

Speech by His Holiness Pope Francis to the Dignitatis Humanae Institute at the Apostolic Palace on 7 December 2013.

Lord Cardinals,

Illustrious Gentlemen,

I thank you for this meeting. I am especially grateful to Cardinal Martino for the words with which he introduced me. Your Institute proposes to promote human dignity on the basis of the fundamental truth about man, who is created in the image and likeness of God. So, there is an original dignity of every man and woman that cannot be suppressed, that cannot be touched by any power or ideology.

Unfortunately, in our epoch, so rich in many accomplishments and hopes, there is no lack of powers and forces that end up producing a throwaway culture (*cultura di scarto*); and this threatens to become the dominant mentality. The victims of such a culture are precisely the weakest and most fragile human beings – the unborn, the poorest people, sick, elderly people, gravely disabled people... who are in danger of being “thrown out,” expelled from a machine that must be efficient at all costs. This false model of man and society embodies a practical atheism, de facto negating the Word of God that says: “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness” (cf. Genesis 1:26).

Instead, if we let ourselves be interrogated by this Word of God, we let it question our personal and social conscience, if we let it shake up our discussions, our ways of thinking and acting, the criteria, the priorities and choices, then things can change. The force of this Word poses limits on whoever wants to rule by abusing the rights and dignity of others. At the same time, it gives hope and consolation to those who are not able to defend themselves, to those who do not have access to the intellectual and practical means to affirm the value of their suffering, of their rights, of their life.

The Church’s social doctrine, with its integral vision of man, as a personal and social being, is our “compass.” Here there is a fruit that is of particular significance to the long journal of the People of God in modern and contemporary history: there is the defence of religious liberty, of life in all its phases, of the right to work and to decent work, of the family, of education.

All initiatives such as your own are, therefore, welcome, initiatives that aim to help people, communities and institutions to rediscover the ethical and social importance of the principle of human dignity, which is the root of liberty and justice. In view of this purpose efforts at raising awareness and formation are necessary. These will assist the lay faithful of every walk of life, and especially those who work in politics, to think according to the Gospel and the Church's social doctrine and to act consistently, dialoguing and collaborating with those who, with sincerity and intellectual honesty, at least share – if not the faith – a similar vision of man and society and its ethical consequences. There are not a few Christians and non-believers, who are convinced that the human person must always be an end and never a means.

In wishing you every good in your work, I invoke the Lord's blessing for you and your loved ones.