During the last years, different questions of cases concerning serious or terminal disease are being asked. Critical decisions such as refusing treatments/therapies deeply impacted on our country’s public conscience. This has been true in other countries as well. Even though these situations and discussions deserve the greatest attention, most of the ideas and opinions are being polarized, risking to reduce public interests to bioethics and the theme of life’s ending, causing paradoxically both indifference and information overload. Nowadays bioethics is considered essentially a health issue, but due to great developments in bioethical technology, it also touches upon other issues of life, such as diseases, doctor-patient relationships and more.

In addition there are questions of equal distribution of economical resources for the best therapies, appropriate social and human assistance for inpatients, new drug experimentation with special attention for children, pregnant and fertile women, people not aware of being part of research trials, healthy persons that want to decide what kind of treatment they should undergo in case of unconsciousness, the future of thousands of frozen embryos and the scenarios that will decide human destiny, if there will be no proper genetic manipulations.

To those life dilemmas we must add others, not necessarily medical ones, such as reflections on dignity, freedom, welfare, daily human life threatened by extreme poverty, social coercions, immigration, violent imprisonments, tortures and death. Also important ethical reflections on equal and satisfactory solutions, projected on to an universal dimension of globalisation. From this point of view ethical reflections are directed to bioethical law, and through the complex human web, to deontology.

The world goes round quickly, history develops fast, new biological realities and social relationships related to environment, health, people’s problems and questions are waiting for new solutions in light of new, liberal and tolerant and sensitive ways of thinking. Bioethics can and should give appropriate answers to all this, being no more constrained by geographic limits and narrow ideological contrasts, but looking outward for new requests for new laws, finding new and redeeming solutions for progressive developments, respectful of the human essence and destiny.

More than 40 years have passed from the brilliant intuition by Potter who proposed ethical thought as the science of survival and a bridge towards the future of human existence threatened by the dramatic progress and massive use of biotechnologies and detached from the necessary focus on moral values and principles. It seems now convenient to review the events that have taken place along that bridge connecting biological knowledge with human values. This must be
done in view of a more aware and constant development aiming at an equilibrium between science and society. In this framework, ethical committees, established to meet the need for a balanced cultural and moral mediation at the highest levels, in the confrontation between scientific progress and human rights in a pluralistic and inter-as well as multidisciplinary framework, are fitly taking part in the spread and progress of bioethics towards creating a correct relationship between anthropology, ethics and scientific research. For such a reason, the Ethics Committee for Biomedical Activities “Carlo Romano” of the Federico II University in Naples, has been engaged for a long time in the promotion and defends of bioethical and medical deontological principles as well as in the ethical training of medical and non-medical staff at international level too, and is now proud to collaborate with great enthusiasm to the organization of the 9th World Conference of the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics concerning the future prospects of Bioethics in the 21st Century. The fruitful collaboration with the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and their mission as well as with the European Centre of Bioethics and Quality of Life - UNESCO Chair in Bioethics Italian Unit and the great appreciation for Prof. Carmi’s and Dr. Vasinova’s unrelenting activity have contributed to establishing an increasingly closer relationship between the Committee and the above Institutions. Therefore, the present World Conference represents the fair reward for the efforts made by the Committee’s members and Secretariat for their indefatigable activity in favour of a clinical and experimental medicine that respects people and their personal autonomy while being necessarily aware of the need for a balanced scientific progress. I am convinced that this large pool of energies, competences and enthusiasm by the Congress participants will be tantamount to the progress and success of bioethics in the years to come, also thanks to the contribution of Italian experts and scholars among whom we may count many students. I therefore wish everybody fruitful discussions in the beautiful city of Naples rich in history, sensitivity and cultural traditions.