

DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE  
SECOND ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN DIGNITY  
CASINA PIO IV, VATICAN CITY STATE  
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Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good evening to you all.

It is a pleasure to participate in tonight's special dinner in the magnificent environs of the Casina Pio IV, in order to celebrate of the work of the Dignitatis Humanae Institute, an organization which exists to witness to the unique and immeasurable good of human life, of the human person. Why is this so important? Precisely for the reason articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Dignity: "[I]t is the recognition of the dignity of Man that is most lacking in our society, not rights, and that this imbalance must be redressed."<sup>1</sup> It is precisely to support the redressing of the imbalance that we have gathered this evening.

Promoting human dignity necessarily means respecting all human beings without exception, men and women equally, from conception to natural death. It is learned in the home, founded on the model of the strong, traditionally-understood family, whose members mutually support and love one other. The Dignitatis Humanae Institute, our host tonight, exists to promote human dignity based on the recognition that each one of us is made in the image and likeness of God.

At the heart of the commitment to safeguard and promote the fundamental good of human life is our faith in Jesus Christ and His Gospel which guides us all on the pilgrimage of our daily living. It is the faith which believes the words of Our Lord in the Beatitudes.<sup>2</sup> It is the faith of the Virgin Mary who trusted that God's promises to her would be fulfilled.<sup>3</sup>

But the truth regarding the inviolable dignity of every human life is under constant attack in an ever-more secularized world. One only has to read the daily newspaper or turn on the television for the evening news to know that the Christian's holding to the truth of the moral law is no longer tolerated by many, and that the secularist agenda never ceases in its efforts to overshadow, drown out, and intimidate the witness of faithful Christians. The goal is to silence the Christian witness. But we cannot succumb to such tactics. I urge all who are

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. <http://www.dignitashumanae.com/index.php/declaration/>, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mt 5, 3-12.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lk 1, 45.

here this evening to stand firm in your witness, knowing that it is indeed the Lord's work and that He will never fail to accompany you. Tonight, the Vigil of the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, two of the greatest saints who are venerated by all Christians, gives us particular inspiration in our steadfast witness to the inviolable dignity of innocent human life. Tomorrow, we will celebrate their martyrdom in Rome for love of Christ and in faithful witness to His Gospel. We trust in the intercession of the Prince of the Apostles and of the Apostle of the Gentiles, even as we recognize that the persecution which they suffered is not only a reality recorded in books of history but continues in our own time.

Even as we gather to celebrate the work of the Dignitatis Humanae Institute, we are conscious that Christian persecution is sadly at a high point throughout the world. We read every day of such persecution, for example, in Syria, Egypt, Eritrea, Nigeria and Indonesia, but we also see examples in our own nations, which have a rich Christian heritage and yet have turned their back on the very foundational truths taught by the Christian faith.

Political leaders in my home country, the United States, are relentlessly advocating further liberalization of any restriction upon procured abortion. They are backed by powerful lobby groups with vested interests, such as Planned Parenthood and Marie Stopes International. Meanwhile in the United Kingdom, we have witnessed a Gay Marriage Act, forced through Parliament in spite of considerable opposition with little consideration of its legal impact upon the Catholic Church and society, in general. The secular form of coercion can also be seen in the United Nations which makes its support for third-world countries dependent upon the provision of contraception and abortion. A thinly-disguised population control agenda is steadfastly at work in the sheep's clothing called "maternal health." The agenda, in fact, has nothing to do with maternity and nothing to do with health. We cannot be deceived. There is no greater issue facing human dignity today than the relentless attack on human life, the integrity of the human body. It is the plight of those who are born into a twofold poverty, the poverty of their personal circumstances and the poverty of the developing world.

As these examples teach us, laws and policies are being employed to further the secular agenda, yet with little reflection upon the sort of "brave new world" which is thereby developed. Without a careful articulation of the inviolable dignity of innocent human life, society's only measure of the good of an individual human life is what the person possesses or produces. It is the way of moral relativism which indeed, in the words of Cardinal Joseph

Ratzinger, is a tyranny based on the supremacy of the strong and the neglect of the weak and vulnerable.<sup>4</sup>

The rapid moral decline of society has resulted in what Blessed Pope John Paul II correctly called the “culture of death.”<sup>5</sup> We must recognize that the culture of death advances in good part because of a lack of attention and information among the public. It is all too easy, with the intensity of the modern world and the preoccupation with our own lives and their struggles, to overlook a pervasive and negative trend of our society. Ignorance and lack of attention of the public is what allows the culture of death to continue and become ever more pervasive. We cannot allow this culture of death to increase and to snuff out our Christian way of life.

How can we ensure that the culture of death will not dominate our lives and our society? First of all, those of us who are Christians must all be attentive to laws that safeguard the dignity of the human person. We must support just laws which respect the inviolable dignity of human life. And we must support the political leaders who work for such legislation. Similarly, it is essential that we become aware of the laws and policies which are attacking human dignity and the goods of our Christian faith, some of which I have mentioned earlier.

In addition to the enhanced awareness of public policy, we must work toward a new evangelization regarding human life. We have the *magna charta* for such a new evangelization in the Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* of Blessed Pope John Paul II. The transformation of hearts by which one truly believes in the dignity of all men, without boundary, is the most fundamental means of a new evangelization.

The new evangelization flourishes when we as Christians proclaim the Gospel of life, a message that God calls us to promote everyday in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions. At the core of this Gospel of life is the sacredness and dignity of human life. Acknowledging, safeguarding and promoting the sacredness and dignity of human life is fundamental and irreplaceable to the seeking of the common good. If people do not acknowledge the dignity of all human beings without exception, the common good, authentically understood, can never thrive.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Initium Conclavis,” 18 Aprilis 2005, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 97 (2005), p. 687.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Litterae encyclicae *Evangelium vitae*, “De vitae humanae inviolabili bono”, 25 Martii 1995, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 87 (1995), 424-428, nos. 21-24.

An essential way in which we can proclaim the Gospel of Life is through strong, supportive, and traditional families with a mother and father who love their children unconditionally. Children witness the Gospel of Life in the relationship of their parents with one another and in the relationship that their parents have with them. The solid relationships between parents, and between the parents and their children, based on respect for human life, leads to a transformation of hearts in which the gospel of life is learned and lived.

Additionally, healthy families depend on a new proclamation of the truth regarding women and motherhood that upholds the virtues of purity, chastity and modesty, and respect for the integrity of marriage and the family. These goods are also under attack. We cannot permit such attacks to continue. The family shapes society, and by advocating for and promoting strong, traditional family life, we will continue to replace the culture of death with the culture of life and love for which God calls us to work, even as He gives us the strength to accomplish the work.

Despite the virulent strains of secularism, there are millions of Christians across the world who have risen up in response to the culture of death with their own manifestations of support of the culture of life, in their work place, and in the public square. What we have recently witnessed in France is an eloquent example. Just two weeks ago, 40,000 people gathered in Dublin to march against a government bill to legalize abortion. This rally was the largest in the history of the country and showed the public's desire to safeguard the life of both the mother and the child. In Brazil, talk show host and pastor Silas Malafia recently led another march of at least 40,000 people against proposed laws to legalize abortion and so-called "gay marriage." And in the United States a new pro-life coalition called Stop the Gosnells was recently formed to prevent from occurring in the future crimes like those committed by Dr. Kermit Gosnell.

I cannot fail to mention that we have in our presence tonight one of the great world leaders of such popular movements, Luca Volontè, the Chairman of the Dignitatis Humanae Institute. Luca finished his term of office today as President of the European People's Party in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg. He has been a guiding force behind the *Manif pour tous* in France. I recall his words to the thousands who rallied in Paris in defence of the traditional marriage. He declared that their witness was "the most beautiful surprise of Europe this year" in the battle for a civilization of life.

Seeing hundreds of thousands unified in witnessing to the Gospel of life gives hope that a new evangelization regarding human life and the dignity of human life will continue and develop, leading our culture along the right path, the path that leads to true freedom and, therefore, lasting peace. These manifestations of faith truly give me hope and inspiration. So, too, does your presence here tonight. A most significant event has taken place here today because leaders from across Europe and beyond Europe have gathered to discuss the fundamental importance of human life and dignity.

All of you here tonight are working toward the goal of a new engagement and a new energy in safeguarding and promoting the inviolable dignity of innocent human life. In the name of the Church, I thank you. It is because of leaders like yourselves that the new evangelization continues and grows. It will continue to spread so long as we work together and let our Christian faith guide us.

Finally, I want to say on a personal level how happy I am to be with you tonight, in order to show my support of this initiative which my brother, His Eminence Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, has been promoting for the last few years with the good results which all can see. Most people in the secular world nurture the ambition to retire at the age of 55. Cardinal Martino, who reached the age of 80 last year, is going as strongly as ever. In many ways, Your Eminence, your work as Honorary President of this Institute ties together the main themes of all your major accomplishments, from your work at the United Nations for which you were the Papal Nuncio for 16 years (during which you led the successful resistance at Cairo in 1994 to stop the UN from promoting abortion as a method of family planning) to your overseeing of the publication of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*,<sup>6</sup> in which you most rightly take great pride. I pay tribute to you tonight, Your Eminence. I am proud as a member of the Sacred College of Cardinals to see one of my brothers so ably demonstrating the very highest dedication to one of the most fundamental of our important responsibilities. May God grant you many more years of fruitful service as Honorary President of the Dignitatis Humanae Institute, energetically endorsing what the British Parliamentarian Lord Alton of Liverpool said about the Institute: It is indeed the most important organization promoting human dignity in the world today.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004).

Thinking specifically about the Universal Declaration of Human Dignity which the Dignitatis Humanae Institute exists to promote, I compliment the Institute for its excellent service in bringing the Church face to face with the secular ambient, so that this important document will be more fully understood and appreciated. There are few other institutions with the call to promote human dignity, which fulfill that mission as authentically and comprehensively as does this Institute. I wholeheartedly encourage you, and I commend your work to the protection of Mary Immaculate, to whom this Institute was consecrated at its foundation. As the Founding Patron of the Institute, Rocco Buttiglione, likes to say: we can always pray to the Madonna for her intercession; but we must always pray to her for her protection.

Thank you for your attention to these words. I wish for you every good success in your important mission. May God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – bless you and all your labors.

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE