DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

DECLARATION "DIGNITAS INFINITA" ON HUMAN DIGNITY

Presentation

During the *Congresso* of 15 March 2019, the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith decided to commence "the drafting of a text highlighting the indispensable nature of the dignity of the human person in Christian anthropology and illustrating the significance and beneficial implications of the concept in the social, political, and economic realms—while also taking into account the latest developments on the subject in academia and the ambivalent ways in which the concept is understood today." An initial draft of the text was prepared with the help of some experts in 2019 but a *Consulta Ristretta* of the Congregation, convened on 8 October of the same year, found it to be unsatisfactory.

The Doctrinal Office then prepared another draft *ex novo*, based on the contribution of various experts, which was presented and discussed in a *Consulta Ristretta* held on 4 October 2021. In January 2022, the new draft was presented during the Plenary Session of the Congregation, during which the Members took steps to shorten and simplify the text.

Following this, on 6 February 2023, the amended version of the new draft was reviewed by a *Consulta Ristretta*, which proposed some additional modifications. An updated version was then submitted for the Members' consideration during the Ordinary Session of the Dicastery (*Feria IV*) on 3 May 2023, where Members agreed that the document, with some adjustments, could be published. Subsequently, Pope Francis approved the deliberations of that session during the Audience granted to me on 13 November 2023. On this occasion, he also asked that the document highlight topics closely connected to the theme of dignity, such as poverty, the situation of migrants, violence against women, human trafficking, war, and other themes. To honor the Holy Father's directions, the Doctrinal Section of the Dicastery dedicated a *Congresso* to an in-depth study of the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, which offers an original analysis and further consideration of the theme of human dignity "beyond all circumstances."

On 2 February 2024, a new and significantly modified version of this text was sent to the Members of the Dicastery ahead of the Ordinary Session (*Feria IV*) on 28 February 2024. The letter accompanying the draft included the following clarification: "This additional drafting was necessary to meet a specific request of the Holy Father: namely, he explicitly urged that more attention be given to the grave violations of human dignity in our time, particularly in light of the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. With this, the Doctrinal Office took steps to reduce the initial part […] and to develop in greater detail what the Holy Father indicated." The text of the current Declaration was finally approved during the above-mentioned *Feria IV* of 28 February 2024. Then, in the Audience granted to me and to Monsignor Armando Matteo, Secretary of the Doctrinal Section, on 25 March 2024, the Holy Father approved this Declaration and ordered its publication.

The five-year course of the text's preparation helps us to understand that the document before us reflects the gravity and centrality of the theme of dignity in Christian thought. The text required a considerable process of maturation to arrive at the final version that we have published today.

In its initial three sections, the Declaration recalls fundamental principles and theoretical premises, with the goal of offering important clarifications that can help avoid frequent confusion that surrounds the use of the term "dignity." The fourth section presents some current and problematic situations in which the immense and inalienable dignity due to every human being is not sufficiently recognized. The Church sees the condemnation of these grave and current violations of human dignity as a necessary measure, for she sustains the deep conviction that we cannot separate faith from the defense of human dignity, evangelization from the promotion of a dignified life, and spirituality from a commitment to the dignity of every human being.

This dignity of every human being can be understood as "infinite" (*dignitas infinita*), as Pope St. John Paul II affirmed in a meeting for people living with various limitations or disabilities.[1] He said this to show how human dignity transcends all outward appearances and specific aspects of people's lives.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis wanted to underscore that this dignity exists "beyond all circumstances." With this, he summoned all people to defend human dignity in every cultural context and every moment of human existence, regardless of physical, psychological, social, or even moral deficiencies. The Declaration strives to show that this is a universal truth that we are all called to recognize as a

fundamental condition for our societies to be truly just, peaceful, healthy, and authentically human.

Although not comprehensive, the topics discussed in this Declaration are selected to illuminate different facets of human dignity that might be obscured in many people's consciousness. Some topics may resonate more with some sectors of society than others. Nevertheless, all of them strike us as being necessary because, taken together, they help us recognize the harmony and richness of the thought about human dignity that flows from the Gospel.

This Declaration does not set out to exhaust such a rich and crucial subject. Instead, its aim is to offer some points for reflection that can help us maintain an awareness of human dignity amid the complex historical moment in which we are living. This is so that we may not lose our way and open ourselves up to more wounds and profound sufferings amid the numerous concerns and anxieties of our time.

Víctor Manuel Card. Fernández
Prefect

Introduction

1. (*Dignitas infinita*) Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter. This principle, which is fully recognizable even by reason alone, underlies the primacy of the human person and the protection of human rights. In the light of Revelation, the Church resolutely reiterates and confirms the ontological dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed in Jesus Christ. From this truth, the Church draws the reasons for her commitment to the weak and those less endowed with power, always insisting on "the primacy of the human person and the defense of his or her dignity beyond every circumstance."[2]

2. This ontological dignity and the unique and eminent value of every man and woman in the world was reaffirmed authoritatively in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, issued by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948.[3] As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of that document, the Church sees an opportunity to proclaim anew its conviction that all human beings—created by God and redeemed by Christ—must be recognized and treated with respect and love due to their inalienable dignity. The anniversary also provides an occasion for the Church to clarify some frequent misconceptions concerning human dignity and to address some serious and urgent related issues.

3. From the start of her mission and propelled by the Gospel, the Church has striven to affirm human freedom and promote the rights of all people.[4] In recent times, thanks to the voices of the Pontiffs, the Church has made a deliberate effort to formulate this commitment in more explicit terms through a renewed call to acknowledge the fundamental dignity inherent in every person. On this point, Pope St. Paul VI affirmed that "no anthropology equals that of the Church regarding the human person—particularly concerning the person's originality, dignity, the intangibility and richness of the person's fundamental rights, sacredness, capacity for education, aspiration to a complete development, and immortality."[5]

4. Pope St. John Paul II, during the Third General Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops in Puebla in 1979, affirmed that human dignity is "a Gospel value that cannot be despised without greatly offending the Creator. This dignity is infringed on the individual level when due regard is not had for values such as freedom, the right to profess one's religion, physical and mental integrity, the right to essential goods, to life. It is infringed on the social and political level when man cannot exercise his right of participation, or when he is subjected to unjust and unlawful coercion, or submitted to physical or mental torture, etc. […] If the Church makes herself present in the defense of, or in the advancement of human dignity, she does so in line with her mission, which, although it is religious and not social or political, cannot fail to consider man in the entirety of his being."[6]

5. Then, in 2010, addressing the Pontifical Academy for Life, Pope Benedict XVI declared that human dignity is "a fundamental principle which faith in the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ has always defended, especially when, in respect of the simplest and most defenseless people, it is disregarded."[7] On another occasion, speaking to economists, he stated that "the economy and finance do not exist for their own sake; they are only an instrument or means. Their sole end is the human person and his or her total fulfillment in dignity. This is the only capital, and it is right to safeguard [it]."[8]

6. From the start of his pontificate, Pope Francis has invited the Church to "believe in a Father who loves all men and women with an infinite love, realizing that 'he thereby confers upon them an infinite dignity.'"[9] He has strongly emphasized that such immense dignity is an original *datum* (something given) that is to be acknowledged faithfully and welcomed with gratitude. Based on this recognition and acceptance of human dignity, a new coexistence among people can be established that develops social relationships in the context of authentic fraternity. Indeed, only by "acknowledging the dignity of each human person" can we "contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity."[10] Pope Francis affirms that "the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,"[11] but even human reason can arrive at this conviction through reflection and dialogue since "the dignity of others is to be respected in all circumstances, not because that dignity is something we have invented or imagined, but because human beings possess an intrinsic worth superior to that of material objects and contingent situations. This requires that they be treated differently. That every human being possesses an inalienable dignity is a truth that corresponds to human nature apart from all cultural change."[12] Pope Francis concludes, "human beings have the same inviolable dignity in every age of history, and no one can consider himself or herself authorized by particular situations to deny this conviction or to act against it."[13] From this perspective, Pope Francis' encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, constitutes a kind of "Magna Carta" of our contemporary tasks to protect and

promote human dignity.

A Fundamental Clarification

7. There is widespread agreement today on the importance and normative scope of human dignity and on the unique and transcendent value of every human being.[14] However, the phrase "the dignity of the human person" risks lending itself to a variety of interpretations that can yield potential ambiguities[15] and "contradictions that lead us to wonder whether the equal dignity of all human beings […] is truly recognized, respected, protected and promoted in every situation."[16] This brings us to recognize the possibility of a fourfold distinction of the concept of dignity: *ontological dignity*, *moral dignity*, *social dignity,* and *existential dignity*. The most important among these is the *ontological dignity* that belongs to the person as such simply because he or she exists and is willed, created, and loved by God. Ontological dignity is indelible and remains valid beyond any circumstances in which the person may find themselves. When we speak of *moral dignity*, we refer to how people exercise their freedom. While people are endowed with conscience, they can always act against it. However, were they to do so, they would behave in a way that is "not dignified" with respect to their nature as creatures who are loved by God and called to love others. Yet, this possibility always exists for human freedom, and history illustrates how individuals—when exercising their freedom against the law of love revealed by the Gospel—can commit inestimably profound acts of evil against others. Those who act this way seem to have lost any trace of humanity and dignity. This is where the present distinction can help us discern between the moral dignity that *de facto* can be "lost" and the ontological dignity that can never be annulled. And it is precisely because of this latter point that we must work with all our might so that all those who have done evil may repent and convert.

8. There are still two other possible aspects of dignity to consider: social and existential. When we speak of *social dignity*, we refer to the quality of a person's living conditions. For example, in cases of extreme poverty, where individuals do not even have what is minimally necessary to live according to their ontological dignity, it is said that those poor people are living in an "undignified" manner. This expression does not imply a judgment on those individuals but highlights how the situation in which they are forced to live contradicts their inalienable dignity. The last meaning is that of *existential dignity*, which is the type of dignity implied in the ever-increasing discussion about a "dignified" life and one that is "not dignified." For instance, while some people may appear to lack nothing essential for life, for various reasons, they may still struggle to live with peace, joy, and hope. In other situations, the presence of serious illnesses, violent family environments, pathological addictions, and other hardships may drive people to experience their life conditions as "undignified" vis-à-vis their perception of that ontological dignity that can never be obscured. These distinctions remind us of the inalienable value of the ontological dignity that is rooted in the very being of the human person in all circumstances.

9. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the classical definition of a person as an "individual substance of a rational nature"[17] clarifies the foundation of human dignity. As an "individual substance," the person possesses ontological dignity (that is, at the metaphysical level of being itself). Having received existence from God, humans are subjects who "subsist"—that is, they exercise their existence autonomously. The term "rational" encompasses all the capacities of the human person, including the capacities of knowing and understanding, as well as those of wanting, loving, choosing, and desiring; it also includes all corporeal functions closely related to these abilities. "Nature" refers to the conditions particular to us as human beings, which enable our various operations and the experiences that characterize them; in this sense, nature is the "principle of action." We do not create our nature; we hold it as a gift and we can nurture, develop, and enhance our abilities. By exercising the freedom to cultivate the riches of our nature, we grow over time. Even if a person is unable to exercise these capabilities due to various limitations or conditions, nevertheless the person always subsists as an "individual substance" with a complete and inalienable dignity. This applies, for instance, to an unborn child, an unconscious person, or an older person in distress.

1. A Growing Awareness of the Centrality of Human Dignity

10. Already in classical antiquity,[18] an intuition about human dignity emerged from a social perspective that viewed each person as invested with a particular dignity based on their rank and status within an established order. From its origins in the social sphere, the word "dignity" then was used to describe the differentiated dignity of beings in the cosmos. In this view, all beings possess their own "dignity" according to their place within the harmony of the whole. Some high points of ancient thought did begin to acknowledge a unique place for humans as beings endowed with reason, able to take responsibility for themselves and others in the world.[19] Nevertheless, a way of thinking that would be able to ground our respect for the dignity of every human person in every circumstance was still a long way away.

Biblical Perspectives

11. Biblical Revelation teaches that all human beings possess inherent dignity because they are created in the image and likeness of God: "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' […] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26-27). With this, humanity has a specific quality that means it is not reducible to purely material elements. Moreover, the "image" does not define the soul or its intellectual abilities but the dignity of man and woman. In their relationship of equality and mutual love, both the man and the woman represent God in the world and are also called to cherish and nurture the world. Because of this, to be created in the image of God means to possess a sacred value that transcends every distinction of a sexual, social, political, cultural, and religious nature. Our dignity is bestowed upon us by God; it is neither claimed nor deserved. Every human being is loved and willed by God and, thus, has an inviolable dignity. In Exodus, at the heart of the Old Testament, God shows himself to be the one who hears the cry of the poor, sees the misery of his people, and cares for those who are least and for the oppressed (cf. Ex. 3:7; 22:20-26). The same teaching can be found in the Deuteronomic Code (cf. Dt. 12-26); here, the teaching on rights is transformed into a manifesto of human dignity, particularly in favor of the threefold category of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger (cf. Dt. 24:17). The ancient precepts of Exodus are recalled and applied to the moment in the preaching of the prophets, who represent the critical conscience of Israel. The prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah,

and Jeremiah have entire chapters denouncing injustice. Amos bitterly decries the oppression of the poor and his listeners' failure to recognize any fundamental human dignity in the destitute (cf. Am. 2:6-7; 4:1; 5:11-12). Isaiah pronounces a curse against those who trample on the rights of the poor, denying them all justice: "Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice" (Is. 10:1-2). This prophetic teaching is echoed in Wisdom Literature. For example, Sirach equates the oppression of the poor with murder: "To take away a neighbor's living is to murder him; to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood" (Sir. 34:22). In the Psalms, the religious relationship with God comes through the defense of the weak and needy: "Do justice for the weak and the orphan; give justice to the poor and afflicted. Rescue the weak and the needy; set them free from the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 82:3-4).

12. Born and raised in humble conditions, Jesus reveals the dignity of the needy and those who labor.[20] Then, throughout his public ministry, he affirms the value and dignity of all who bear the image of God, regardless of their social status and external circumstances. Jesus broke down cultural and cultic barriers, restoring dignity to those who were "rejected" or were considered to be on the margins of society, such as tax collectors (cf. Mt. 9:10-11), women (cf. Jn. 4:1-42), children (cf. Mk. 10:14-15), lepers (cf. Mt. 8:2-3), the sick (cf. Mk. 1:29-34), strangers (cf. Mt. 25:35), and widows (cf. Lk. 7:11-15). He heals, feeds, defends, liberates, and saves. He is described as a shepherd who is concerned about the one sheep that was lost (cf. Mt. 18:12-14). He identifies with the least of his brethren: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40). In biblical language, the "little ones" are not only the children, but are also the vulnerable, the most insignificant, the outcast, the oppressed, the discarded, the poor, the marginalized, the unlearned, the sick, and those who are downtrodden by the powerful. The glorious Christ will judge by the love of neighbor that consists in ministering to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned, with whom he identifies (cf. Mt. 25:34-36). For Jesus, the good done to every human being, regardless of the ties of blood or religion, is the single criterion of judgment. The apostle Paul affirms that every Christian must live according to the requirements of dignity and respect for the rights of all people (cf. Rom. 13:8-10) according to the new commandment of love (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-13).

Developments in Christian Thought

13. As Christian thought developed, it also prompted and accompanied the progress of humanity's reflection on the concept of dignity. Drawing from the rich tradition of the Church Fathers, classical Christian anthropology emphasized the doctrine of the human being as created in the image and likeness of God and the unique role of the human person in creation.[21] By critically sifting through the inheritance it had received from ancient philosophy, Medieval Christian thought arrived at a synthesis of the notion of the "person" that recognized the metaphysical foundation of human dignity. St. Thomas Aquinas attested to this when he affirmed that "'person' signifies what is most perfect in all nature—that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature."[22] The Christian humanism of the Renaissance later emphasized this ontological dignity and its preeminent manifestation in free human action.[23] Even in the writings of such modern thinkers as Descartes and Kant, who challenged some of the foundations of traditional Christian anthropology, one can still strongly perceive echoes of Revelation. Building upon some recent philosophical reflections about the status of theoretical and practical subjectivity, Christian reflection then came to emphasize even more the depths of the concept of dignity. In the twentieth century, this reached an original perspective (as seen in Personalism) that reconsidered the question of subjectivity and expanded it to encompass intersubjectivity and the relationships that bind people together.[24] The thinking flowing from this view has enriched contemporary Christian anthropology.[25]

The Present Era

14. Today, the term "dignity" is mainly used to emphasize the uniqueness of the human person, incomparable to all other entities in the universe. From this perspective, we can understand how the word "dignity" was used in the 1948 United Nations *Declaration*, which speaks about "the *inherent* dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family." Only this inalienable character of human dignity makes it possible to speak about human rights.[26]

15. To clarify the concept of dignity even further, it is essential to point out that dignity is not something granted to the person by others based on their gifts or qualities, such that it could be withdrawn. Were it so bestowed, it would be given in a conditional and alienable way, and then the very meaning of dignity (however worthy of great respect) would remain exposed to the risk of being abolished. Instead, dignity is intrinsic to the person: it is not conferred subsequently (*a posteriori*), it is prior to any recognition, and it cannot be lost. All human beings possess this same intrinsic dignity, regardless of whether or not they can express it in a suitable manner.

16. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council speaks of the "sublime dignity of the human person, who stands above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable."[27] As the opening line of the conciliar Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* recalls, "contemporary man is becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person; more and more people are demanding that men should exercise fully their own judgment and a responsible freedom in their actions and should not be subject to the pressure of coercion but be inspired by a sense of duty."[28] Such freedom of thought and conscience, both individual and communal, is based on the recognition of human dignity "as known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself."[29] The Church's Magisterium progressively developed an ever-greater understanding of the meaning of human dignity, along with its demands and consequences, until it arrived at the recognition that the dignity of every human being prevails beyond all circumstances.

2. The Church Proclaims, Promotes, and Guarantees Human Dignity

17. The Church proclaims the equal dignity of all people, regardless of their living conditions or qualities. This proclamation rests on a threefold conviction, which—in the light of Christian faith—gives human dignity an immeasurable value and reinforces its intrinsic demands.

The Indelible Image of God

18. The first conviction, drawn from Revelation, holds that the dignity of the human person comes from the love of the Creator, who has imprinted the indelible features of his image on every person (cf. Gen. 1:26). The Creator calls each person to know him, to love him, and to live in a covenantal relationship with him, while calling the person also to live in fraternity, justice, and peace with all others. In this perspective, dignity refers not only to the soul but also to the person as an inseparable unity of body and soul. Accordingly, dignity is also inherent in each person's body, which participates in its own way in being *in imago Dei* (in the image of God) and is also called to share in the soul's glory in the divine beatitude.

Christ Elevates Human Dignity

19. The second conviction follows from the fact that the dignity of the human person was revealed in its fullness when the Father sent his Son, who assumed human existence to the full: "In the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God confirmed the dignity of the body and soul which constitute the human being."[30] By uniting himself with every human being through his Incarnation, Jesus Christ confirmed that each person possesses an immeasurable dignity simply by belonging to the human community; moreover, he affirmed that this dignity can never be lost.[31] By proclaiming that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor, the humble, the despised, and those who suffer in body and spirit; by healing all sorts of illnesses and infirmities, even the most dramatic ones, such as leprosy; by affirming that whatever is done to these individuals is also done to him because he is present in them: in all these ways, Jesus brought the great novelty of recognizing the dignity of every person, especially those who were considered "unworthy." This new principle in human history—which emphasizes that individuals are even more "worthy" of our respect and love when they are weak, scorned, or suffering, even to the point of losing the human "figure"—has changed the face of the world. It has given life to institutions that take care of those who find themselves in disadvantaged conditions, such as abandoned infants, orphans, the elderly who are left without assistance, the mentally ill, people with incurable diseases or severe deformities, and those living on the streets.

A Vocation to the Fullness of Dignity

20. The third conviction concerns the ultimate destiny of human beings. After the Creation and the Incarnation, Christ's Resurrection reveals a further aspect of human dignity. Indeed, "the dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God,"[32] destined to last forever. Thus, "the dignity of this life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact that it comes from God, but also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God in knowledge and love of him. In the light of this truth, Saint Irenaeus qualifies and completes his praise of man: 'the glory of God' is indeed, 'man, living man,' but 'the life of man consists in the vision of God.'"[33]

21. Consequently, the Church believes and affirms that all human beings—created in the image and likeness of God and recreated[34] in the Son, who became man, was crucified, and rose again—are called to grow under the action of the Holy Spirit to reflect the glory of the Father in that same image and to share in eternal life (cf. Jn. 10:15-16, 17:22-24; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:3-14). Indeed, "Revelation […] shows forth the dignity of the human person in all its fullness."[35]

A Commitment to One's Own Freedom

22. Every individual possesses an inalienable and intrinsic dignity from the beginning of his or her existence as an irrevocable gift. However, the choice to express that dignity and manifest it to the full or to obscure it depends on each person's free and responsible decision. Some Church Fathers, such as St. Irenaeus and St. John Damascene, distinguished between the "image" and "likeness" mentioned in Genesis (cf. 1:26). This allowed for a dynamic perspective on human dignity that understands that the image of God is entrusted to human freedom so that—under the guidance and action of the Spirit—the person's likeness to God may grow and each person may attain their highest dignity.[36] All people are called to manifest the ontological scope of their dignity on an existential and moral level as they, by their freedom, orient themselves toward the true good in response to God's love. Thus, as one who is created in the image of God, the human person never loses his or her dignity and never ceases to be *called* to embrace the good freely. At the same time, to the extent that the person *responds* to the good, the individual's dignity can manifest itself freely, dynamically, and progressively; with that, it can also grow and mature. Consequently, each person must also strive to live up to the full measure of their dignity. In light of this, one can understand how sin can wound and obscure human dignity, as it is an act contrary to that dignity; yet, sin can *never* cancel the fact that the human being is created in the image and likeness of God. In this way, faith plays a decisive role in helping reason perceive human dignity and in accepting, consolidating, and clarifying its essential features, as Benedict XVI pointed out: "Without the corrective supplied by religion, though, reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person. Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century."[37]

3. Dignity, the Foundation of Human Rights and Duties

23. As Pope Francis has recalled, "In modern culture, the closest reference to the principle of the inalienable dignity of the person is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which Saint John Paul II defined as a 'milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race,' and as 'one of the highest expressions of the human conscience.'"[38] To resist attempts to alter or annul the profound meaning of that *Declaration*, it is worth recalling some essential principles that must always be honored.

Unconditional Respect for Human Dignity

24. First, while there has been a growing awareness of human dignity, many misunderstandings of the concept still distort its

meaning. Some people propose that it is better to use the expression "personal dignity" (and the rights "of the person") instead of "human dignity" (and the rights "of man") since they understand a "person" to be only "one who is capable of reasoning." They then argue that dignity and rights are deduced from the individual's capacity for knowledge and freedom, which not all humans possess. Thus, according to them, the unborn child would not have personal dignity, nor would the older person who is dependent upon others, nor would an individual with mental disabilities.[39] On the contrary, the Church insists that the dignity of every human person, precisely because it is intrinsic, remains "in all circumstances." The recognition of this dignity cannot be contingent upon a judgment about the person's ability to understand and act freely; otherwise, it would not be inherent in the person, independent of the individual's situation, and thus deserving *unconditional* respect. Only by recognizing an intrinsic and inalienable dignity in every human being can we guarantee a secure and inviolable foundation for that quality. Without any ontological grounding, the recognition of human dignity would vacillate at the mercy of varying and arbitrary judgments. The only prerequisite for speaking about the dignity inherent in the person is their membership in the human species, whereby "the rights of the person are the rights of man."[40]

An Objective Basis for Human Freedom

25. Second, the concept of human dignity is also occasionally misused to justify an arbitrary proliferation of new rights, many of which are at odds with those originally defined and often are set in opposition to the fundamental right to life.[41] It is as if the ability to express and realize every individual preference or subjective desire should be guaranteed. This perspective identifies dignity with an isolated and individualistic freedom that claims to impose particular subjective desires and propensities as "rights" to be guaranteed and funded by the community. However, human dignity cannot be based on merely individualistic standards, nor can it be identified with the psychophysical well-being of the individual. Rather, the defense of human dignity is based on the constitutive demands of human nature, which do not depend on individual arbitrariness or social recognition. Therefore, the duties that stem from recognizing the dignity of the other and the corresponding rights that flow from it have a concrete and objective content based on our shared human nature. Without such an objective basis, the concept of dignity becomes *de facto* subject to the most diverse forms of arbitrariness and power interests.

The Relational Structure of the Human Person

26. Viewed through the lens of the *relational* character of the person, human dignity helps to overcome the narrow perspective of a self-referential and individualistic freedom that claims to create its own values regardless of the objective norms of the good and of our relationship with other living beings. Indeed, there is an ever-growing risk of reducing human dignity to the ability to determine one's identity and future independently of others, without regard for one's membership in the human community. In this flawed understanding of freedom, the mutual recognition of duties and rights that enable us to care for each other becomes impossible. In fact, as Pope St. John Paul II recalled, freedom is placed "at the service of the person and of his fulfillment through the gift of self and openness to others; but when freedom is made absolute in an individualistic way, it is emptied of its original content, and its very meaning and dignity are contradicted."[42]

27. Human dignity also encompasses the capacity, inherent in human nature, to assume obligations vis-à-vis others.

28. The difference between humans and all other living beings, which stands out thanks to the concept of dignity, should not lead us to forget the goodness of other creatures. Those beings exist not only for human utility but also possess a value of their own; they are like gifts entrusted to humanity to be cherished and cultivated. Thus, while the concept of dignity is reserved for the human being, at the same time, the creaturely goodness of the rest of the cosmos must be affirmed. As Pope Francis points out, "By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws […], 'Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection…Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things.'"[43] Furthermore, "today we see ourselves forced to realize that it is only possible to sustain a 'situated anthropocentrism.' To recognize, in other words, that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures."[44] In this perspective, "it is not a matter of indifference to us that so many species are disappearing and that the climate crisis endangers the life of many other beings."[45] Indeed, it belongs to human beings' dignity to care for the environment, taking particular account of the human ecology that preserves their very existence.

Freeing the Human Person from Negative Influences in the Moral and Social Spheres

29. These fundamental prerequisites, however necessary, are not enough to guarantee a person's growth consistent with his or her dignity. While "God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions,"[46] with a view to the good, our free will often prefers evil over good. Thus, human freedom, in its turn, needs to be freed. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul affirms that "for freedom, Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1), recalling the task proper to each Christian, on whose shoulders rests a responsibility for liberation that extends to the whole world (cf. Rom. 8:19ff). This is a liberation that, starting from the hearts of individual people, is called to spread and manifest its humanizing power across all relationships.

30. Freedom is a marvelous gift from God. Even when God draws us to him with his grace, he does so in a way that never violates our freedom. Thus, it would be a grave error to think that by distancing ourselves from God and his assistance, we could somehow be freer and thus feel more dignified. Instead, detached from the Creator, our freedom can only weaken and become obscured. The same happens if freedom imagines itself to be independent of any external reference and perceives any relationship with a prior truth as a threat; as a result, respect for the freedom and dignity of others would also diminish. As Pope Benedict XVI explained, "A will which believes itself radically incapable of seeking truth and goodness has no objective reasons or motives for acting save those imposed by its fleeting and contingent interests; it does not have an 'identity' to safeguard and build up through truly free and conscious decisions. As a result, it cannot demand respect from other 'wills,' which are themselves detached from their own deepest

being and thus capable of imposing other 'reasons' or, for that matter, no 'reason' at all. The illusion that moral relativism provides the key for peaceful coexistence is actually the origin of divisions and the denial of the dignity of human beings."[47]

31. Moreover, it would be unrealistic to posit an abstract freedom devoid of any influence, context, or limitation. Instead, "the proper exercise of personal freedom requires specific conditions of an economic, social, juridic, political and cultural order,"[48] which often remain unfulfilled. In this sense, we can say that some individuals enjoy more "freedom" than others. Pope Francis has given special attention to this point: "Some people are born into economically stable families, receive a fine education, grow up well nourished, or naturally possess great talent. They will certainly not need a proactive state; they need only claim their freedom. Yet, the same rule clearly does not apply to a disabled person, to someone born in dire poverty, to those lacking a good education and with little access to adequate health care. If a society is governed primarily by the criteria of market freedom and efficiency, there is no place for such persons, and fraternity will remain just another vague ideal."[49] Therefore, it is crucial to understand that "removing injustices promotes human freedom and dignity"[50] at every level of human endeavor. To enable authentic freedom, "we must put human dignity back at the center and, on that pillar, build the alternative social structures we need."[51] Similarly, freedom is frequently obscured by a variety of psychological, historical, social, educational, and cultural influences. Real and historical freedom always needs to be "liberated." One must, moreover, reaffirm the fundamental right to religious freedom.

32. At the same time, human history shows clear progress in understanding human dignity and freedom, albeit not without shadows and risks of regression. Such advancement in understanding human dignity is demonstrated by the fact that there is an increasing desire to eradicate racism, slavery, and the marginalization of women, children, the sick, and people with disabilities. This aspiration has been bolstered under the influence of the Christian faith, which continues to be a ferment, even in increasingly secularized societies. However, the arduous journey of advancing human dignity remains far from completion.

4. Some Grave Violations of Human Dignity

33. In light of the previous reflections on the centrality of human dignity, the final section of this Declaration addresses some specific and grave violations of that dignity. It does so in the spirit proper to the Church's magisterium, which has found full expression in the teaching of the recent Pontiffs, as mentioned previously. For example, Pope Francis, on the one hand, tirelessly reminds us of the need to respect human dignity: "Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally; this fundamental right cannot be denied by any country. People have this right even if they are unproductive or were born with or developed limitations. This does not detract from their great dignity as human persons, a dignity based not on circumstances but on the intrinsic worth of their being. Unless this basic principle is upheld, there will be no future either for fraternity or for the survival of humanity."[52] On the other hand, he never ceases to point out the concrete violations of human dignity in our time, calling us each to awaken to our responsibility and the need to engage in a concrete commitment in this regard.

34. In addressing some of the many grave violations of human dignity today, we can draw upon the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which emphasized that "all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, and willful suicide" must be recognized as contrary to human dignity.[53] Furthermore, the Council affirmed that "all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures," also infringe upon our dignity.[54] Finally, it denounced "all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where individuals are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons."[55] Here, one should also mention the death penalty, for this also violates the inalienable dignity of every person, regardless of the circumstances.[56] In this regard, we must recognize that "the firm rejection of the death penalty shows to what extent it is possible to recognize the inalienable dignity of every human being and to accept that he or she has a place in this universe. If I do not deny that dignity to the worst of criminals, I will not deny it to anyone. I will give everyone the possibility of sharing this planet with me, despite all our differences."[57] It is also fitting to reaffirm the dignity of those who are incarcerated, who often must live in undignified conditions. Finally, it should be stated that—even if someone has been guilty of serious crimes—the practice of torture completely contradicts the dignity that is proper to every human being.

35. While not claiming to be exhaustive, the following paragraphs draw attention to some grave violations of human dignity that are particularly relevant.

The Drama of Poverty

36. One of the phenomena that contributes significantly to denying the dignity of so many human beings is extreme poverty, linked as it is to the unequal distribution of wealth. As Pope St. John Paul II emphasized, "One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many. It is the injustice of the poor distribution of the goods and services originally intended for all."[58] Moreover, it would be misleading to make a cursory distinction between "rich" and "poor" countries, for Benedict XVI recognized that "*the world's wealth is growing in absolute terms, but inequalities are on the increase.* In rich countries, new sectors of society are succumbing to poverty and new forms of poverty are emerging. In poorer areas, some groups enjoy a sort of 'super-development' of a wasteful and consumerist kind, which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation." The "'scandal of glaring inequalities' continues,"[59] where the dignity of the poor is doubly denied because of the lack of resources available to meet their basic needs and the indifference shown toward them by their neighbors.

37. With Pope Francis, therefore, one must conclude that "wealth has increased, but together with inequality, with the result that 'new forms of poverty are emerging.' The claim that the modern world has reduced poverty is made by measuring poverty with criteria from the past that do not correspond to present-day realities."[60] As a result, poverty "can take a variety of forms, such as an obsession with reducing labor costs with no concern for its grave consequences, since the unemployment that it directly generates leads to the

expansion of poverty."[61] Among these "destructive effects of the empire of money,"[62] it must be recognized that "there is no poverty worse than that which takes away work and the dignity of work."[63] Moreover, if some people are born into a country or family where they have fewer opportunities to develop, we should acknowledge that this is contrary to their dignity, which is the same dignity as that of those born into a wealthy family or country. We are all responsible for this stark inequality, albeit to varying degrees.

War

38. Another tragedy that denies human dignity, both in the past and today, is war: "War, terrorist attacks, racial or religious persecution, and many other affronts to human dignity […] 'have become so common as to constitute a real 'third world war' fought piecemeal.'"[64] With its trail of destruction and suffering, war attacks human dignity in both the short and long term: "While reaffirming the inalienable right to self-defense and the responsibility to protect those whose lives are threatened, we must acknowledge that war is always a 'defeat of humanity.' No war is worth the tears of a mother who has seen her child mutilated or killed; no war is worth the loss of the life of even one human being, a sacred being created in the image and likeness of the Creator; no war is worth the poisoning of our common home; and no war is worth the despair of those who are forced to leave their homeland and are deprived, from one moment to the next, of their home and all the family, friendship, social and cultural ties that have been built up, sometimes over generations."[65] All wars, by the mere fact that they contradict human dignity, are "conflicts that will not solve problems but only increase them."[66] This point is even more critical in our time when it has become commonplace for so many innocent civilians to perish beyond the confines of a battlefield.

39. Therefore, even today, the Church cannot but make her own the words of the Pontiffs, repeating with Pope St. Paul VI: "*jamais plus la guerre, jamais plus la guerre!*" ["never again war, never again war!"].[67] Moreover, together with Pope St. John Paul II, the Church pleas "in the name of God and in the name of man: Do not kill! Do not prepare destruction and extermination for people! Think of your brothers and sisters who are suffering hunger and misery! Respect each one's dignity and freedom!"[68] As much now as ever, this is the cry of the Church and of all humanity. Pope Francis underscores this by stating, "We can no longer think of war as a solution because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a 'just war.' Never again war!"[69] Since humanity often falls back into the same mistakes of the past, "in order to make peace a reality, we must move away from the logic of the legitimacy of war."[70] The intimate relationship between faith and human dignity means it would be contradictory for war to be based on religious convictions: "The one who calls upon God's name to justify terrorism, violence, and war does not follow God's path. War in the name of religion becomes a war against religion itself."[71]

The Travail of Migrants

40. Migrants are among the first victims of multiple forms of poverty. Not only is their dignity denied in their home countries,[72] but also their lives are put at risk because they no longer have the means to start a family, to work, or to feed themselves.[73] Once they have arrived in countries that should be able to accept them, "migrants are not seen as entitled like others to participate in the life of society, and it is forgotten that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person. […] No one will ever openly deny that they are human beings; yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human."[74] Therefore, it is urgent to remember that "every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance."[75] Receiving migrants is an important and meaningful way of defending "the inalienable dignity of each human person regardless of origin, race or religion."[76]

Human Trafficking

41. Human trafficking must also be counted among the grave violations of human dignity.[77] While it is not a new phenomenon, it has taken on tragic dimensions before our eyes, which is why Pope Francis has denounced it in particularly emphatic terms: "I reaffirm here that the 'trade in people' is a vile activity, a disgrace to our societies that claim to be civilized! Exploiters and clients at all levels should make a serious examination of conscience both in the first person and before God! Today the Church is renewing her urgent appeal that the dignity and centrality of every individual always be safeguarded, with respect for fundamental rights, as her social teaching emphasizes. She asks that these rights really be extended for millions of men and women on every continent, wherever they are not recognized. In a world in which a lot is said about rights, how often is human dignity actually trampled upon! In a world in which so much is said about rights, it seems that the only thing that has any rights is money."[78]

42. For these reasons, the Church and humanity must not cease fighting against such phenomena as "the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labor, including prostitution, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism, and international organized crime. Such is the magnitude of these situations, and their toll in innocent lives, that we must avoid every temptation to fall into a declarationist nominalism that would assuage our consciences. We need to ensure that our institutions are truly effective in the struggle against all these scourges."[79] Confronted with these varied and brutal denials of human dignity, we need to be increasingly aware that "human trafficking is a crime against humanity."[80] It essentially denies human dignity in at least two ways: "Trafficking profoundly disfigures the humanity of the victim, offending his or her freedom and dignity. Yet, at the same time, it dehumanizes those who carry it out."[81]

Sexual Abuse

43. The profound dignity inherent in human beings in their entirety of mind and body also allows us to understand why all sexual abuse leaves deep scars in the hearts of those who suffer it. Indeed, those who suffer sexual abuse experience real wounds in their human dignity. These are "sufferings that can last a lifetime and that no repentance can remedy. This phenomenon is widespread in society and it also affects the Church and represents a serious obstacle to her mission."[82] From this stems the Church's ceaseless

efforts to put an end to all kinds of abuse, starting from within.

Violence Against Women

44. Violence against women is a global scandal that is gaining increasing recognition. While the equal dignity of women may be recognized in words, the inequalities between women and men in some countries remain very serious. Even in the most developed and democratic countries, the concrete social reality testifies to the fact that women are often not accorded the same dignity as men. Pope Francis highlighted this when he affirmed that "the organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story. Indeed, 'doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment, and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights.'"[83]

45. Pope St. John Paul II recognized that "much remains to be done to prevent discrimination against those who have chosen to be wives and mothers. […] [T]here is an urgent need to achieve *real equality* in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State."[84] Indeed, inequalities in these areas are also various forms of violence. He also recalled that "the time has come to condemn vigorously the types of *sexual violence* which frequently have women for their object and to pass laws which effectively defend them from such violence. Nor can we fail, in the name of the respect due to the human person, to condemn the widespread hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality and corrupts even very young girls into letting their bodies be used for profit."[85] Among the forms of violence carried out on women, how can we not mention coercive abortions, which affect both mother and child, often to satisfy the selfishness of males? And how can we not also mention the practice of polygamy? As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, polygamy is contrary to the equal dignity of women and men; it is also "contrary to conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive."[86]

46. In this consideration of violence against women, one cannot condemn enough the phenomenon of femicide. On this front, the entire international community must have a coordinated and concrete commitment, as Pope Francis reiterated, "Our love for Mary must help us to feel appreciation and gratitude for women, for our mothers and grandmothers, who are a bastion in the life in our cities. Almost always in silence, they carry life forward. It is the silence and strength of hope. Thank you for your witness. […] But in thinking of our mothers and grandmothers, I want to invite you to combat a scourge that affects our American continent: the numerous cases where women are killed. And the many situations of violence that are kept quiet behind so many walls. I ask you to fight against this source of suffering by calling for legislation and a culture that repudiates every form of violence."[87]

Abortion

47. The Church consistently reminds us that "the dignity of every human being has an intrinsic character and is valid from the moment of conception until natural death. It is precisely the affirmation of such dignity that is the inalienable prerequisite for the protection of a personal and social existence, and also the necessary condition for fraternity and social friendship to be realized among all the peoples of the earth."[88] On account of the intangible value of human life, the Church's magisterium has always spoken out against abortion. In this regard, Pope St. John Paul II writes: "Among all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable. […] But today, in many people's consciences, the perception of its gravity has become progressively obscured. The acceptance of abortion in the popular mind, in behavior, and even in law itself is a telling sign of an extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense, which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, even when the fundamental right to life is at stake. Given such a grave situation, we need now more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception. In this regard, the reproach of the Prophet is extremely straightforward: 'Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness' (Is. 5:20). Especially in the case of abortion, there is a widespread use of ambiguous terminology, such as 'interruption of pregnancy,' which tends to hide abortion's true nature and to attenuate its seriousness in public opinion. Perhaps this linguistic phenomenon is itself a symptom of an uneasiness of conscience. But no word has the power to change the reality of things: *procured abortion is the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth*."[89]Unborn children are, thus, "the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays, efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this."[90] It must, therefore, be stated with all force and clarity, even in our time, that "this defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. Reason alone is sufficient to recognize the inviolable value of each single human life, but if we also look at the issue from the standpoint of faith, 'every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the Creator of the individual.'"[91] In this context, it is worth recalling St. Teresa of Calcutta's generous and courageous commitment to the defense of every person conceived.

Surrogacy

48. The Church also takes a stand against the practice of surrogacy, through which the immensely worthy child becomes a mere object. On this point, Pope Francis's words have a singular clarity: "The path to peace calls for respect for life, for every human life, starting with the life of the unborn child in the mother's womb, which cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking. In this regard, I deem deplorable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs. A child is always a gift and never the

basis of a commercial contract. Consequently, I express my hope for an effort by the international community to prohibit this practice universally."[92]

49. First and foremost, the practice of surrogacy violates the dignity of the child. Indeed, every child possesses an intangible dignity that is clearly expressed—albeit in a unique and differentiated way—at every stage of his or her life: from the moment of conception, at birth, growing up as a boy or girl, and becoming an adult. Because of this unalienable dignity, the child has the right to have a fully human (and not artificially induced) origin and to receive the gift of a life that manifests both the dignity of the giver and that of the receiver. Moreover, acknowledging the dignity of the human person also entails recognizing every dimension of the dignity of the conjugal union and of human procreation. Considering this, the legitimate desire to have a child cannot be transformed into a "right to a child" that fails to respect the dignity of that child as the recipient of the gift of life.[93]

50. Surrogacy also violates the dignity of the woman, whether she is coerced into it or chooses to subject herself to it freely. For, in this practice, the woman is detached from the child growing in her and becomes a mere means subservient to the arbitrary gain or desire of others. This contrasts in every way with the fundamental dignity of every human being and with each person's right to be recognized always individually and never as an instrument for another.

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

51. There is a special case of human dignity violation that is quieter but is swiftly gaining ground. It is unique in how it utilizes a mistaken understanding of human dignity to turn the concept of dignity against life itself. This confusion is particularly evident today in discussions surrounding euthanasia. For example, laws permitting euthanasia or assisted suicide are sometimes called "death with dignity acts." With this, there is a widespread notion that euthanasia or assisted suicide is somehow consistent with respect for the dignity of the human person. However, in response to this, it must be strongly reiterated that suffering does not cause the sick to lose their dignity, which is intrinsically and inalienably their own. Instead, suffering can become an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of mutual belonging and gain greater awareness of the precious value of each person to the whole human family.

52. Certainly, the dignity of those who are critically or terminally ill calls for all suitable and necessary efforts to alleviate their suffering through appropriate palliative care and by avoiding aggressive treatments or disproportionate medical procedures. This approach corresponds with the "enduring responsibility to appreciate the needs of the sick person: care needs, pain relief, and affective and spiritual needs."[94] However, an effort of this nature is entirely different from—and is indeed contrary to—a decision to end one's own life or that of another person who is burdened by suffering. Even in its sorrowful state, human life carries a dignity that must always be upheld, that can never be lost, and that calls for unconditional respect. Indeed, there are no circumstances under which human life would cease from being dignified and could, as a result, be put to an end: "Each life has the same value and dignity for everyone: the respect of the life of another is the same as the respect owed to one's own life."[95] Therefore, helping the suicidal person to take his or her own life is an objective offense against the dignity of the person asking for it, even if one would be thereby fulfilling the person's wish: "We must accompany people towards death, but not provoke death or facilitate any form of suicide. Remember that the right to care and treatment for all must always be prioritized so that the weakest, particularly the elderly and the sick, are never rejected. Life is a right, not death, which must be welcomed, not administered. And this ethical principle concerns everyone, not just Christians or believers."[96] As mentioned above, the dignity of each person, no matter how weak or burdened by suffering, implies the dignity of us all.

The Marginalization of People with Disabilities

53. One criterion for verifying whether real attention is given to the dignity of every individual in society is the help given to the most disadvantaged. Regrettably, our time is not known for such care; rather, a "throwaway culture" is increasingly imposing itself.[97] To counter this trend, the condition of those experiencing physical or mental limitations warrants special attention and concern. Such conditions of acute vulnerability[98]—which feature prominently in the Gospels—prompt universal questions about what it means to be a human person, especially starting from the condition of impairment or disability. The question of human imperfection also carries clear socio-cultural implications since some cultures tend to marginalize or even oppress individuals with disabilities, treating them as "rejects." However, the truth is that each human being, regardless of their vulnerabilities, receives his or her dignity from the sole fact of being willed and loved by God. Thus, every effort should be made to encourage the inclusion and active participation of those who are affected by frailty or disability in the life of society and of the Church.[99]

54. In a broader perspective, it must be remembered that "this charity, which is the spiritual heart of politics, is always a preferential love shown to those in greatest need; it undergirds everything we do on their behalf. […] 'To tend those in need takes strength and tenderness, effort, and generosity in the midst of a functionalistic and privatized mindset that inexorably leads to a 'throwaway culture' […]. It involves taking responsibility for the present with its situations of utter marginalization and anguish, and being capable of bestowing dignity upon it.' It will likewise inspire intense efforts to ensure that 'everything be done to protect the status and dignity of the human person.'"[100]

Gender Theory

55. The Church wishes, first of all, "to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while 'every sign of unjust discrimination' is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence."[101] For this reason, it should be denounced as contrary to human dignity the fact that, in some places, not a few people are imprisoned, tortured, and even deprived of the good of life solely because of their sexual orientation.

56. At the same time, the Church highlights the definite critical issues present in gender theory. On this point, Pope Francis has

reminded us that "the path to peace calls for respect for human rights, in accordance with the simple yet clear formulation contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose seventy-fifth anniversary we recently celebrated. These principles are self-evident and commonly accepted. Regrettably, in recent decades, attempts have been made to introduce new rights that are neither fully consistent with those originally defined nor always acceptable. They have led to instances of ideological colonization, in which gender theory plays a central role; the latter is extremely dangerous since it cancels differences in its claim to make everyone equal."[102]

57. Regarding gender theory, whose scientific coherence is the subject of considerable debate among experts, the Church recalls that human life in all its dimensions, both physical and spiritual, is a gift from God. This gift is to be accepted with gratitude and placed at the service of the good. Desiring a personal self-determination, as gender theory prescribes, apart from this fundamental truth that human life is a gift, amounts to a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God, entering into competition with the true God of love revealed to us in the Gospel.

58. Another prominent aspect of gender theory is that it intends to deny the greatest possible difference that exists between living beings: sexual difference. This foundational difference is not only the greatest imaginable difference but is also the most beautiful and most powerful of them. In the male-female couple, this difference achieves the most marvelous of reciprocities. It thus becomes the source of that miracle that never ceases to surprise us: the arrival of new human beings in the world.

59. In this sense, respect for both one's own body and that of others is crucial in light of the proliferation of claims to new rights advanced by gender theory. This ideology "envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family."[103] It thus becomes unacceptable that "some ideologies of this sort, which seek to respond to what are at times understandable aspirations, manage to assert themselves as absolute and unquestionable, even dictating how children should be raised. It needs to be emphasized that 'biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.'"[104] Therefore, all attempts to obscure reference to the ineliminable sexual difference between man and woman are to be rejected: "We cannot separate the masculine and the feminine from God's work of creation, which is prior to all our decisions and experiences, and where biological elements exist which are impossible to ignore."[105] Only by acknowledging and accepting this difference in reciprocity can each person fully discover themselves, their dignity, and their identity.

Sex Change

60. The dignity of the body cannot be considered inferior to that of the person as such. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expressly invites us to recognize that "the human body shares in the dignity of 'the image of God.'"[106] Such a truth deserves to be remembered, especially when it comes to sex change, for humans are inseparably composed of both body and soul. In this, the body serves as the living context in which the interiority of the soul unfolds and manifests itself, as it does also through the network of human relationships. Constituting the person's being, the soul and the body both participate in the dignity that characterizes every human.[107] Moreover, the body participates in that dignity as it is endowed with personal meanings, particularly in its sexed condition.[108] It is in the body that each person recognizes himself or herself as generated by others, and it is through their bodies that men and women can establish a loving relationship capable of generating other persons. Teaching about the need to respect the natural order of the human person, Pope Francis affirmed that "creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created."[109] It follows that any sex-change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception. This is not to exclude the possibility that a person with genital abnormalities that are already evident at birth or that develop later may choose to receive the assistance of healthcare professionals to resolve these abnormalities. However, in this case, such a medical procedure would not constitute a sex change in the sense intended here.

Digital Violence

61. Although the advancement of digital technologies may offer many possibilities for promoting human dignity, it also increasingly tends toward the creation of a world in which exploitation, exclusion, and violence grow, extending even to the point of harming the dignity of the human person. Consider, for example, how easy it is through these means to endanger a person's good name with fake news and slander. On this point, Pope Francis stresses that "it is not healthy to confuse communication with mere virtual contact. Indeed, 'the digital environment is also one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation, and violence, even to the extreme case of the 'dark web.' Digital media can expose people to the risk of addiction, isolation, and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships. New forms of violence are spreading through social media, for example, cyberbullying. The internet is also a channel for spreading pornography and the exploitation of persons for sexual purposes or through gambling.'"[110] In this way, paradoxically, the more that opportunities for making connections grow in this realm, the more people find themselves isolated and impoverished in interpersonal relationships: "Digital communication wants to bring everything out into the open; people's lives are combed over, laid bare and bandied about, often anonymously. Respect for others disintegrates, and even as we dismiss, ignore, or keep others distant, we can shamelessly peer into every detail of their lives."[111] Such tendencies represent a dark side of digital progress.

62. In this perspective, if technology is to serve human dignity and not harm it, and if it is to promote peace rather than violence, then the human community must be proactive in addressing these trends with respect to human dignity and the promotion of the good: "In today's globalized world, 'the media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which in turn can inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all. […] The media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances. The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.' We need constantly to ensure that present-day forms of communication are in fact guiding us to generous encounter with others, to honest pursuit of the

whole truth, to service, to closeness to the underprivileged and to the promotion of the common good."[112]

Conclusion

63. On the 75th anniversary of the promulgation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), Pope Francis reaffirmed that this document "is like a master plan, from which many steps have been taken, but many still need to be made, and unfortunately, at times, steps backward have been taken. The commitment to human rights is never finished! In this regard, I am near to all those who, without fanfare, in concrete daily life, fight and personally pay the price for defending the rights of those who do not count."[113]

64. In this spirit, the Church, with the present Declaration, ardently urges that *respect for the dignity of the human person beyond all circumstances* be placed at the center of the commitment to the common good and at the center of every legal system. Indeed, respect for the dignity of each person is the indispensable basis for the existence of any society that claims to be founded on just law and not on the force of power. Acknowledging human dignity forms the basis for upholding fundamental human rights, which precede and ground all civic coexistence.[114]

65. Each individual and also every human community is responsible for the concrete and actual realization of human dignity. Meanwhile, it is incumbent on States not only to protect human dignity but also to guarantee the conditions necessary for it to flourish in the integral promotion of the human person: "In political activity, we should remember that 'appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love and dedication.'"[115]

66. Even today, in the face of so many violations of human dignity that seriously threaten the future of the human family, the Church encourages the promotion of the dignity of every human person, regardless of their physical, mental, cultural, social, and religious characteristics. The Church does this with hope, confident of the power that flows from the Risen Christ, who has fully revealed the integral dignity of every man and woman. This certainty becomes an appeal in Pope Francis' words directed to each of us: "I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us."[116]

The Supreme Pontiff, Francis, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the Secretary for the Doctrinal Section of the Dicastery, on 25 March 2024, approved this Declaration, which was decided at the Ordinary Session of this Dicastery on 28 February 2024, and he ordered its publication.

Given in Rome, at the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 2 April 2024, the nineteenth anniversary of the death of Pope St. John Paul II.

Víctor Manuel Card. Fernández
Prefect

Msgr. Armando Matteo
Secretary for the Doctrinal Section

Ex Audientia Die 25.03.2024
FRANCISCUS

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[1] John Paul II*, Angelus in the Cathedral of Osnabrück* (16 November 1980): *Insegnamenti III/2* (1980), 1232.

[2] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* (4 October 2023), no. 39: *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 October 2023), III.

[3] In 1948, the United Nations adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which consists of thirty articles. The word "dignity" appears there five times, in strategic places: in the first words of the *Preamble* and in the first sentence of *Article One*. This dignity is declared to be "inherent in all members of the human family" (*Preamble*) and "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1).

[4] Paying attention only to the modern era, we see how the Church has progressively accentuated the importance of human dignity. The theme was particularly developed in Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Pope Pius XI's Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and Pope Pius XII's *Address to the Congress of the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives* (1951). The Second Vatican Council, then, developed this issue, devoting an entire document to the subject with the Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965) and discussing human freedom in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965).

[5] Paul VI, *General Audience* (4 September 1968): *Insegnamenti VI* (1968), 886.

[6] John Paul II*, Address to the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate* (28 January 1979), III.1-2: *Insegnamenti II/1* (1979), 202-203.

[7] Benedict XVI, *Address to Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life* (13 February 2010): *Insegnamenti VI/1* (2011), 218.

[8] Benedict XVI, *Address to Participants in the Meeting of the Development Bank of the Council of Europe* (12 June 2010): *Insegnamenti VI/1* (2011), 912-913.

[9] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 178: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1094; quoting John Paul II, *Angelus in the Cathedral of Osnabrück* (16 November 1980): *Insegnamenti III/2* (1980), 1232.

[10] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 8: *AAS* 112 (2020), 971.

[11] *Ibid.*, no. 277: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1069.

[12] *Ibid.*, no. 213: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1045.

[13] *Ibid.*, no. 213: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1045; quoting Id., *Message to Participants in the International Conference "Human Rights in the Contemporary World: Achievements, Omissions, Negations"* (10 December 2018): *L'Osservatore Romano*, (10-11 December 2018), 8.

[14] The 1948 UN Declaration was followed and further elaborated by the 1966 UN *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the 1975 *Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.*

[15] Cf. International Theological Commission, *Dignity and Rights of the Human Person* (1983), Introduction, 3. A compendium of Catholic teaching on human dignity can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in the chapter entitled, "The Dignity of the Human Person," nos. 1700-1876.

[16] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 22: *AAS* 112 (2020), 976.

[17] Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium,* c. 3: PL 64, 1344: "*persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*." Cf. Bonaventure, *In I Sent.*, d. 25, a. 1, q. 2; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 1, *resp.*

[18] Since it is not the purpose of this Declaration to draw up an exhaustive treatise on the notion of dignity, for the sake of brevity, only the so-called classical Greek and Roman culture is mentioned here as an example, as the point of reference for early Christian philosophical and theological reflection.

[19] For example, see Cicero, *De Officiis* I, 105-106: "*Sed pertinet ad omnem officii quaestionem semper in promptu habere, quantum natura hominis pecudibus reliquisque beluis antecedat* […] *Atque etiam si considerare volumus, quae sit in natura excellentia et dignitas, intellegemus, quam sit turpe diffluere luxuria et delicate ac molliter vivere quamque honestum parce, continenter, severe, sobrie*" (Id., *Scriptorum Latinorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*, ed. M. Winterbottom, Oxford 1994, 43). In English translation: "But it is essential to every inquiry about duty that we keep before our eyes how far superior man is by nature to cattle and other beasts […] And if we will only bear in mind the superiority and dignity of our nature, we shall realize how wrong it is to abandon ourselves to excess and to live in luxury and voluptuousness, and how right it is to live in thrift, self-denial, simplicity, and sobriety" (Id., *On Duties*, tr. W. Miller, Loeb Classical Library 30, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1913, 107-109).

[20] Cf. Paul VI, *Address to the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land: Visit to the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth* (5 January 1964): *AAS* 56 (1964), 166-170.

[21] For example, see Clement of Rome, 1 Clem. 33, 4f: PG 1, 273; Theophilus of Antioch, Ad Aut. I, 4: PG 6, 1029; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* III, 42, 5-6: PG 8, 1145; Ibid., VI, 72, 2: PG 9, 293; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adv. Haer*. V, 6, 1: PG 7, 1137-1138; Origen, *De princ.* III, 6, 1: PG 11, 333; Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt.* VI, 12: PL 34, 348; *De Trinitate* XIV, 8, 11: PL 42, 1044-1045.

[22] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 29, a. 3, *resp.*: «*persona significat id, quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationali natura*».

[23] Cf. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and his well-known text, *Orartio de Hominis Dignitate* (1486).

[24] For a Jewish thinker, such as E. Levinas (1906-1995), the human being is qualified by his freedom insofar as he discovers himself as infinitely responsible for another human being.

[25] Some great Christian thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—such as St. J.H. Newman, Bl. A. Rosmini, J. Maritain, E. Mounier, K. Rahner, H.-U. von Balthasar, and others—have succeeded in proposing a vision of the human person that can validly dialogue with all the currents of thought present in the early twenty-first century, whatever their inspiration, even Postmodernism.

[26] This is why the "*Universal Declaration of Human Rights* […] implicitly suggests that the source of inalienable human rights is found in the dignity of every human person" (International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethics: A New Look at the Natural Law* [2009], no. 115).

[27] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), no. 26: *AAS* 58 (1966), 1046. The entire first chapter of the first part of the Pastoral Constitution (nos. 11-22) is devoted to the "Dignity of the Human Person."

[28] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* (7 December 1965), no. 1: *AAS* 58 (1966), 929.

[29] *Ibid.*, no. 2: *AAS* 58 (1966), 931.

[30] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Dignitas Personae* (8 September 2008), no. 7: *AAS* 100 (2008), 863. Cf. also Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adv. Haer*. V, 16, 2: PG 7, 1167-1168.

[31] Since "by his Incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in a certain way with every man," the dignity of every man is revealed to us by Christ in its fullness (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* [7 December 1965], no. 22: *AAS* 58 [1966], 1042).

[32] Second Vatican Ecumenical Concil, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), no. 19: *AAS* 58 (1966), 1038.

[33] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), no. 38: *AAS* 87 (1995), 443, quoting Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adv. Haer*. IV, 20, 7: PG 7, 1037-1038.

[34] Indeed, Christ has given the baptized a new dignity, that of being "sons of God": cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1213, 1265, 1270, 1279.

[35] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* (7 December 1965), no. 9: *AAS* 58 (1966), 935.

[36] Cf. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adv. Haer*. V, 6, 1. V, 8, 1. V, 16, 2: PG 7, 1136-1138. 1141-1142. 1167-1168; John Damascene, *De fide orth*. 2, 12: PG 94, 917-930.

[37] Benedict XVI, *Address at Westminster Hall* (17 September 2010): *Insegnamenti VI/2* (2011), 240.

[38] Francis, *General Audience* (12 August 2020): *L'Osservatore Romano* (13 August 2020), 8; quoting John Paul II, *Address to the United Nations General Assembly* (2 October 1979), 7 and Id., *Address to the United Nations General Assembly* (5 October 1995), 2.

[39] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Dignitas Personae* (8 September 2008), no. 8: *AAS* 100 (2008), 863-864.

[40] International Theological Commission, *Religious Freedom for the Good of All* (2019), no. 38.

[41] Cf. Francis, *Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See for the Presentation of New Year's Greetings* (8 January 2024): *L'Osservatore Romano* (8 January 2024), 3.

[42] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), no. 19: *AAS* 87 (1995), 422.

[43] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), no. 69: *AAS* 107 (2015), 875; quoting *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 339.

[44] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* (4 October 2023), no. 67: *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 October 2023), IV.

[45] *Ibid.,* no. 63: *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 October 2023), IV.

[46] *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* no. 1730.

[47] Benedict XVI, *Message for the Celebration of the 44th World Day of Peace* (1 January 2011), no. 3: *Insegnamenti VI/2* (2011), 979.

[48] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 137.

[49] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 109: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1006.

[50] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 137.

[51] Francis, *Address to Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements* (28 October 2014): *AAS* 106 (2014), 858.

[52] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 107: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1005-1006.

[53] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), no. 27: *AAS* 58 (1966), 1047.

[54] *Ibid*.

[55] *Ibid*.

[56] Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2267, and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to Bishops Regarding the New Revision of Number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Death Penalty* (1 August 2018), nos. 7-8.

[57] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 269: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1065.

[58] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), no. 28: *AAS* 80 (1988), 549.

[59] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), no. 22: *AAS* 101 (2009), 657, quoting Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), no. 9: *AAS* 59 (1967), 261-262.

[60] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 21: *AAS* 112 (2020), 976; quoting Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter

Caritas in Veritate (29 June 2009), no. 22: *AAS* 101 (2009), 657.

[61]Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 20: *AAS* 112 (2020), 975-976. Cf. also the "Prayer to the Creator" at the end of this encyclical.

[62] *Ibid.*, no. 116: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1009; quoting Francis, *Address to Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements* (28 October 2014): *AAS* 106 (2014), 851-852.

[63] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 162: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1025; quoting Francis, *Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See* (12 January 2015): *AAS* 107 (2015), 165.

[64] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 25: *AAS* 112 (2020), 978; quoting Francis, *Message for the 2016 World Day of Peace* (1 January 2016): *AAS* 108 (2016), 49.

[65] Francis, *Message to Participants in the Sixth Edition of the "Forum de Paris sur la Paix"* (10 November 2023): *L'Osservatore Romano* (10 November 2023), 7; quoting Id., *General Audience* (23 March 2022): *L'Osservatore Romano* (23 March 2022), 3.

[66] Francis, *Address to the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 28)* (2 December 2023): *L'Osservatore Romano* (2 December 2023), 2.

[67] Cf. Paul VI, *Address to the United Nations* (4 October 1965): *AAS* 57 (1965), 881.

[68] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), no. 16: *AAS* 71 (1979), 295.

[69] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 258: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1061.

[70] Francis, *Address to the Security Council of the United Nations* (14 June 2023): *L'Osservatore Romano* (15 June 2023), 8.

[71] Francis, *Address on the World Day of Prayer for Peace* (20 September 2016): *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 September 2016), 5.

[72] Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 38: *AAS* 112 (2020), 983: "For this reason, 'there is also a need to reaffirm the right not to emigrate, that is, to remain in one's homeland'"; quoting Benedict XVI, *Message for the 99th World Day Migrants and Refugees* (12 October 2012): *AAS* 104 (2012), 908.

[73] Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 38: *AAS* 112 (2020), 982-983.

[74] *Ibid.*, no. 39: *AAS* 112 (2020), 983.

[75] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), no. 62: *AAS* 101 (2009), 697.

[76] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 39: *AAS* 112 (2020), 983.

[77] We might recall here Pope Paul III's declaration on the dignity of those people found in the lands of the "New World" in the Bull *Pastorale Officium* (29 May 1537), where the Holy Father established—under penalty of excommunication—that the inhabitants of those territories, "even if outside the bosom of the Church, are not […] to be deprived, of their freedom or the ownership of their goods, for they are men and, therefore, capable of faith and salvation" («*licet extra gremium Ecclesiae existant, non tamen sua libertate, aut rerum suarum dominio* […] *privandos esse, et cum homines, ideoque fidei et salutis capaces sint*»): DH 1495.

[78] Francis, *Address to Participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People* (24 May 2013): *AAS* 105 (2013), 470-471.

[79] Francis, *Address to the United Nations Organization*, New York (25 September 2015): *AAS* 107 (2015), 1039.

[80] Francis, *Address to New Ambassadors Accredited to the Holy See on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Letters of Credence* (12 December 2013): *L'Osservatore Romano* (13 December 2013), 8.

[81] Francis, *Address to Participants in the International Conference on Human Trafficking* (11 April 2019): *AAS* 111 (2019), 700.

[82] XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Final Document* (27 October 2018), no. 29.

[83] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 23: *AAS* 112 (2020), 977, quoting Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 212: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1108.

[84] John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (29 June 1995), no. 4: *Insegnamenti XVIII/1* (1997), 1874.

[85] *Ibid.*, no. 5: *Insegnamenti XVIII/1* (1997), 1875.

[86] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1645.

[87] Francis, *Address on the Occasion of the Marian Celebration – Our Lady of the Gate* (20 January 2018): *AAS* 110 (2018), 329.

[88] Francis, *Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* (21 January 2022): *L'Osservatore Romano* (21 January 2022), 8.

[89] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), no. 58: *AAS* 87 (1995) 466-467. On the subject of the respect due to human embryos, see Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987): "The practice of keeping alive human embryos *in vivo* or *in vitro* for experimental or commercial purposes is totally opposed to human dignity" (I, 4): *AAS* 80 (1988), 82.

[90] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 213: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1108.

[91] *Ibid*.

[92] Francis, *Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See* (8 January 2024): *L'Osservatore Romano* (8 January 2024), 3.

[93] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Dignitas Personae* (8 September 2008), no. 16: *AAS* 100 (2008), 868-869. All these aspects are recalled in the then-Congregation's Instruction *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987): *AAS* 80 (1988), 71-102.

[94] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Samaritanus Bonus* (14 July 2020), V, no. 4: *AAS* 112 (2020), 925.

[95] Cf. *Ibid.,* V, no. 1: *AAS* 112 (2020), 919.

[96] Francis, *General Audience* (9 February 2022): *L'Osservatore Romano* (9 February 2022), 3.

[97] See especially Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), nos. 18-21: *AAS* 112 (2020), 975-976: "A 'Throwaway' World." No. 188 of the same Encyclical goes so far as to identify a "throwaway culture."

[98] Cf. Francis, *Address to Participants in the Conference Organized by the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization* (21 October 2017): *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 October 2017), 8: "Vulnerability is intrinsic to the essential nature of the human person."

[99] Cf. Francis, *Message for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities* (3 December 2020): *AAS* 112 (2020), 1185-1188.

[100] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), nos. 187-188: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1035-1036; cf. Id., *Address to the European Parliament*, Strasbourg (25 November 2014): *AAS* 106 (2014), 999, and Id., *Address at the Meeting with Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps in the Central African Republic*, Bangui (29 November 2015): *AAS* 107 (2015), 1320.

[101] Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), no. 250: *AAS* 108 (2016), 412-413; quoting *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358.

[102] Francis, *Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See for the Presentation of New Year's Greetings* (8 January 2024): *L'Osservatore Romano* (8 January 2024), 3.

[103] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), no. 56: *AAS* 108 (2016), 334.

[104] *Ibid*.; quoting Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio Finalis* (24 October 2015), 58.

[105] *Ibid.,* no. 286: *AAS* 108 (2016), 425.

[106] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 364.

[107] This also applies to the respect due to the bodies of the deceased; for example, see Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Ad Resurgendum cum Christo* (15 August 2016), no. 3: *AAS* 108 (2016), 1290: "By burying the bodies of the faithful, the Church confirms her faith in the resurrection of the body, and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity." More generally, see also International Theological Commission, *Current Problems of Eschatology* (1990), no. 5: "People Called to Resurrection."

[108] Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), no. 155: *AAS* 107 (2015), 909.

[109] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), no. 56: *AAS* 108 (2016), 344.

[110] Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (25 March 2019), no. 88: *AAS* 111 (2019), 413, quoting the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Final Document* (27 October 2018), no. 23.

[111] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 42: *AAS* 112 (2020), 984.

[112] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 205: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1042; quoting Id., *Message for the 48th World Communications Day* (24 January 2014): *AAS* 106 (2014), 113.

[113] Francis, *Angelus* (10 December 2023): *L'Osservatore Romano* (11 December 2023), 12.

[114] Cf. International Theological Commission, *Propositions on the Dignity and Rights of the Human Person* (1983), no. 2.

[115] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), no. 195: *AAS* 112 (2020), 1038, quoting Id., Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 274: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1130.

[116] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), no. 205: *AAS* 107 (2015), 928.