



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO A DELEGATION FROM
THE DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 7 December 2013*

*Your Eminences,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I thank you for this meeting. I am especially grateful to Cardinal Martino for the words with which he introduced it. Your Institute means to promote human dignity on the basis of the fundamental truth that man is created in the image and likeness of God. The original dignity of every man and woman is therefore inalienable and inaccessible to any power or ideology. Unfortunately, in our own time, one so rich in achievements and hopes, there are many powers and forces that end up producing a culture of waste; and this tends to become the common mentality. The victims of this culture are precisely the weakest and most fragile human beings — the unborn, the poorest, the sick and elderly, the seriously handicapped, *et. al.* — who are in danger of being “thrown away”, expelled from a system that must be efficient at all costs. In fact, this false model of man and society implements a practical atheism by rejecting the Word of God, which says: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (cf. Gen 1:26).

Instead, if we allow ourselves to be questioned by this Word, if we allow it to challenge our personal and social awareness, if we allow it to call into question our ways of thinking and acting, our standards, our priorities and our choices, then things can change. The power of this Word sets certain limits to whomsoever wants to become hegemonic by abusing the rights and the dignity of others. At the same time, it gives hope and consolation to those who cannot defend themselves, who do not have the intellectual or practical resources to affirm the value of their suffering, of their rights, of their lives.

The Church's Social Doctrine, with its integral vision of man as a personal and social being, is your "compass". There you will find an especially significant fruit of the long journey of the People of God in modern and contemporary history: the defence of religious liberty, of life at every stage, of the right to work and to decent work, of family, of education...

Therefore, all initiatives such as your own are welcome, which 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. To this end, it is necessary to raise awareness and form the lay faithful, in whatever state, especially those engaged in the field of politics, so that they may think in accord with the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church and act consistently by dialoguing and collaborating with those who, in sincerity and intellectual honesty, share — if not the faith — at least a similar vision of man and society and its ethical consequences. There are many non-Christians and non-believers who share the conviction that the human person must always be treated as an end and never as a means.

In wishing you all the best for your work, I invoke the Blessing of the Lord upon you and your loved ones.