



# PASTORAL CARE OF HUMAN LIFE

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## INTRODUCTION

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*INTRODUCTION*

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*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. 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». (Dignitas infinita, 1)*

*That dignity is intrinsic to the person and cannot be lost. (15) It is valid from the moment of conception until natural death. (47)*

Yet, nowadays, all this is no longer taken for granted. So much so that we felt comforted by the recent Declaration *Dignitas Infinita* of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. The reference to human dignity, in fact, is now often *misused to justify new rights, many of which are set in opposition to the fundamental right to life. (25)*

But the Church reiterates it clearly: *all offenses against life itself, all violations of the integrity of the human person, all offenses against human dignity, must be recognized as contrary to human dignity. (34)*

The very serious forms of violation of dignity and life - such as abortion, euthanasia and suicide, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, all forms of violence and abuse, including digital violence and gender theory - are *telling sign of an extremely dangerous crisis of the moral sense, which is becoming more and more incapable of distinguishing between good and evil. (47)*

The relativized idea we have of truth leads us to think that good and evil are two opposite poles that have the same weight. It is not so. Only good has consistency and value, evil is a *lack of due good*, a lack of good, not a little bit of good. The idea according to which evil is necessary to achieve good is a

myth of the modern age, it derives from the absolutization of the principle of autonomy, and requires vigilance and action on a pastoral level to form consciences.

Furthermore, the relativization of the value of human life also extends to areas that concern the economic-social development of many peoples in the world, in which the "throwaway culture" manifests itself. There are new "existential peripheries", with respect to which the Church feels the need to develop new skills to accompany the faithful who seek to live a Christian life: I am thinking of the suicide of minors, which constitutes the second cause of death among young people in the world after the accidents. Or cyber-sex: 22,000,000 child pornographic images circulate on the web every year, without geographical boundaries, in every cell phone they can reach. It is necessary to help so much loneliness, desperation and spiritual emptiness.

For these reasons, our Dicastery - which has specific competence over questions concerning the promotion and protection of human life (*Praedicate Evangelium*, 128) - has taken the initiative to bring you together today.

Together we will try to work and reflect to build an **organic pastoral care of human life**, which, starting from respect for the dignity, life and integrity of every human being, is an adequate expression of the evangelizing and pedagogical commitment of the Church in families, communities, in dioceses and parishes around the world.

Listening to the bishops in their *ad limina visits*, as well as many ecclesial realities with which we have come into contact in recent years, we have realized that a widespread concern for serious violations of human life does not correspond in most particular Churches to an effective and organized pastoral care of life.

The complexity of the problems, particularly in the field of bioethics, leads many educators not to deal with them due to lack of training. Among the faithful, there is widespread ignorance regarding the ability to formulate an adequate ethical judgment, and people settle on customs that have nothing to do with Christian values. Utilitarian and individualistic considerations prevail when choices must be made within families. I am thinking of abortion and how much is now practiced, especially in the presence of a diagnosis of even mild disease in the fetus. Or the widespread use of in vitro fertilization, which involves the discarding of thousands of newly conceived lives. Anonymous surveys in various ecclesial realities highlight a profound ignorance about what

the implications are and what the value of the life of embryos produced, discarded, selected or frozen forever is.

It is true that in many Countries the attention on life issues is kept high by pro-life movements, but many of these mostly carry out civil and political action.

Pastoral care is instead a specifically *ecclesial* action of the Christian community, lay people and pastors together, which cannot be delegated. Families and individual believers need to be trained, accompanied and advised in discernment to live with evangelical coherence and not to allow themselves to be affected by devastating experiences that harm the lives and dignity of the people themselves.

What to do to start this pastoral journey together?

The majority of Episcopal Conferences are equipped, like our Dicastery, with an Office dedicated to Family and Life. Yet it is not easy to move from theoretical reflection to pastoral action. It is not enough to establish a pastoral commission and appoint a leader in it. The multiplication of projects, improvisation, the lack of homogeneity of objectives, sectoralisation, can make the transition to dioceses and parishes, of the work that is planned at a central level, ineffective.

For this reason, today we will try to reflect together on what the pastoral care of life is and how to plan it. The themes, however, change depending on the geographical and cultural realities, and it will be up to you to identify them at the level of particular Churches.

We want to try to build *ecclesial intelligence* with you through coherent reflection, dialogue, listening to some issues that emerge almost everywhere in the world, through the observation of a reality in which human life is increasingly outraged and rejected. We need to "think together" and experience the creative effect of discerning and conversing in the Spirit, with the limits of meeting via the web.

We hope that this will help us to experience a **transformative process**, first of ourselves and then of the ecclesial reality in which we are called to act as a *community*. Let's remember that working alone is not effective.

At the beginning the Apostles did not have a plan, but they responded to a vocation, a call that determined their identity as disciples and the content of their mission.

It will perhaps be necessary to rethink the style we use in pastoral care, the way of announcing and making people reflect on values that are no longer talked about in the family. *We can no longer take anything for granted.* Just as young people today do not get married because the understanding of the value of marriage is not transmitted within families, so too the values and criteria of discernment based on our faith are not transmitted. Not even the inviolable value of human life, from conception to natural death.

It is necessary to stimulate reflection with an *inductive method*, starting from the questions that arise in people's practical lives. We need depth, clarity, a simple language suitable for all, but being vigilant, because making ourselves understandable does not mean that we have to become relativists in the Christian message. "Life is always a good" (Evangelium Vitae n. 30) and as such it must be presented, preserved and valued in every situation.

Our aim today, therefore, is to begin to reflect *to build an ecclesial action together*, in order to integrate the formation of lay people on urgent life issues for the good of individuals and families in communities and parishes, to form consciences and accompany the faithful in a Christian discernment consistent with Christian anthropology, the magisterium and the truths of our faith.

This project fits into our work to implement the Family Global Compact. Due to the specificity of the topics and the skills required, it is an area in which bishops and priests are asked to work, giving particular *space to lay people*, so that, thanks to the consolidated skills and experiences they can get on these matters, they can act with discernment according to the principle of *co-responsibility* and putting themselves at the service of the Church.