

The Infinite Dignity of Human Beings, Part II
Reflection on “Dignitas Infinita”
Fr. Jeffrey S. Tunncliff
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Last week I wrote [Part I](#) of this two-part series examining the new Declaration released by the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, [“Dignitas Infinita”](#). This declaration discusses the topic human dignity, its source, types of dignity, and application in the way people are treated.

In [Part I](#), I discussed the concept of dignity as presented in the first half of [“Dignitas Infinita”](#). Concepts are important but they reach their full benefit when applied to practical life situations. This is what the second half of [“Dignitas Infinita”](#) does as it seeks to “addresses some specific and grave violations of that dignity” (33). Now, I will provide my reflection on the application of dignity presented in [“Dignitas Infinita”](#).

The situations in which the concept of dignity apply are numerous. In fact, the concept of dignity applies in all situations where humans are involved. As [“Dignitas Infinita”](#) states the Second Vatican Council “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” (34).

Even the dignity of the criminal whose crime seems to merit the death penalty must be respected. The criminal has given up their moral dignity in committing their crime but their ontological dignity as a child of God can never be taken away even if they do not believe in God (see [“Dignitas Infinita”](#), 34).

In looking to see the relevance of dignity in everyday live, we need to consider the “unequal distribution of wealth” ([“Dignitas Infinita”](#), 36). Our Catholic faith is not against the ownership of private property. As I said in my reflection, [“2nd Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday,”](#) our Catholic faith rejects Socialism. However, neither does it advocate for allowing the rich to get richer while the poor get poorer. To respect the dignity of every person, every person must be given the resources to meet their basic needs ([“Dignitas Infinita”](#), 36) and the same opportunities to advance in life.

Moving to another life situation where human dignity is often not properly respected, [“Dignitas Infinita”](#) states, “Another tragedy that denies human dignity, both in the past and today, is war” (38). Our Catholic faith affirms the right to self-defense (the first criteria in [Just War Theory](#)). It continues, “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” (38, as quoted from 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.)

Each time war seems to come, we must ask ourselves, what is to be accomplished and is life being respected in the actions taken. I see this as the foundation for [Just War Theory](#).

Then, [“Dignitas Infinita”](#) turns to the topic of migrants and how they are treated (40). It saddens me when I hear people say that they do not trust or respect *any* migrants who enter our country illegally (or even some who come legally). We are a nation of immigrants. ***We must ask ourselves why they wish to come.*** They generally come looking for work and often take jobs no one else wants. ***We must ask ourselves how bad conditions in their native countries are for them to wish to make the difficult journey and face the risk of punishment for illegally entering our country.*** It must be bad. How can we help them in their own countries? ***How can we make sure they are treated as human beings?***

Next, [“Dignitas Infinita”](#) turns to the topic of human trafficking as “counted among the grave violations of human dignity” (41). This includes the inhumane transportation of migrants. It also includes “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” (41). The selling of human organs can make a person nothing more than a source for “parts.” Sexual exploitation treats people as ***objects*** of pleasure. Drug trade takes advantage of their vulnerability.

Turning to the topic of abortion, [“Dignitas Infinita”](#) cites [Isaiah 5:20](#) when it states, “*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness*” (47). Those who support abortion try to declare it to be good as supporting a woman’s right to choose while ignoring the evil of killing an innocent life that began at conception. Even in the good of trying to respect the health of the mother, they still ignore the good of the innocent life in the womb.

Likewise, [“Dignitas Infinita”](#) addresses the practice of surrogacy. It quotes Pope Francis when he said, “A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract” (48). The child has the right to be born from a fully human origin, without the use of procedures such as IVF that fail to respect human procreation as set by God, and in a way that respects the “dignity of the give and that of the receiver...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” (49). We must also consider how surrogacy views the surrogate mother (50). Is she treated as anything more than a means to an end, a factory in which the child is ***manufactured***.

Paragraphs 51 and 52 of [“Dignitas Infinita”](#) address the topic of Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. Those who support assisted suicide claim to be honoring the dignity of the dying person when, in fact, they are saying the person has lost their dignity. As death approach, one’s existential dignity may shift ***but their ontological dignity is never lost***. “Life is a right, not death, which must be welcomed, not administered. And this ethical principle concerns everyone, not just Christians or believers” ([“Dignitas Infinita”](#), 52).

Likewise, we must cherish the lives of those with disabilities. Their disabilities have ***no effect on their ontological dignity*** ([“Dignitas Infinita”](#), 53).

[“Dignitas Infinita”](#) includes the topic of gender theory as one involving human dignity (55ff). No matter how a person identifies in gender, they are a child of God and must be treated with the ontological dignity given to them by God. However, this does not mean they have the ***right*** to make themselves into whatever they want. We are not God (see [“Dignitas Infinita”](#), 57). Gender theory fails to respect in inherit sexual difference between male and female created in the image of God (see [“Dignitas Infinita”](#), 58 and [Genesis 1:26-27](#). Cf. [my article *Towards Dignity and Truth: Compassionate Dialogue and Pastoral Response on Transgenderism*](#)).

To change one’s sex “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” ([“Dignitas Infinita”](#), 60). These are very complex issues. We must never forget that each person is created ***body and soul*** by God. Both must be respected and cherished. To ignore either one is to fail to respect the dignity of the person.

I will now conclude by inviting you to join me in praying for recognition of the dignity of every person from the moment their life begins ***at conception*** till it ends in natural death, not a hastened death and at every step in between. This means respecting life in the womb. It means ensuring the needs of a child living in poverty are met. It means helping the migrant find a place to live with their proper social dignity. It means loving and caring for any person confused about their gender. It means being present to the person who is dying. It even means treated their body with respect after death ([see my blog article “More on Respecting the Dead”](#))