

Remarks to President Bush on Stem Cell Research

John Paul II

Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you on your first visit since you assumed the office of President of the United States. I warmly greet the distinguished First Lady and the members of your entourage. I express heart-felt good wishes that your presidency will strengthen your country in its commitment to the principles which inspired American democracy from the beginning, and sustained the nation in its remarkable growth. These principles remain as valid as ever as you face the challenges of the new century opening up before us.

Your nation's founders, conscious of the immense natural and human resources with which your land has been blessed by the Creator, were guided by a profound sense of responsibility towards the common good, to be pursued in respect for the God-given dignity and inalienable rights of all. America continues to measure herself by the nobility of her founding vision in building a society of liberty, equality, and justice under the law. In the century which has just ended, these same ideals inspired the American people to resist two totalitarian systems based on an atheistic vision of man and society.

At the beginning of this new century, which also marks the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, the world continues to look to America with hope. Yet it does so with an acute awareness of the crisis of values being experienced in Western society, ever more insecure in the face of the ethical decisions indispensable for humanity's future course.

In recent days, the world's attention has been focused on the process of globalization which has so greatly accelerated in the past decade, and which you and other leaders of the industrialized nations have discussed in Genoa. While appreciating the opportunities for economic growth and material prosperity which this process offers, the Church cannot but express profound concern that our world continues to be divided no longer by the former political and military blocs but by a tragic

fault line between those who can benefit from these opportunities and those who seem cut off from them. The revolution of freedom of which I spoke at the United Nations in 1995 must now be completed by a revolution of opportunity in which all the world's peoples actively contribute to economic prosperity and share in its fruits. This requires leadership by those nations whose religious and cultural traditions should make them most attentive to the moral dimension of the issues involved.

Respect for human dignity and belief in the equal dignity of all the members of the human family demand policies aimed at enabling all peoples to have access to the means required to improve their lives, including the technological means and skills needed for development. Respect for nature by everyone, a policy of openness to immigrants, the cancellation or significant reduction of the debt of poor nations, the promotion of peace through dialogue and negotiation, the primacy of the rule of law: These are the priorities which leaders of developed countries cannot disregard. A global world is essentially a world of solidarity! From this point of view, America, because of her many resources, cultural traditions, and religious values has a special responsibility.

Respect for human dignity finds one of its highest expressions in religious freedom. This right is the first listed in your nation's Bill of Rights, and it is significant that the promotion of religious freedom continues to be an important goal of American policy in the international community. I gladly express the appreciation of the whole Catholic Church for America's commitment in this regard.

Another area in which political and moral choices have the gravest consequences for the future of civilization concerns the most fundamental of human rights, the right to life itself. Experience is already showing how a tragic coarsening of consciences accompanies the assault on innocent human life in the womb, leading to accommodation and acquiescence in the face of other related evils, such as euthanasia, infanticide, and most recently, proposals for the creation for research purposes of human embryos, destined to destruction in the process. A free and virtuous society, which America aspires to be, must reject practices that devalue and violate human life at any stage from conception until natural death. In defending the right to life, both in law and through a vibrant culture of life, America can show the world a path to a truly humane future in which man remains the master, not the product, of his technology.

Mr. President, as you carry out the tasks of the high office which the American people have entrusted to you, I assure you of a remembrance in my prayers. I am confident that under your leadership, your nation will continue to draw on its heritage and resources to help build a world in which each member of the human family can flourish and live in a manner worthy of his or her innate dignity. With these sentiments, I cordially invoke upon you and the beloved American people God's blessings of wisdom, strength, and peace.

Thank you very much.