



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE
INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF TOXICOLOGY***

Saturday, 6 September 1970

Gentlemen,

We bid a heartfelt and respectful welcome to each and every one of you who have come to Rome from various countries of Europe and America to take part in the international congress of toxicology which is entitled "Roman International Poison Days" and which has been organized by the Association "Centro nazionale contro le intossicazioni" under the patronage of the Italian Minister for Health. We greet in a particular way Professor Piero Mazzoni, who has earned Our esteem and who is so competently presiding over the meeting.

Your visit is a response to a question We ask Ourselves and a desire We feel within Us. The question is: What title have We to speak before a congress which is dealing with scientific matters outside Our competence? And this is your reply: We have come to the Pope, because we recognize in him a man who is dedicated, if any man is, to the service of his fellow men, the "servus servorum Dei"; our scientific problems come within his competence and call for his assistance when they touch on human life under moral and spiritual aspects. And such indeed are certain of the problems you deal with in toxicology.

The desire—one that has been Ours for some time—was that We too should have an occasion to say a word, both frank, loving and at the same time severe, about the fearful spread of certain poisons which join to their destructive power the attraction of inebriating emotions, and today form one of the most serious and threatening evils of our generation. We refer to drugs.

Therefore, while this meeting offers Us the opportunity to pay Our tribute of praise to your science, it encourages Us to add to your scientific conclusions the support of Our ethical and religious convictions.

It is, accordingly, a meeting for which We are grateful to you, since We see in you experts deeply versed in matters of such importance and difficulty. In fact, while preserving the due autonomy of his own discipline, a pharmacologist today ranges over the most diverse fields, from biology and physiology to chemical and chemico-physical investigations, keeping ever in mind the innumerable needs of medical science and the pressing problems posed by pathology.

In this vast framework of questions, investigations and problems a particularly important part of pharmacology finds its place, namely toxicology. Precisely because of the great conquests attained in the most diverse sectors of the biological sciences and because of the growing knowledge of pharmacodynamic action on organisms, it poses new questions today, questions which grow more numerous and difficult when they spring from the new branch which is called psychopharmacology.

Then the questions become gnawing problems not only for the scientist, who can never give up the dignity that is his as a man, since science must always be at the service of human society, but also for the doctor in the watchful solicitude which urges him to care for his patient, urging him all the more if the latter consents blindly to his sickness.

For Our part We cannot but encourage you to continue your studies and researches for the deeper understanding of truth and for the discovery of new pharmaceutical preparations capable of preventing or neutralizing the evil effects of toxic substances and providing doctors with new aids and new techniques of healing. In this context you could not avoid dealing with the grave problem of drugs, and have in fact done so to your praise. Allow Us, therefore, to encourage you to devote every energy to your scientific researches in this sector, which are aimed at discovering the biochemical mechanisms which injure the body and change and weaken the psyche, and at making ready new techniques capable at least of lessening their effects.

On the strength of the scientific knowledge you have acquired to date and to which your studies and experiments will yet bring you, you will moreover be able to make a valid denunciation of the often irreparable harm caused by the abuse of drugs, especially among the young; and for them the witness of science always has great value.

It is well known that recourse to drugs is the result of a series of very complex causes, which are of concern especially for parents and educators. But you too, gentlemen, have a task of primary importance. Let your voice be raised, loudly and authoritatively, to give an admonition springing from the knowledge and conscience of each one of you, as you work for the good of society against the harm which can threaten youth, exposed to the danger of degradation in body, spirit and morals. It will be a warning for all those who, by natural vocation or by a mission undertaken with responsibility, are under obligation for the education of youth, a task which above all else is an activity of love and intelligence for the gradual attainment of true self-mastery, that is to say, of the freedom of the children of God. Your scientific contribution and your moral authority will

moreover, where necessary, uphold and further encourage the public powers to carry on ceaselessly and with the appropriate means the struggle against drugs-against what must justly be considered one of the most baneful scourges of our time. You will thus be contributing to the health of the young generations, and it is on them that the hopes for a better future for all society in every field of civil life are founded. You know, gentlemen, that we are united with you for this high purpose in our religious and moral function as a pastor, teacher and friend of men, especially of the young.

It is to give you a sign of that union with you that We have received you and that We now give you yourselves and your studies the encouragement of Our Apostolic Blessing.