

New at Helm of the Life Academy: Where to Start?

Interview With the President, Monsignor Ignacio Carrasco

By Carmen Elena Villa

ROME, JULY 13, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The new president of the Pontifical Academy for Life recognizes that the group cannot tackle every bioethical issue simultaneously, so he says they are concentrating forces currently on two topics.

Monsignor Ignacio Carrasco de Paula, previously the academy's chancellor, was appointed June 30 to lead the group. He succeeds Archbishop Salvatore Fisichella, who is now the president of the newly established Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.

Monsignor Carrasco, a 72-year-old Spanish priest-doctor and member of Opus Dei, brings a long history of bioethical and medical expertise to the role.

He was the director of the Bioethics Institute at Rome's University of the Sacred Heart and a member of the ethics committee for experimentation clinic at the Gemelli Policlinic of Rome.

Monsignor Carrasco talked with ZENIT about his new post and why his Opus Dei spirituality is helping him take the mission with a spirit of faith.

ZENIT: What is your experience in the Pontifical Academy for Life?

Monsignor Carrasco: I began to work in the academy in 1994 when it was established by John Paul II. He put Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini in charge, who at the time was president of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry, and appointed Jerome Lejeune as the first president. I worked with the academy's organization when the first members and consultors were appointed. Cardinal Angelini called me and asked me to collaborate as a consultor of this dicastery and to give him a hand from that moment.

ZENIT: You have written several books in favor of life. Speak to us about this.

Monsignor Carrasco: I am not much of a writer. In fact, I have written several books but if you asked me for a copy it would be hard for me to find one. From a systematic point of view I [wrote on] bioethics with a series of manuals that were published contemporaneously in Italian and Spanish, and which follow the normal outline for writings of this type.

Along a different line, from the point of view of concrete topics, I have done studies on the dignity of

the embryo. Another of my studies was in the entirely opposite direction, which is the subject of brain death, a subject that I do not now like to treat because it generates controversies in some sectors.

ZENIT: Speaking of the dignity of the embryo, you have been appointed president of this dicastery at a time when in your country the new law of abortion is coming into force.

Monsignor Carrasco: This new legislation is a disaster. I hope it won't have too great a repercussion and that it will not be a model for other countries. It is the first time that abortion is recognized as a right that substantially is to kill another person. It is inconceivable.

ZENIT: How can the embryo be defended from the scientific point of view?

Monsignor Carrasco: The problem is not scientific. The embryo is very well defended from that point of view. The problem is essentially of a socio-political and ideological nature and here scientific arguments don't count. It is a realm in which what counts is power and if the one who has power has no desire to dialogue or, at least to reflect somewhat, then he doesn't have much to do with other guidelines.

That is, in the end what remains is the political weapon and the political weapon that we citizens have today is weak. Those who know politics can do much more and that is their very grave responsibility. Speaking in soccer language, let's say it's that they have the ball.

What we have are scientific studies, but those who make the decisions don't listen. Everything is reduced to human rights, but understood in a way that anything can become a human right. I don't know when we will arrive at the right to steal but behind these laws what exists is a relativistic logic.

ZENIT: And from the theological and spiritual point of view?

Monsignor Carrasco: One of the problems we have with regard to the embryo is that it isn't seen. Instead of embryo we should speak of a child who is in the initial phase of development. Because we cannot see him, he is in a situation of tremendous danger, at tremendous risk.

The defense of the embryo precedes the Christian mentality itself. This does not mean that no one ever thought of aborting. The sin has always existed. We all know that we cannot steal and yet, in many cultures and at all times there has been stealing. The Christian became aware that this creature is the creation of God; he is conscious that [this creature] is a presence of divine action.

In some way, at the beginning of their life, creatures are a sort of reminder of what the action of God is in the world among people, who often act without our perceiving him, because what we perceive sometimes is people's wickedness and not God's goodness. Of course, God could render a murderer paralyzed before he kills, but he doesn't do that because his love works in another way.

ZENIT: Is it not a contradiction that now that technology allows so many ways of perceiving human life from its first stages, there is such a strong current opposed to life?

Monsignor Carrasco: It certainly is a contradiction. There are women who abort and keep the photograph of the child and show their friends what the child was like! This leaves me totally disconcerted. On the other hand it coincides with the experiences we have of seeing that we are capable of incredible good and also of living an incomprehensible irrationality. There is an ever greater tendency to eliminate moral sensibility.

ZENIT: How do you see your appointment?

Monsignor Carrasco: We have an immense field of work. We do not have the strength to address every challenge at the same time, but we can address some of them. We are working on very specific subjects. In September we hope to work intensely on two topics with working teams made up of academics: one is post abortion syndrome. The mission is not to demonstrate that this syndrome exists but to see what it is exactly and what it is like.

The second topic is the question of umbilical cord banks because this is something that is spreading and we are at a moment when we can be a step ahead, and see what type of problems are being faced: whether the management should be public or private. Private management at times is governed by profit; public management takes the need of persons more into account. This must always be a service for the human being. That must be the fundamental value.

ZENIT: As a member of the Opus Dei, what have you learned most from the virtues of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer?

Monsignor Carrasco: I have learned very many things. Obviously the most practical is the sanctification of work. This will never be a bureaucratic task. There are always legitimate interests in work but above all it is necessary to see work as something that God allows to attain sanctity and I see that to accept the direction of the Pontifical Academy is what the Lord is asking of me concretely.

[Translation by ZENIT]