

Vitae Misterium

1. The mystery of life, and of human life in particular, is attracting the increased attention of experts who are drawn by the extraordinary opportunities for investigation that scientific and technological advances offer their research today. While this new situation opens up fascinating horizons for intervention at the sources of life itself, it also gives rise to a variety of new moral questions that man cannot ignore without the risk of taking steps that could prove irreversible. With this awareness, the Church which by Christ's mandate must enlighten the consciences of men regarding the moral requirements inherent in their very nature, "having taken account of the data of research and technology, intends to put forward, by virtue of its evangelical mission and apostolic duty, the moral teaching corresponding to the dignity of the person and to his or her integral vocation" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Vitae*, n.1). This is a particularly urgent task in our day, if one considers that "the Church today lives a fundamental aspect of her mission in lovingly and generously accepting every human being, especially those who are weak and sick. This is made all the more necessary as a 'culture of death' threatens to take control" (Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, n. 38).

2. The Church has been active for many centuries in the health-care sector and has frequently anticipated State interventions. Through the assistance and pastoral services she provides, she continues today to proclaim the "Gospel of life" in changing historical and cultural circumstances, relying on teachings that are faithful to the Gospel truth and attentive to the "signs of the times". In the health-care sector, she is particularly aware of the need to broaden all possible knowledge at the service of human life, so that where technology is unable to provide exhaustive answers, "the law of love" may come to light. This law inspires all her missionary activity and urges her to express in a living and practical way the message of Christ, who came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (cf. *Jn 10:10*).

3. When on 11 February 1985 I established the Pontifical Commission that now is the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, I pointed out one of its objectives: "to spread, explain and defend the Church's teachings on the subject of health care, and encourage their penetration into health-care practices" (*Motu proprio Dolentium Hominum*, n.6). This goal was confirmed by this dicastery in the Apostolic Constitution *pastor bonus*, (art. 153, 3-4). All health-care workers are required to be properly trained in morals and the problems in bioethics (cf. Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops, 1991, Final Declaration, n. 10), to show clearly that science and technology, at the service of the human person and his fundamental rights, contribute to the overall good of man and to fulfilling the divine plan of salvation (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n. 35).

4. In order to achieve these goals, I have gathered together the suggestions made by those chiefly responsible for pastoral assistance to health-care workers, realizing that in serving life the Church

and science cannot fail the Church and science cannot fail to cross paths (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Message to Men of Thought and Science, 8 December 1965). With this Motu Proprio I am establishing the Pontifical Academy for Life, which is autonomous in accordance with its statutes. However it is connected to and works in close relationship with the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers. It will have the specific task to study and provide information and training about the principal problems of law and biomedicine pertaining to the promotion and protection of life, especially in the direct relationship they have with Christian morality and the directives of the Church's Magisterium.

5. The Pontifical Academy for Life, located in the Vatican, will be chaired by a President whom I shall appoint, assisted by a Council and an Ecclesiastical Adviser. It will be the task of the Pontifical Academy's President to convene the Assembly to encourage its activities, to approve its annual programmes and to supervise its administration in accordance with its own Statutes, to be approved by the Apostolic See. The members of the Academy, appointed by me, will represent the various branches of the biomedical sciences and those that are most closely related to problems concerning the promotion and protection of life. It is also planned to associate Members by correspondence.

6. As I invoke the divine assistance on the activities of the new Academy, which I shall not fail to follow with keen interest, I am pleased to impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all its members and associates and to all those who will strive to make this initiative as successful as possible.

From the Vatican, 11 February 1994,

JOANNES PAULUS II