



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONGRESS
ON THE "BIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
FOUNDATIONS OF PRENATAL EDUCATION"**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to greet you on the occasion of the Congress on the "*Biological and Psychological Foundations of Prenatal Education*" which you are attending. I extend my cordial greetings to each of you, with special appreciation for the organizers of this meeting, including the leaders of the *Pro-Life Movement*, a praiseworthy initiative of generous hearts which has received increasing support in recent years.

It is encouraging to find a group of researchers in the contemporary scientific field who, recognizing the full dignity of the unborn child, are exploring the paths of a new discipline, prenatal education. This is marvellous, praiseworthy research: to examine the child still in his mother's womb, not only to monitor and observe his physical growth and to listen to the beat of his tiny heart, but also to study his emotions and record the signs of his psychological development. In this research there is an implicit respect for the person in whom an immortal spirit already pulsates and the Creator's image is revealed.

2. It is right that the behavioural as well as the biological sciences should focus their attention on the child from the very beginning of his temporal development in the mother's womb. Thus your dedication, dear participants, is certainly valuable in the field of the experimental sciences, but it also has an anthropological and moral significance. In fact your interest, dear participants, goes beyond the merely organic and the consideration of physical and functional aspects, which nonetheless have their importance, and is directed to the inmost depths of the new being, a guest in his mother's womb.

Your outlook, so to speak, is prospective: you observe the child's developmental phases: infancy, adolescence, adulthood - to discern the psychological connections between those stages of life and its beginnings in the mother's womb, to suggest to parents the most suitable behaviour for

guaranteeing a harmonious beginning to this process.

The history of the individual after birth depends, of course, on the physical and medical care he receives. But he is greatly influenced by the calmness, intensity and variety of the emotions he has felt during his prenatal life. So this line of prenatal research must be considered highly important.

In this perspective, it is also important to identify the connection between the psychological development of the unborn child and the family context in which he lives. The harmony of the married couple, the warmth of the home, the tranquillity of daily life affect his psychology, fostering harmonious growth: it is not only genes that hand on the parents' hereditary traits, but also the repercussions of their spiritual and emotional experiences.

3. It is a pleasure to see how medicine and psychology, with their respective resources, can serve unborn life and its progressive development. While some current lines of research and experimental intervention risk forgetting the mystery of the person present in the life that is maturing in the maternal womb, you have decided to develop your studies starting from this premiss. Indeed, you know that the worst disaster for humanity is to lose the sense of the value of human life from its beginning.

To know life in all its dimensions so as to respect it and promote its full development and mystery: this is the vision which guides you and which you would like to reconfirm today to the Successor of Peter. In this context we can only hope that those responsible for allocating the financial means for research will be able to distinguish between programmes that support life and those that offend its integrity or jeopardize its very existence.

It is the task of Catholic researchers in particular to focus their efforts on the loftiest human objectives science can serve. In my Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* I wrote in this regard: "Intellectuals can also do much to build a new culture of human life. A special task falls to Catholic intellectuals, who are called to be present and active in the leading centres where culture is formed, in schools and universities, in places of scientific and technological research, of artistic creativity and of the study of man" (n. 98).

4. I renew my invitation to believers to collaborate with an open mind with their colleagues in the scientific world, in order to further research on the physical, psychological and spiritual elements of human life from its beginnings. Anyone concerned about defending and promoting life, especially if it is frail and defenceless, cannot be satisfied with proclaiming the right to life, although that is just and right, but must feel committed to creating a culture based on science, "by offering serious and well-documented contributions, capable of commanding general respect and interest by reason of their merit" (ibid.).

The truth will ultimately triumph, because God is on its side. Indeed, is he not the God of truth and

the Lord of life?

I therefore urge you to continue your studies with exemplary rigour. The Lord will not fail to accompany you with his grace in the daily work which you devote to the service of a brighter and life-filled future.

With this hope, as I invoke upon you and your activities the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom and Mother of the Incarnate Word, I cordially impart to you my affectionate Blessing.

From the Vatican, 20 March 1998.

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