons with frightening potential for unspeakable destruction.

Your country has achieved notable successes in scientific research and development. Prominent among these are advances in biotechnology with the potential to treat and cure illnesses so as to improve the quality of life in your homeland and abroad. Discoveries in this field invite man to a deeper awareness of the weighty responsibilities involved in their application. The use society hopes to make of biomedical science must constantly be measured against robust and firm ethical standards (cf. Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 6 November 2006). Foremost among these is the dignity of human life, for under no circumstances may a human being be manipulated or treated as a mere instrument for experimentation. The destruction of human embryos, whether to acquire stem cells or for any other purpose, contradicts the purported intent of researchers, legislators and public health officials to promote human welfare. The Church does not hesitate to approve and encourage somatic stem-cell research—not only because of the favourable results obtained through these alternative methods, but more importantly because they harmonize with the aforementioned intent by respecting the life of the human being at every stage of his or her existence (cf. Address to the Pontifical Academy for Life Symposium, 16 September 2006). Mr. Ambassador, I pray that the inherent moral sensibility of the Korean people, as evidenced by their rejection of human cloning and related procedures, will help attune the international community to the deep ethical and social implications of scientific research and its utilization.

The promotion of human dignity also summons public authorities to ensure that young people receive a sound education. Faith-based schools have much to contribute in this regard. It is incumbent upon governments to



afford parents the opportunity to send their children to religious schools by facilitating the establishment and financing of such institutions. Insofar as possible, public subsidies should free parents from undue financial burdens that attenuate their ability to choose the most suitable means of educating their children. Catholic and other religious schools should enjoy the appropriate latitude of freedom to design and implement curricula that nurture the life of the spirit without which the life of the mind is so seriously distorted. I appeal to Church and civic leaders to move forward in a spirit of cooperation to guarantee a future for Catholic schooling in your country which will contribute to the moral and intellectual maturation of the younger generation for the benefit of all society.

Your Excellency, on this happy occasion as you begin your mission, I assure you that the Holy See and its various offices will be ever ready to assist you in carrying out your duties. I invoke divine blessings upon you, your family and the people of your country, who hold a special place in my thoughts and prayers at this time.

Tot de Internationale Theologencommissie

Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to members of the International Theological Commission



Website Vatican, 5 October 2007

Vatican's Hall of Popes

Your Eminence, Venerable Brothers in the Priesthood, Distinguished Professors and dear Collaborators,

I welcome you with special pleasure at the end of your Annual Plenary Meeting. I would like first of all to express my heartfelt gratitude for the tribute which, as President of the International Theological Commission, Your Eminence has addressed to me on behalf of all. The work of this seventh "quinquennium" of the International Theological Commission, as you recalled, Your Eminence, has already born fruit in practice with the publication of the Document "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized". The subject is treated here in the context of the universal saving will of God, the universality of the one mediation of Christ, the primacy of divine grace and the sacramental nature of the Church. I am confident that this Document will be a useful reference point for Pastors of the Church and for theologians, as well as a help and source of consolation to members of the faithful who have suffered in their families the unexpected death of a child before he or she could receive the bath of baptismal regeneration. Your reflections will also be an opportunity for further study of, and research into, this subject.

Indeed, it is necessary to penetrate ever more deeply into the comprehension of the various manifestations of God's love for all human beings, especially the lowliest and the poorest, which was revealed to us in Christ.

I congratulate you on the results you have already achieved and encourage you at the same time to persevere with commitment in the examination of the other themes proposed for this quinquennium, on which you have already worked in previous years as well as at this Plenary Meeting. They, as Your Eminence has recalled, are the basis of natural moral law, theology and its method. At the Audience on 1 December 2005, I presented



certain fundamental approaches for the work that theologians must carry out in communion with the living voice of the Church under the guidance of the Magisterium. I would like here to reflect in a special way on the theme of natural moral law.

As you probably know, at the invitation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, symposiums or study days were held or are being organized by various university centres and associations in order to find constructive pointers and convergences for an effective deepening of the doctrine on natural moral law. So far, this invitation has met with a positive reception and aroused considerable interest. The contribution of the International Theological Commission, aimed above all to justify and describe the foundations of a universal ethic that is part of the great patrimony of human knowledge which in a certain way constitutes the rational creature's participation in the eternal law of God, is eagerly awaited. It is not, therefore, a theme of an exclusively or mainly denominational kind, although the doctrine on natural moral law is illuminated and developed to the full in the light of Christian revelation and the fulfilment of man in the mystery of Christ.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up well the central content of the doctrine on natural moral law, pointing out that it "states the first and essential precepts which govern the moral life. It hinges upon the desire for God and submission to him, who is the source and judge of all that is good, as well as upon the sense that the other is one's equal. Its principal precepts are expressed in the Decalogue. This law is called "natural", not in reference to the nature of irrational beings, but because reason which decrees it properly belongs to human nature" (n. 1955). With this doctrine two essential goals are reached: on the one hand, it is understood that the ethical content of the Christian faith does not constitute an imposition dictated to the human conscience from the outside but a norm inherent in human nature itself; on the other hand, on the basis of natural law, in itself accessible to any rational creature, with this doctrine the foundations are laid to enter into dialogue with all people of good will and more generally, with civil and secular society.

Yet, precisely because of the influence of cultural and ideological factors, today's civil and secular society is found to be in a state of bewilderment and confusion: it has lost the original evidence of the roots of the human being and his ethical behaviour. Furthermore, the doctrine of natural moral law conflicts with other concepts that are a direct denial of it. All this has far-reaching, serious consequences on the civil and social order. Today, a positivist conception of law seems to dominate many thinkers. They claim that humanity or society or indeed the majority of citizens is becoming the ultimate source of civil law. The problem that arises is not, therefore, the search for good but the search for power, or rather, how to balance powers. At the root of this trend is ethical relativism, which some even see as one of the principal conditions for democracy, since relativism is supposed to guarantee tolerance of and reciprocal respect for people. But if this were so, the majority of a moment would become the ultimate source of law. History very clearly shows that most people can err. True rationality is not guaranteed by the consensus of a large number but solely by the transparency of human reason to creative Reason and by listening together to this Source of our rationality.

When the fundamental requirements of human dignity, of human life, of the family institution, of a fair social order, in other words, basic human rights, are at stake, no law devised by human beings can subvert the law that the Creator has engraved on the human heart without the indispensable foundations of society itself being dramatically affected. Natural law thus becomes the true guarantee offered to each one in order that he may live in freedom, have his dignity respected and be protected from all ideological manipulation and every kind of arbitrary use or abuse by the stronger. No one can ignore this appeal. If, by tragically blotting out the collective conscience, scepticism and ethical relativism were to succeed in deleting the fundamental principles of the natural moral law, the foundations of the democratic order itself would be radically damaged. To prevent this obscuring, which is a crisis of human civilization even before it is a Christian one, all consciences of people of good will, of lay persons and also of the members of the different Christian denominations, must be mobilized so



that they may engage, together and effectively, in order to create the necessary conditions for the inalienable value of the natural moral law in culture and in civil and political society to be fully understood. Indeed, on respect for this natural moral law depends the advance of individuals and society on the path of authentic progress in conformity with right reason, which is participation in the eternal Reason of God.

Dear friends, with gratitude I express to you all my appreciation for the dedication that distinguishes you and my esteem for the work you have done and continue to do. As I offer you my best wishes for your future commitments, I impart my Blessing to you with affection.