

RATZINGER: "DONATION OF ORGANS IS AN ACT OF LOVE"
New Italian Law on Transplants: Cardinal is Donor

ROME, FEB 4 (ZENIT).- "To donate one's organs is an act of love that is morally licit, so long as it is free and spontaneous." With these words, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, confirmed the line of the Church on this matter, at a time when Italy has approved a law to facilitate organ donation and transplants. Just as in other European countries, the law approved yesterday in Italy presupposes a person is a potential donor unless opposition is specifically expressed; in other words, silence is permission.

Cardinal Ratzinger disclosed he is a member of an association of organ donors....

Cardinal Ratzinger, Is it always morally licit to donate one's organs?

CARD. RATZINGER: It certainly is licit to participate spontaneously and in full awareness in the culture of transplants and the donation of organs in which we live. As for myself, I have agreed to give my organs to whomever might be in need.

Does this mean you are registered with an association of donors?

CARD. RATZINGER: Yes, I registered years ago and I always carry this document with me; in addition to personal data, it states that I offer my organs to help whomever is in need: it is simply an act of love.

What does it mean for a Christian to offer his own body for transplants?

CARD. RATZINGER: It means so many things. But, above all, it means -- I repeat -- to carry out an act of love toward someone in need, toward a brother in difficulty. It is a free act of love, of availability, that every person of good will can do at any time and for any brother. That is all.

An act which now, in Italy, has been codified with a law. What do you think of this law?

CARD. RATZINGER: In my capacity, I do not allow myself to judge the law of any State. I do not judge laws. I only say that to give one's organs spontaneously for transplants, in full awareness and full knowledge, means to give expression to a true, deep act of love for one's neighbor.

And yet, around this act of love there is controversy, especially regarding informed silence-assent. What is your opinion on this issue?

CARD. RATZINGER: No, I will not answer. Those are legislative aspects about which I cannot make a declaration. Moreover, I am still not sufficiently familiar with all the terminology of the norms regarding the matter. I will not pass judgement on laws, beyond saying that donation is a gesture of fraternal love.