



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 25 February 2012*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am glad to meet you on the occasion of the 18th General Assembly of the [Pontifical Academy for Life](#). I greet and thank all of you for your generous pro-life service, and Bishop Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, your President, in particular for his words to me also on your behalf. The orientation you have given your work reflects the trust that the Church has always placed in the possibilities of human reason and in strictly conducted scientific work, which always takes the moral aspect into account.

The theme you have chosen this year, “Diagnosis and Treatment of Infertility”, in addition to its human and social importance, it has a particular scientific value and expresses the concrete possibility of fruitful dialogue between the ethical dimension and biomedical research. With regard to the problem of the infertility of couples you have in fact chosen to recall and to consider attentively the moral dimension, seeking to find a correct diagnostic evaluation and treatment that corrects the causes of infertility. This approach is not only prompted by the wish to give the couple a child but also to restore to the spouses their fertility and the full dignity of being responsible for their own procreative decisions, in order to cooperate with God in begetting a new human being.

Research for diagnosing the condition and appropriate treatment is the correct scientific approach to the question of infertility, and also the one that best respects the integral humanity of those involved. Indeed, the union of the man and the woman in the community of love and life, which is

marriage, constitutes the only worthy “place” to call into existence a new human being, who is always a gift.

I therefore wish to encourage intellectual honesty in your work. It is an example of a science that retains its spirit in seeking the truth at the service of the authentic good of the human being and that avoids the risk of being a merely functional practice. The human and Christian dignity of procreation, in fact, does not consist in a “product”, but in its link to the conjugal act, an expression of the love of the husband and wife, of their union, which is not only biological but also spiritual.

The Instruction *Donum Vitae* reminds us in this regard that “by its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, capacitates them for the generation of new life, according to laws inscribed in the very being of man and of woman” (B 4a). The couple’s legitimate aspirations to parenthood who experience a condition of infertility, must therefore — with the help of science — find an answer that fully respects their dignity as people and as spouses. The humility, precision and depth with which you study these problems, deemed superseded by some of your colleagues in the face of the fascination of artificial fertilization technology, deserves encouragement and support.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, I recalled that “easy earnings or, even worse, the arrogance of replacing the Creator, at times play a decisive role. This is a form of the *hybris* of reason, which can acquire characteristics that are dangerous to humanity itself” (*Discourse to the Participants in the International Congress organized by the Pontifical Lateran University*, 16 October 2008: *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 22 October 2008, p. 43). Scientism and the logic of profit seem effectively to dominate the field of infertility and human procreation today, even to the point of limiting many other areas of research.

The Church pays great attention to the distress of infertile couples, she cares for them and for this very reason encourages medical research. Science, however, is not always able to respond positively to the desires of numerous couples. I would therefore like to remind spouses in a condition of infertility, that this does not thwart their matrimonial vocation. Spouses are always called by their baptismal and matrimonial vocation itself to cooperate with God in the creation of a new human life. The vocation to love is in fact a vocation to the gift of self, and this is a possibility that no physical condition can prevent. Therefore, whenever science finds no answer, the answer that gives light comes from Christ.

I would like to encourage all of you gathered here for these study days and who at times work in a medical and scientific context where the dimension of truth is obscured: persevere on the way on which you have set out with an intellectually honest science, fascinated by the constant search for the good of the human being. On your intellectual journey, do not disdain the dialogue with faith. I address to you the heartfelt appeal expressed in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “if reason is to be exercised properly, it must undergo constant purification, since it can never be completely free

of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests.... Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly” (n. 28).

On the other hand, the cultural matrix Christianity created — rooted in the affirmation of the existence of the Truth and of the intelligibility of the real in the light of the Supreme Truth — I mean, the cultural matrix — made possible in Medieval Europe the development of modern scientific knowledge, a knowledge that in previous cultures had remained only in embryo.

Distinguished scientists and all of you, members of the Academy engaged in promoting the life and dignity of the human person, may you always also bear in mind the fundamental cultural role you play in society and the influence you have in forming public opinion. My Predecessor, [Bl. John Paul II](#), recalled that “scientists, therefore, precisely because they ‘know more’, are called to ‘serve more” (*Discourse to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, 11 November 2002: *L’Osservatore Romano* 20 November 2003, p. 4).

People trust in you who serve life, they trust in your commitment to support those in need of comfort and hope. Never give in to the temptation to treat the good of the person by reducing him or her to a mere technical problem! The conscience’s indifference to the true and the good is a dangerous threat to authentic scientific progress.

I would like to conclude by renewing the hope that the [Second Vatican Council](#) addressed to men of thought and science: “Happy are those who, while possessing the truth, search more earnestly for it in order to renew it, deepen it, and transmit it to others” (*Message to Men of Thought and Science*, 8 December 1965: AAS 58 [1966], 12). With these hopes I impart the Apostolic Blessing to all of you present here and to your loved ones. Many thanks.