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## Concluding Remarks

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## CONCLUDING REMARKS

During the course of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, which met on February 23 - 25, 1998, a group of experts of various nationalities, brought together by the Academy itself, presented the work they had accomplished over the past year. These experts represent the various disciplines involved in the study of the human genome and of the anthropological, ethical, juridical, and social implications of the biomedical applications of this scientific knowledge.

Biologists, doctors, philosophers, theologians, and legal experts have worked together in this interdisciplinary project. They have sought a deeper understanding of the delicate and complex issue which is connected both with the development of the Human Genome Project and other research on the identity, localization, heterogeneousness, and *mutability* of those genes which constitute the hereditary patrimony of man, as well as with the diagnostic, therapeutic, and biotechnological potentialities of new scientific knowledge and of technological progress in the field of molecular genetics.

The work of the Academy, which "has the assignment of contributing to a more profound awareness of the value of life, especially through dialogue with experts in the biomedical, moral, and legal fields", has made it possible to bring together the various perspectives concerning the genetic question with respect for the scientific method and in the light of an anthropological *vision* which is coherent with the Christian *conception* of man.

The development and function of the somatic and psychic structures of the human organism has at its origin the formation of the individual genome through the process of fertilization, which represents the beginning of the life of a new human being. Its nature *has as its organismic basis* the presence of a specifically human genome, which represents the condition for the gradual manifestation over time of all the faculties of the human person. This intrinsic bond of the human genome with the formation of the person essentially distinguishes it from that of every other living species, and is the basis of its inalienable dignity in connection with that of the human person himself. Because of the substantial unity of the body with the spirit - *corpore et anima unus: una summa* - the human genome has not only a biological significance, but is the bearer of an anthropological dignity, which has its foundation in the spiritual soul which pervades it and vivifies it (cf. *Discourse of His Holiness John Paul II to other Members of the Academy*, February 24, 1998).

The origin itself of the human race can today be studied through the evolution of the genome, but the *reality* of Creation, which is inscribed in the free act of love with which God gives being to the only creature that He willed in His image and likeness, remains - beyond all scientific research - an exigency postulated by reason and an *affirmation* of divine Revelation.

Knowledge obtained through research in the field of genetics as it applies to man is very powerful. The positive value of an understanding of the genome of the species, and also in some cases of that of the individual, must be recognized. However, no one has an absolute right to such knowledge. The positive value of the acquisition of genetic information is based not only on the value of scientific knowledge as such, but most of all on the possibility of the service it can render to the good of the person, as for example in its use in preventive health measures, in diagnosis, and also in the treatment of genetically based diseases, when it can be

applied without undue risk to the patients themselves and to their children.

On the contrary, every use of knowledge derived from research on the human genome with the purpose of stigmatizing or discriminating against those who are carriers of pathogenic genes or who have a susceptibility for the development of certain diseases are morally unacceptable, since they are contrary to the inalienable dignity and equality of all human beings, and to social justice. *Cloning*, as an extreme form of manipulative intervention in the genomic constitution of the human being, represents a grave menace to the dignity *of the conceived being, and to the right of that being to a genome that is unrepeatable and not predetermined.*

It is furthermore particularly worrisome to observe the growth of a cultural climate *fostered by information that is not always scientifically and/or deontologically correct*, which leads to the practice of prenatal diagnosis and pre-implantations in a way that is no longer therapeutic, but rather discriminatory of those who are not healthy or perfect from the earliest stages of their life. More and more this discrimination is transformed into an attempt on the very lives of these individuals, who will never see the light of day. Under this profile, the Members of the Pontifical Academy unite themselves with the Holy Father in denouncing "the growth and diffusion of a new selective eugenics, which leads to the suppression of embryos and fetuses affected by some disease", at times availing itself of the pretext of anthropological and ethical differences between the various phases of the development of prenatal life.

Existing legislation on biotechnology and the new genetics gives us some reason to hope, but also to fear. An anthropological foundation and an ethical sensibility in the education of jurists and in the making of laws should lead to a just social order, to the respect of the person, of the family, and of those who are weakest. We can reach this new social order by realizing certain positive and generous actions that can restore the relationship between life, liberty, and truth within society.

Holy Scripture tells us that the person is formed through an intimate correlation between the human creature and his Creator: "In His hand is the soul of every living thing, and the life breath of all mankind" ( Job 12, 10). The hands of the Creator Himself form the person in His image and likeness (cf. Gen 1, 26), giving him the capacity in his turn to generate human life (procreation) as a symbol of His creative work. God calls the human being from the maternal womb (cf Ps 22, 11), that through this call the person can freely and responsibly realize the divine plan of redemption and salvation.

