

## Main Identity

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### **PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE: CLOSE BY THE INCURABLE SICK**

VATICAN CITY, 21 FEB 2008 (VIS) - At 11.30 a.m. today in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present an international congress entitled "Close by the Incurable Sick Person and the Dying: Scientific and Ethical Aspects", due to be held in the Vatican on February 25 and 26 under the auspices of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Participating in today's press conference were Bishop Elio Sgreccia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life; Joseph Capizzi, professor of Moral Theology at the Catholic University of America, and member of the Foundation "Culture and Life" (USA); Monsignor Maurizio Calipari, one of the academy's moral theologians and bioethics professor at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family; and Zbigniew Zylicz, the medical director of "Dove House Hospice" in Hull, East Yorkshire (England).

Bishop Sgreccia briefly summarized the goal of the assembly, which will focus on the moment "in which human fragility is felt most deeply, a moment often intensified by solitude and suffering (...) but one which is very important in the Christian vision because the physical body crumbles and the subject's history comes to an end but they draw near the entrance to full life, eternal life".

This moment of passage is the assembly's specific subject", added the prelate. "We once again", he said, "sense the need to further define the terms of what is and is not licit in the therapeutic sphere, above all in order to respond to the various doubts and continuing debate in the field of medical assistance. The program proposes many ethical themes with the expectation of clarifying with balance and precision, as best as possible, the limits of the therapy and assistance given to the terminally ill and dying. There will also be discussions of cultural and anthropological nature. Above all, we will present the aspects concerning assistance: how society and the Christian community can be mobilized, palliative care, but the main focus will be on treatments that respond to precise ethical questions".

Monsignor Calipari affirmed that "besides ensuring greater possibilities for life and better health conditions for many, new techniques in medical assistance can sometimes carry with them a greater affront than personal suffering to the patient without there being, or even contrary to there being, a real perspective of benefit."

"What should be done in these cases?", he asked. "What criteria should be adopted to be able to express an ethical and functional judgment on the use of means of prolonging life that is well-grounded and justifiable"?

Professor Calipari proposed the outline of "a new systematic standard of evaluation that would dynamically join the concepts of 'proportionality/disproportionality' (which is chronologically more recent) and 'ordinariness/extraordinariness' (more traditional), without depriving them of their differences and their characteristics". >From this would derive, he continued, a norm that "could represent a precise reference for the concrete decisions on the choice for and recourse to the different means of prolonging life. The result of this effort is called 'the principle of ethical adaptation on the use of the means of prolonging life'".

Professor Zylicz continued the presentation, speaking on the theme of palliative care, hospices, and household assistance. "Although the concept of the hospice is very Christian, hospices do accept people of all faiths and religions".

"Death", he continued, "should be seen as a part of life, a normal event. The death of a loved one can even be an important moment of personal growth. People working in hospices struggle with many ethical dilemmas, such as (artificial) food and hydration, intensive symptom control, which may result in the earlier death of a patient, anguish and terminal sedation, and, finally, with the increasing societal demands of euthanasia".

OP/INCURABLY SICK/SGRECCIA VIS 080221 (610)