



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS
IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TRISOMY 21**

*Clementine Hall
Tuesday, 23 May 1989*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends:*

1. I salute each one of you, organizers and participants in this *International Symposium on Trisomy 21*.

On this occasion, I am happy to meet the distinguished scientists who have presented the results of their research at this Meeting. Your work aims at a deeper understanding of the pathogenesis of *Down's syndrome*, as well as the development of an effective treatment of those affected by it. At a time when the allocation of funds for this sort of research tends to be reduced, your continuing involvement in this work reflects a generosity and commitment for which we are all grateful.

I also wish to greet the *health-care workers* among you. As people devoted to caring for those afflicted by Down's syndrome, you offer your own experience, together with your research on the clinical, psychological and social levels, in order to improve their living conditions. By your efforts, you enable these patients to develop their native gifts and abilities in a way that allows them, in various degrees, to overcome the limitations brought on by their illness. My greeting also goes to *the families* who give such love and self-sacrifice to these children. You, more than anyone, know that, despite their handicaps, these children are worthy of loving care, and readily give so much affection in return.

2. Reaching out to the suffering and less fortunate is at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The *image of the Good Samaritan* which Christ himself so fully embodied, reappears time and again – even though we often fail to realize it – in the scientist at work in his laboratory, where he works in hope of preventing or curing illness through the discovery of its causes. The figure of the

Good Samaritan also appears in the *health-care and social workers* who care for the sick and help them to live a truly human life in everyday society. And it appears in all its greatness in those *parents* who, despite their own limitations and a frequent sense of frustration at not receiving the support they would expect, nevertheless strive to ensure for their children a truly loving upbringing. Each one of you, in his or her own way, is a reminder of that beautiful image from the Gospel. The gratitude which I express to you is the same gratitude which Christ himself felt, when he said: “Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me” (Cfr. *Matth.* 25, 40).

3. Your presence here offers me an opportunity to refer to an important development in present-day society. More and more, the word “special” is being used to describe people whose physical or psychological make-up or behaviour appears to diverge in some way from what is considered “normal”. Whatever meaning we may wish to give to the term, one thing is certain: *the person who is “special” is still a human person*, possessing the same inalienable dignity and deserving exactly the same respect as any other person.

This truth makes us realize how necessary it is to *reaffirm* the universal nature of the *transcendent values connected with human life*. It urges us to insist that these values should be recognized in each and every person, and that they should be promoted with genuine love. It demands that society make every effort to ensure that sufficient numbers of health-care personnel and adequate facilities be made available for the care of the sick. Where necessary, existing structures should be adapted to suit new needs, thus providing an environment conducive to more humane living. Scientific skill and professional experience are necessary and indeed indispensable in the delicate work you have undertaken. But it is to be hoped that these qualifications will always be accompanied by a spirit of sincere dedication and by *concern for the patient as a person* – not only as someone requiring therapeutic treatment, but also as one who needs comforting and moral support.

The Church calls for a *profound commitment* to the promotion of *Christian values within our social and healthcare institutions*. As a case in point, the increasing use of selective abortion as a means of preventing the birth of handicapped children requires a firm response from Christians. In our search for genuine social progress, we can never ignore the law of God. The right answers to the problems our society is facing will always be marked by justice, respect for human dignity and the defence of the innocent lives of the vulnerable and the unborn. The Gospel affirms that every individual is a creature whom God chose to fashion in his own image, and both Christian revelation and reason affirm the existence of a moral order which transcends man himself. These truths and values require of you a generous commitment to *scholarship*, a scholarship *enlightened both by rigorous scientific investigation and by objective ethical and moral principles*.

4. The protection and defence of the human person – every person and the whole person, especially those who are vulnerable and most helpless: this is a task which the Catholic Church, in the name of Christ, cannot and will not forsake. We are all heartened when we see science,

medicine, society and the family co-operating in the effort to meet, in a genuinely humane way, the particular problems of the person who is “special” – in your case, the person with Down’s syndrome.

In paying tribute to the progress made in the past thirty years, from the time when the causal connection between a clearly defined chromosomal anomaly and Down’s syndrome first became apparent, I express the hope that science and medicine will soon be in a position to overcome the developmental difficulties experienced by individuals with this condition. All of you, including the families concerned, have my appreciation and support. God bless you and your efforts. May his protection be with those you treat and care for.

5. Desidero rivolgere, ancora, un saluto in lingua italiana esprimendo compiacimento per tutti coloro che si dedicano ai problemi riguardanti la sindrome di Down e la malattia di Alzheimer, ed in particolare per i componenti dell’istituto di genetica umana della facoltà di medicina e chirurgia “Agostino Gemelli” dell’Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, che hanno organizzato questo simposio.

Alle famiglie qui presenti e a tutte le famiglie dico che la loro sofferente attesa di un futuro migliore per i loro figli Down è anche la nostra attesa, l’attesa della Chiesa di Cristo; ma voglio assicurarle che la loro coraggiosa fiducia, che le vede già fortemente impegnate per promuovere un più attento e giusto riconoscimento della persona Down da parte della società, ha il mio sentito apprezzamento e tutta la mia adesione.

Con questi voti imparto a tutti la mia benedizione apostolica.

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