



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION
AND THE WORLD PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION**

*Consistory Hall
Monday, 4 January 1993*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome to the Vatican the Presidents and members of the *American Psychiatric Association* and the *World Psychiatric Association*, together with officers and members of other psychiatric and psychoanalytic associations of the United States and other countries. This meeting affords me a welcome opportunity to express the Church's esteem for the many physicians and health care professionals involved in the important and delicate area of psychiatric medicine. Your patient efforts to understand the conditions of general mental health and to provide care to those suffering from psychic disorders have an immense potential for good for individuals and for the life of society. Associations like your own serve a valuable purpose in promoting high standards of scientific knowledge as well as a deep awareness of the professional and ethical requirements demanded by the practice of psychiatry.

By its very nature, your work often brings you to the threshold of the human mystery. It involves a sensitivity to the often tangled workings of the human mind and heart, and an openness to the ultimate concerns which give meaning to people's lives. These are areas of utmost importance to the Church, and they call to mind the urgent need for *a constructive dialogue between science and religion* for the sake of shedding greater light on the mystery of man in its fullness. The Church's own history of commitment to caring for the sick, especially the poor and the emarginated, is rooted in the conviction that the human person is a unity of body and spirit, possessing an inviolable dignity as one made in the image of God and called to a transcendent destiny. For this reason, the Church is convinced that *no adequate assessment of the nature of the human person or the requirements for human fulfillment and psycho-social well-being can be made without*

respect for man's spiritual dimension and capacity for self-transcendence. Only by transcending themselves and living a life of self-giving and openness to truth and love can individuals reach fulfillment and contribute to building an authentic human community.

Your Association is rightly concerned to promote human dignity and the inviolability of individuals and of their freedom. The foundations of human dignity are to be found in the truth about man, and in his human freedom to form his instincts and passions according to the objective requirements of the moral order. As the Scriptures suggest, there is an unbreakable link between authentic freedom and truth (cf. Jn. 10:47); indeed, "freedom attains its full development only by accepting the truth" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 46). It follows that *no genuine therapy or treatment for psychic disturbances can ever conflict with the moral obligation of the patient to pursue the truth and to grow in virtue.* This moral component of the therapeutic task makes great demands upon psychiatrists, who must be committed to attaining a more adequate grasp of the truth of their own lives and to showing profound respect for the dignity of their patients.

Psychiatrists must also feel themselves responsible for the social ramifications of their practice. This is especially true today, when there is ever more clearly a relationship between the appearance and aggravation of certain illnesses and mental disturbances and the crisis of values which society is experiencing. You and your associates will make an important contribution to the future of society by seeking to point out, in the light of a dispassionate commitment to truth, the limits of certain models of social life which can lead to the manipulation of persons and to an unhealthy conditioning of human freedom. In your work to overcome the stigma which has often been associated with mental illness, to end the abuse of psychiatry for ideological reasons, and to strengthen the family as the basic unit of society, as well as in your efforts to draw society's attention to the special needs of the poor, the homeless and the abused – you can be certain of the Church's appreciation and ready cooperation.

The task of healing others and ensuring their psycho-social equilibrium is indeed important and delicate. Together with scientific knowledge there is need of great wisdom in those who devote themselves to this work. Assuring you once more of the Church's esteem, I cordially invoke upon you and the members of your Associations the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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