



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL
SYMPOSIUM SPONSORED BY THE
«NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR CANCER RESEARCH»**

Friday, 27 April 1984

Dear Friends,

1. It is an honour and a pleasure for me to welcome to the Vatican those taking part in the International Symposium sponsored by the National Foundation for Cancer Research. As I greet you today, I wish to express my *deep appreciation of the important contribution* you are making to the health and happiness of the human family. Through your generosity and self-sacrifice in the disciplined and often tedious task of research, you have greatly increased our understanding of the causes and nature of cancer and of the best methods for treating it effectively. This Symposium is one more example of your untiring efforts in this regard and of your dedicated concern for those throughout the world who suffer from this dreaded disease.

2. Several months ago, I issued an [Apostolic Letter on the Christian meaning of human suffering](#). In that document I sought to bring the light of Christ to that experience which is an essential part of every person's life. In addition to my desire to help people find meaning in the mysterious face of suffering, I also wished to draw attention in *gratitude* to those, like yourselves, who are particularly sensitive to the sufferings of others, and who strive to offer not only sympathy and compassion but concrete efforts to alleviate those sufferings. In this regard, I stated: "How much there is of 'the Good Samaritan' in the profession of the doctor, or the nurse, or others similar! Considering its 'evangelical' content, we are inclined to think here of a vocation rather than simply a profession. And the institutions which from generation to generation have performed 'Good Samaritan' service have developed and specialized even further in our times. This undoubtedly proves that people today pay ever greater and closer attention to the sufferings of their neighbour, seek to understand those sufferings and deal with them with ever greater skill. They also have an ever greater

capacity and specialization in this area. In view of all this, we can say that the parable of the Samaritan of the Gospel has become *one of the essential elements of moral culture and universally human civilization*. And thinking of all those who by their knowledge and ability provide many kinds of service to their suffering neighbour, we cannot but offer them words of thanks and gratitude" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 29).

3. For years, medical research has required the adoption of methods of advanced specialization in order to pursue new discoveries. More recently, an *interdisciplinary approach* has been increasingly needed, one which encompasses the insights provided by various fields of knowledge, such as medicine, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and so forth. All of this points to a need for greater dialogue and collaboration among the men and women of the different sciences. Together with this, more and more scientists and researchers feel the importance of placing the results of their research within a wider social and cultural context and of giving due consideration to the moral principles and spiritual values which are associated with new discoveries. Your desire to meet the Pope on the occasion of this International Symposium shows your own sensitivity to these dimensions.

Medical research, and indeed all scientific study, needs the support and guidance of *spiritual and moral values*. For such research is ultimately intended for the good of the whole person, even if the immediate aim is the treatment of certain tissues or organs of the body. A deep unity exists between the body and the spirit, a unity which is so substantial that the most spiritual activity is affected by the bodily condition, and the body itself achieves its proper and final purpose only when directed by the spirit. I would therefore like to offer encouragement to all those who are promoting an interdisciplinary approach to cancer research and other medical problems, and I would urge that there be included in this approach the wisdom which is found in the spiritual heritage of the human family. I assure you, in this regard, of the great interest of the Catholic Church in your research, and of a readiness to dialogue and to share with you the spiritual and ethical traditions of the Christian faith.

4. The interdisciplinary nature of science today has also involved an *internationalization* among those carrying out research. This is clearly seen in your present Symposium. And it is a hopeful sign of an increasing spirit of brotherhood and fruitful cooperation among men and women of good will from all nations. I pray that your successes and achievements will, in a similar way, bring hope and assistance not only to a fortunate few but to people throughout the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, yours is indeed a noble and vitally important task. May God grant you joy and strength in your work, and may he bless you and your families with his rich and abiding peace.

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