



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE**

Friday, 14 February 1997

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

1. I am pleased to extend my cordial greetings to you, dear Members of the Pontifical Academy for Life, who have gathered for your third general assembly. I especially thank the President, Prof. Juan de Dios Vial Correa, for the friendly words he has just addressed to me on behalf of you all.

I know that some of you, ordinary members, are present for the first time, since you have only recently been appointed. Likewise the corresponding members, who are taking part in this meeting for the first time, also serve in the life of the Academy as a valuable link with society. I extend my welcome to all, receiving you as a distinguished community of intellectuals at the service of life.

First of all I would like to express my satisfaction with the activity that the Academy has carried out in this short period since its foundation: I would like especially to stress the valuable works that have already been published as a commentary on the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, and the active collaboration offered to the various dicasteries for courses and study conventions on the contents of both the Encyclical and other pronouncements by the Magisterium in the delicate area of life.

2. The theme that you chose for this assembly — “*Identity and Status of the Human Embryo*” — with the approach of the 10th anniversary of the Instruction *Donum vitae*, published on 22 February 1987, is also in line with your commitment and today has a particular cultural and political relevance.

In fact, it is first of all a question of reaffirming that “the human being is to be respected and treated

as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human to life" (*Donum vitae*, I, 1). Such statements, solemnly restated in the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, are entrusted to the conscience of humanity and are increasingly accepted even in the areas of scientific and philosophical research.

Appropriately during these days you have tried to clarify further the misunderstandings in the modern cultural context stemming from preconceptions of a philosophical and epistemological nature which cast doubt on the very foundations of knowledge, especially in the field of moral values. In fact the truth about the human person must be freed from every possible exploitation, reductionism or ideology, in order to guarantee full and scrupulous respect for the dignity of every human being from the first moments of his existence.

3. How can we fail to recognize that our age is unfortunately witnessing an unprecedented and almost unimaginable massacre of innocent human beings, which many States have legally endorsed? How many times has the Church's voice, raised in defence of these human beings, gone unheard! And how many times, unfortunately, from other parts has what is an aberrant crime against the most defenceless of human beings been presented as a right and sign of civilization!

But the historic and pressing moment has come to take a decisive step for civilization and the authentic welfare of peoples: the necessary step to reclaim the full human dignity and the right to life of every human being from the first instant of life and throughout the whole prenatal stage. This objective, to restore human dignity to prenatal life, demands a joint and unbiased effort of interdisciplinary reflection, together with an indispensable renewal of law and politics.

When this journey has begun, it will mark the beginning of a new stage of civilization for future humanity, the humanity of the third millennium.

4. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is quite clear how important is the responsibility of intellectuals in their task of conducting research in this field. It is a matter of restoring legal protection to specific areas of human existence, first and foremost that of prenatal life.

On this restoration, which is the victory of truth, the moral good and rights, depends the success of the defense of human life in its other more fragile moments such as its final phase, illness and handicap. Nor should it be forgotten that the preservation of peace and even the protection of the environment presuppose, by logical coherence, the respect and defence of life from the very first moment until its natural end.

5. The Pontifical Academy for Life, which I sincerely thank for the service it is rendering to life, has the duty of contributing to a deeper awareness of the value of this basic good, especially through dialogue with experts in the biomedical, legal and moral sciences. To achieve this goal, the work

of your study and research community will have to rely on an intense life *ad intra*, characterized by exchange and multidisciplinary scholarly collaboration. It will thus be able to offer *ad extra*, in the world of culture and society, beneficial encouragement and worthwhile contributions for an authentic renewal of society.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the generous beginning of your activity reassures us in this hope. I wish here to encourage you to continue on the path you have taken, in memory of the praiseworthy insight of your first President, Prof. Lejeune, that valiant and tireless defender of human life.

The Church today feels the historical need to protect life for the good of man and of civilization. I am convinced that future generations will be grateful to her for having so firmly opposed the many manifestations of the culture of death and every form of disregard for human life.

May God bless your every effort and may the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, make your research fruitful. In testimony to the interest with which I follow your activity, I willingly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.