

**Address of John Paul II
To The 18th International Congress
of The Transplantation Society
Tuesday 29 August 2000
(part 1 of 2)**



Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am happy to greet all of you at this International Congress, which has brought you together for a reflection on the complex and delicate theme of transplants. I thank Professor Raffaello Cortesini and Professor Oscar Salvatierra for their kind words, and I extend a special greeting to the Italian Authorities present.

To all of you I express my gratitude for your kind invitation to take part in this meeting and I very much appreciate the serious consideration you are giving to the moral teaching of the Church. With respect for science and being attentive above all to the law of God, the Church has no other aim but the integral good of the human person.

Transplants are a great step forward in science's service of man, and not a few people today owe their lives to an organ transplant. Increasingly, the technique of transplants has proven to be a valid means of attaining the primary goal of all medicine - the service of human life. That is why in the Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* I suggested that one way of nurturing a genuine culture of life "is the donation of organs, performed in an ethically acceptable manner, with a view to offering a chance of health and even of life itself to the sick who sometimes have no other hope" (No. 86).

2. As with all human advancement, this particular field of medical science, for all the hope of health and life it offers to many, also presents *certain critical issues* that need to be examined in the light of a discerning anthropological and ethical reflection.

In this area of medical science too the fundamental criterion must be *the defence and promotion of the integral good of the human person*, in keeping with that unique dignity which is ours by virtue of our humanity. Consequently, it is evident that every medical procedure performed on the human person is subject to limits: not just the limits of what it is technically possible, but also limits determined by respect for human nature itself, understood in its fullness: "what is technically possible is not for that reason alone morally admissible" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae*, 4).

3. It must first be emphasized, as I observed on another occasion, that every organ transplant has its source in a decision of great ethical value: "the decision to offer without reward a part of one's own body for the health and well-being of another person" (*Address to the Participants in a Congress on Organ Transplants*, 20 June 1991, No. 3). Here precisely lies the nobility of the gesture, a gesture which is a genuine act of love. It is not just a matter of giving away something that belongs to us but of giving something of ourselves, for "by virtue of its substantial union with a spiritual soul, the human body cannot be considered as a mere complex of tissues, organs and functions . . . rather it is a constitutive part of the person who manifests and expresses himself through it" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae*, 3).

Accordingly, any procedure which tends to commercialize human organs or to consider them as items of exchange or trade must be considered morally unacceptable, because to use the body as an "object" is to violate the dignity of the human person.

This first point has an immediate consequence of great ethical