



# The Holy See

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***SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER  
JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE CONGRESS OF THE CATHOLIC DOCTORS***

*July 7, 2000*

1. I extend a cordial welcome to you all, dear Catholic doctors who have come to Rome with your family members to attend the international congress organized by the Italian Catholic Medical Association, the European Catholic Medical Association and the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations. The principal aim of your meeting in the Eternal City is to celebrate your Jubilee. I fervently hope that, refreshed by this timely spiritual break, you will be able to give fresh, courageous vitality to your Gospel witness in the important area of medicine and health care.

I greet you all affectionately, beginning with Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, Archbishop of Genoa, and Professors Domenico Di Virgilio, Paul Deschepper and Gian Luigi Gigli, Presidents respectively of the above-mentioned associations. And I greet Fr Feytor Pinto and Fr Valentini Pozaic, along with the ecclesiastical advisers present.

I also extend my greetings to Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers, an institution which I entrusted with the task of encouraging and promoting the work of formation, study and action carried out by the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, especially in the context of the Jubilee Year. I lastly offer my particular thanks to Prof. Domenico Di Virgilio, who has well expressed the sentiments you share and your loyal fidelity to the Chair of Peter.

2. The theme chosen for your congress - Medicine and Human Rights - is very important, not only for the cultural effort it expresses of combining medical progress with the ethical and juridical requirements of the human person, but also for its timeliness because of actual or potential violations of the fundamental right to life, on which every other personal right is based.

Every day in your professional work you render a noble service to life. Your mission as doctors puts you in daily contact with the mysterious and wonderful reality of human life, prompting you to be concerned for the sufferings and hopes of our many brothers and sisters. Persevere in your generous dedication, showing particular attention to the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

You have firsthand experience that in your profession medical care and technical services are not enough, even if provided with exemplary professionalism. You must also be able to offer the sick that special spiritual medicine which is the warmth of genuine human contact. This can restore the love of life to your patients, inspiring them to struggle for it with an inner determination that is sometimes decisive for their recovery.

The sick must be helped to regain not only their physical health, but also psychological and moral well being. This presupposes that the doctor, in addition to his professional skill, also has an attitude of loving concern inspired by the Gospel image of the Good Samaritan. With every suffering person, the Catholic doctor is called to bear witness to those higher values which have their firmest foundation in faith.

3. Dear Catholic doctors, you know so well that it is your indispensable mission to defend, promote and love the life of every human being from its beginning until its natural end. Today, unfortunately, we live in a society dominated both by an abortionist culture, leading to the violation of the fundamental right to life of the unborn, and by a concept of human autonomy expressed in

the demand for euthanasia as self-liberation from a situation which for some reason has become distressing.

You know that it is never licit for a Catholic to be party to an alleged right to abortion or euthanasia. Since legislation allowing such crimes is intrinsically immoral, it cannot represent a moral imperative for the doctor, who will rightly have recourse to conscientious objection. The great progress made in recent years in the palliative treatment of pain makes it possible to provide

suitable care for the difficult situations of the terminally ill.

The many disturbing ways in which health and life are attacked should be courageously addressed by every person who truly respects human rights. I am thinking of the destruction, suffering and death that afflict entire populations because of conflicts and fratricidal wars. I am thinking of the epidemics and diseases that occur among populations forced to abandon their lands and flee into the unknown. How could we remain indifferent to the agonizing scenes of children and the elderly living in intolerable situations of hardship and suffering, especially when they are denied even the basic right to health care!

A vast field of action lies before you, dear Catholic doctors, and I express my heartfelt appreciation to those of you who courageously decide to dedicate some of their time to people in situations of such dire emergency. Missionary cooperation in the health-care field has always been open-hearted, and I fervently hope that this generous service to suffering humanity will continue to grow.

4. As we enter the third millennium, men and women, especially in the poorest countries, are unfortunately still deprived of access to health services and the essential medicines for their treatment. Many of our brothers and sisters die each day of malaria, leprosy and AIDS, sometimes in the midst of the general indifference of those who could or should offer them support.

May your hearts be attentive to these silent pleas! It is your task, dear members of Catholic medical associations, to work so that every person, regardless of his social or economic status, can exercise his primary right to what is necessary for restoring his health and thus to adequate medical care. Some of you are researchers in the biomedical sciences, which by nature aim at advancing, developing and improving the conditions of human health and life. I urgently appeal to them to make a generous contribution to providing humanity with better health conditions, while always respecting the dignity and sacredness of life. Everything that is scientifically possible is not always morally acceptable.

When you return to your respective nations, take with you a desire to continue with new zeal in your work of formation

and updating, not only in the disciplines associated with your profession, but also in theology and bioethics. It is very important, particularly in the nations with young Churches, to see to the professional and ethical-spiritual formation of doctors and health-care personnel, who often have to confront serious emergencies calling for professional skill and suitable preparation in the moral and religious field.

5. Dear Catholic doctors, your congress is providentially occurring during the Jubilee, a favourable moment for personal conversion to Christ and for opening your hearts to those in need. May the fruit of your Jubilee celebration be a deeper concern for your neighbour, a generous sharing of knowledge and experience and an authentic spirit of solidarity and Christian charity.

May our Blessed Lady, *Salus infirmorum*, assist you in your complex and necessary mission. May St Giuseppe Moscati be your example, so that you will never lack the strength to bear witness with consistency, complete honesty and absolute integrity to the "Gospel of life".

Thanking you again for your visit, I implore the Lord's constant benevolence for you, for your families and for everyone entrusted to your care, as I wholeheartedly impart to all a special Apostolic Blessing.

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