



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE COMMEMORATIVE CONFERENCE
OF THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC PHYSICIANS' ASSOCIATION
ON THE OCCASION OF ITS 70th ANNIVERSARY OF FOUNDATION***

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 15 November 2014*

[Multimedia]

Good morning!

Thank you for your presence and also for your wish that the Lord grant me life and health! But this also depends on doctors, may they help the Lord! In particular I would like to greet: the chaplain, Archbishop Edoardo Menichelli; Cardinal Tettamanzi, who has been your first assistant; and a thought also goes to Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, who for decades has followed the life of the Association and who has been very ill but has improved in recent days. I also thank the President for his greeting. Thank you.

There is no doubt that, in our time, due to scientific and technical advancements, the possibilities for physical healing have significantly increased; and yet, in some respects it seems that the capacity for “taking care” of the person has diminished, especially when one is sick, frail and helpless. In effect, medical and scientific achievements can contribute to improving human life, provided that they are not separated from the ethical root of these disciplines. For this reason, you, Catholic doctors, commit to practicing your profession as a human and spiritual mission, as a true lay apostolate.

Attention to human life, especially to those in greatest difficulty, that is, to the sick, the elderly, children, deeply implicates the mission of the Church. The Church also feels called to participate in the debate which focuses on human life, presenting her proposal on the basis of the Gospel. In many places, quality of life is primarily related to economic means, to “well-being”, to the beauty and enjoyment of physical life, forgetting the other, more profound, interpersonal, spiritual and

religious dimensions of existence. In fact, in the light of faith and right reason, human life is always sacred and always has “quality”. As there is no human life that is more sacred than another: every human life is sacred! There is no human life qualitatively more significant than another, only by virtue of resources, rights, greater social and economic opportunities.

This is what you, Catholic doctors, try to affirm, first of all with your professionalism. Your work seeks to bear witness by word and deed that human life is always sacred, valuable and sacrosanct. As such, it must be loved, defended and cared for. Your professionalism, enriched with the spirit of faith, is a further reason to collaborate with those — even from different religious perspectives or thought — who recognize the dignity of the human person as a criterion for their activities. Indeed, while the Hippocratic Oath commits you to always be servants of life, the Gospel drives you further: to love life always and in any case, especially when it requires special care and attention. This is what the members of your Association have done over the course of 70 years of commendable work. I urge you to continue on this road with humility and trust, striving to pursue your statutory purposes of implementing the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church in the field of medical ethics.

The predominant school of thought sometimes leads to “false compassion” which holds that it is a benefit to women to promote abortion; an act of dignity to perform euthanasia; a scientific breakthrough to “produce” a child, considered as a right rather than a gift to be welcomed; or to using human lives as laboratory animals, allegedly in order to save others. Instead, the compassion of the Gospel is what accompanies us in times of need, that compassion of the Good Samaritan, who “sees”, “has compassion”, draws near and provides concrete help (cf. Lk 10:33). Your mission as doctors places you in daily contact with so many forms of suffering. I encourage you to take them on as “Good Samaritans”, caring in a special way for the elderly, the infirm and the disabled. Faithfulness to the Gospel of life and respect for life as a gift from God sometimes require brave choices that go against the current, which in particular circumstances may become points of conscientious objection. This faithfulness brings with it many social consequences. We are living in a time of experimentation with life. But it is harmful experimentation. *Making* children, rather than accepting them as a gift, as I said. Playing with life. Be careful, because this is a sin against the Creator: against God the Creator, who created things this way. Many times in my life as a priest, I have heard objections. “Tell me, why, for example, does the Church oppose abortion? Is it a religious problem?” — “No, no. It’s not a religious problem” — “Is it a philosophical problem?” — “No, it’s not a philosophical problem”. It is a scientific problem, because there is a human life there and it is not licit to eliminate a human life to resolve a problem. “But no, the modern school of thought...”. — “Listen, in the old and the modern schools of thought, the word *kill* means the same thing!”. The same is true for euthanasia. We all know that with so many elderly people in this throw-away culture, euthanasia is being performed in secret. There is also another. And this is saying to God: “No, I will end life, as I see fit”. A sin against God the Creator: think hard about this.

I hope the 70 years of your Association will encourage a further journey of growth and maturation. May you work constructively with all the people and institutions who share your love of life and seek to serve it in its dignity, sanctity and inviolability. St Camillus de Lellis, in proposing the most effective method to care for the sick, simply said: “Put more heart into those hands”. Put more heart into those hands — this is my hope as well. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Salus Infirmorum*, support the intentions with which you intend to continue your action. I ask you to please pray for me and I give you my heartfelt blessing. Thank you.