

PAPAL ADDRESS TO PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE

"It is necessary that the whole of Society defend the Right to Life"

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

I receive you with joy on the occasion of the annual assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life. I greet, in particular, the president, Bishop Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, and I thank him for his courteous words. I address my cordial welcome to each one of you!

In the activities of these days you addressed topics of current importance, which question

contemporary society profoundly and challenge it to find answers that are appropriate for the good of the human person.

Post-abortion syndrome -- the serious psychological difficulties often felt by women who have taken recourse to voluntary abortion -- reveals the irrepressible voice of the moral conscience, and the grave wound it suffers each time that human action betrays the person's innate vocation to good, and of which he gives witness.

It would be useful also in this reflection to focus attention on the conscience, at times blurred, of the fathers of the children, who often abandon pregnant women. The moral conscience -- teaches the Catechism of the Catholic Church -- "is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right" (No. 1778).

It is, in fact, the duty of the moral conscience to discern good from evil in the different situations of existence, in order that, on the basis of this judgment, the human being can orient himself towards the good. Many would like to deny the existence of the moral conscience in man, reducing its voice to the result of external conditioning or to a purely emotive phenomenon, and it is important to affirm that the moral quality of human action is not an extrinsic value or even optional and it is not even a prerogative of Christians or believers, but common to every human being. In the moral conscience, God speaks to each one and invites him to defend human life at all times. In this personal bond with the Creator lies the profound dignity of the moral conscience and the reason for its inviolability.

Fulfilled in the conscience of every man -- intelligence, emotive nature, will -- is his vocation to the good, so that the choice of good or evil in the concrete situations of existence ends by marking the human person profoundly in each expression of his being. The whole man, in fact, is wounded when his behavior is contrary to the dictate of his own conscience.

However, even when man rejects the true and the good that the Creator proposes to him, God does not abandon him, but through the voice of conscience, continues to seek and speak to him, so that he will acknowledge his error and open himself to Divine Mercy capable of healing any wound.

Doctors, in particular, cannot fail to consider important the grave duty to defend against the deception of the conscience of many women who think they will find in abortion the solution to family, economic, social difficulties or to the problems of health of their children. Especially in this last situation, the woman is convinced, often by the doctors themselves, that abortion represents not only a licit moral choice, but that in addition it is a necessary "therapeutic" act to avoid the suffering of the child and of its family and an "unjust" burden to society.

In a cultural background characterized by the eclipse of the meaning of life, in which the common perception of the moral gravity of abortion and of other forms of attempts against human life has been attenuated, exacted from doctors is a special fortitude to continue affirming that abortion does not resolve anything, but that it kills the child, destroys the woman and blinds

the conscience of the child's father, often ruining family life.

This duty, however, does not only affect the medical profession or health professionals. It is necessary that the whole of society defend the right to life of the conceived and the true good of the woman, who never, under any circumstance, will be fulfilled in the choice of abortion. In the same way it is necessary -- as has been indicated in your works -- to provide the necessary help to women who sadly have already taken recourse to abortion, and who now experience all its moral and existential tragedy. There are many initiatives, at the diocesan level or through individual volunteer entities, which offer psychological and spiritual support for a complete human recovery. The solidarity of the Christian community cannot give up this type of co-responsibility.

I would like to recall, in this connection, the invitation addressed by the Venerable John Paul II to women who have taken recourse to abortion. "The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But 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. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life" ("Evangelium Vitae," No. 99).

The moral conscience of researchers and of the whole of society is profoundly involved also in the second topic of your works: the use of umbilical cord banks for clinical and research purposes. Medical-scientific research is a value and, hence, a commitment, not only for researchers but for the whole civil community. The result is the duty to promote ethically valid research on the part of institutions, and the value of the solidarity of individuals in the participation of research directed to promote the common good.

This value, and the necessity of this solidarity, are very well evidenced in the case of the use of stem cells from the umbilical cord. They are important clinical applications and promising research at the scientific level, but for their realization many depend on the generosity, on the donation of blood of the cord at the moment of birth, on the part of the women who have just given birth. Hence, I invite all of you to be promoters of a true and conscious human and Christian solidarity. In this connection, many medical researchers rightly regard with perplexity the growing number of private storage banks of the blood of the cord for exclusive autologous use. Such an option -- as the works of your Assembly demonstrate -- in addition to lacking a real scientific superiority in relation to the donation of the cord, weakens the genuine spirit of solidarity which must constantly animate the search of that common good to which, in the last analysis, science and medical research tend.

Dear brothers and sisters, once again I express my gratitude to the president and to all the members of the Pontifical Academy for Life for the scientific and ethical courage with which you

carry out your commitment to the service of the good of the human person. My hope is that you will maintain always alive the spirit of authentic service which makes hearts and minds sensitive to recognize the needs of the men who are our contemporaries. To each one of you and to your loved ones, I impart my heartfelt apostolic blessing.

[Translation by ZENIT]

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