



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF NEUROPSYCHIATRY***

Saturday 12 April 1986

Dear Friends,

1. I am particularly happy to have this opportunity of welcoming you, distinguished men and women of medical science, participants in the International Congress on Hypothalamic Dysfunction in Neuropsychiatric Disorders. I extend cordial greetings to you all, especially to Dr. Goodwin of the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Maryland, and to Dr. Frajese of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Rome "La Sapienza", under whose auspices your Congress is meeting.

I have been informed that the purpose of your Congress is to discuss and evaluate the integration of the latest discoveries in the field of neuroendocrinology in the clinical treatment of neuropsychiatric disorders, with special reference to hypothalamic dysfunction.

The special object of your research is the biochemical microcosm constituted by the structure and action of neuropeptides, especially in their mutual interaction with the endocrine system. It is a very specific field of medical science in which knowledge is advancing at an ever accelerating pace, with the potential of greatly improving clinical approaches to mental health problems.

2. The Catholic Church admires and encourages the work and commitment of men and women of science as explorers of man and of the universe. While the Church does not claim to have particular competence in the specifically scientific nature of your endeavours, she sincerely and openly welcomes the advancement of knowledge obtained through honest means. She is firmly convinced that the progress of science is a special form of service to humanity.

Indeed, I wish to make my own the words of the Second Vatican Council in order to assure you that "your paths are never foreign to ours. We (in the Church) are the friends of your vocation as

searchers, companions in your fatigues, admirers of your successes, and, if necessary, consolers in your discouragement and your failures" .

In this sense the Church greatly appreciates your efforts to place at the disposal of the medical community a more complete understanding of the influence on human behaviour of the biochemical mechanisms which have been the object of your study and discussion during these days.

3. The specific point at which our paths cross is the realisation that the Church and the scientific/medical community, each in its own sphere, seek to serve the well-being of human beings, every one of whom is called to go beyond self to fulfilment in intimate communion with others, and ultimately with the Creator himself.

Science in general, and medical science in particular, is justified and becomes an instrument of progress, liberation and happiness only insofar as it serves man's integral well-being. The magnificent conquests of the human spirit in discovering the secrets of nature and of created life, and in establishing the technical means to make practical use of this knowledge, must never become instruments of destruction and death, nor means for manipulating and enslaving other human beings.

This is a real concern of many men and women of our time, and fortunately the scientific community in general manifests an awareness of its grave responsibility in this regard.

4. Scientists are happy when, at the end of a rigorous methodological approach, they grasp the object of their research in its objective reality. They want the object of their study to speak its "truth" to them. They do not wish to impose a personal or ideologically based preconception upon reality. In this sense the progress of scientific knowledge has followed the path of discovery: the "truth" of nature and life is discovered and unveiled in its complexity, but at the same time in its profound logic and order.

In your field, which is so closely linked to the intimate well-being of individuals, you are confronted daily by the fact that the biochemical processes which you study have to be integrated into the wider "truth" of what it means to be a person, to be the subject of inalienable rights, to possess a dignity as a human being which can never be lost.

5. One of the major cultural tasks of our time is that of "integrating knowledge, in the sense of a synthesis, in which the impressive body of scientific knowledge may find its meaning within the framework of an integral vision of man and of the universe, that is of the *ordo rerum*, the order of things" .

Precisely in the construction of such a synthesis, science, philosophy and religion have much to

say to one another. In this sense the Catholic Church wishes to be in constant dialogue with the advances of scientific knowledge and technology. Indeed, she is convinced that she has something essential to contribute to this dialogue in presenting the truth and wisdom which the eternal Father has revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh: "the way, and the truth, and the life" .

In essence, my dear friends, my words are meant as an expression of encouragement to you in your endeavours and in your service to those who will benefit from your skill and dedication. They are meant to confirm the Church's interest in you and her support for the healing processes which you seek to perfect. I gladly commend you and your work to the One of whom the Scriptures speak, saying that "he welcomed the multitudes and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing" .

May Almighty God bless you all!

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