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"Gaudium et Spes" on Human Dignity and Its Implications in Bioethics

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Gaudium et Spes on Human Dignity and Its Implications in Bioethics

Abstract: Promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* coincided with the beginnings of bioethics as well as the cultural and technological revolution of the late 1960s. In this way, the teaching of the Church has become a prophetic voice on many contemporary crimes against humanity. In the first part, the article presents the conciliar anthropology which is based on the Bible along with classical philosophy and constitutes the foundation for dignity. According to it, every human person, as a corporeal and spiritual being created in God's image and likeness, is endowed with dignity. In this philosophical idiom, the aforesaid dignity can be defined as ontological. It belongs to every human person and is inalienable and inviolable. The second part of the text shows the historical and geographical development of new challenges that threaten the human dignity. In many countries, national legislation supports abortion and euthanasia. It creates a new mentality: "the culture of death." In its last part, the article examines the paradigm of modern "progressive" moral decadence: the Dutch legislation on euthanasia of new-borns. The so-called Groningen Protocol is an example of the erroneous belief that "death is more humane than continued life in suffering." The only means to healing the mentality affected by "the culture of death" is respect for human dignity: the sanctity of human life.

Keywords: *Gaudium et Spes*, human dignity, abortion, euthanasia, Groningen Protocol, bioethics

When we reflect on more than fifty years that have passed since the promulgation of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965, we can see how certain topics presented in this document have gained prophetic importance in the modern world. Not only are they the proper reading of the signs of the times and description of the most urgent issues of the humanity (promotion of marriage and family, development of the culture, peace and community of the nations), but most off all, the fundamental reflection on what it means to be human

today became an obligatory point of reference in contemporary philosophical and theological discourse.

Reflecting on the importance of *Gaudium et Spes*, John Paul II stated that the essence and needs of men could be discovered only in light of the crucified and resurrected Christ. The discovery of man under this light is the *magna carta* of human dignity.¹ Undoubtedly, *Gaudium et Spes* has helped to form the conscience of humanity regarding the dignity and value of human life. The clear voice of the Church resounds at the break of a day that promises great advances in medicine and represents the emerging years of bioethics.² It was absolutely necessary for the realization of how sacred human life is. The Church *expressis verbis* denounced offences and crimes against humanity:

Furthermore, whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator.³

Not all of the above-mentioned transgressions are related to the realm of bioethics. Some have undoubtedly social and political dimensions. But a half-century later, unfortunately, all these infamies occur in our world and there is a strong impression that their frequency is increasing. The judgment against crimes, presented in *Gaudium et Spes* has a Biblical and also a classical philosophical background. On the one hand, we are directed to the Decalogue and Christ's law of love (cf. Mt. 25:40; Jn 13:34), on the other, we can recall ethics of Aristotle and of Plato.⁴

¹ John Paul II, "Gaudium et Spes: The Council Took Place, Hope for the World," *Tertium Millennium*, no 2. (1997), http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01051997_p-28_en.html, accessed June 4, 2016.

² Cf. Edmund D. Pellegrino, "The Origins and Evolution of Bioethics: Some Personal Reflections," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 9, no. 1 (1999): 73–88.

³ II Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, n. 27, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, accessed June 4, 2016.

⁴ The conclusion given by the Council after mentioning offenses against human dignity states that "all these things and others of their like are infamies." This phrase brings to mind a classical passage from *Nicomachean Ethics* which describes the vicious attitude of man: "But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, for example, spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery,

It is good to see what kind of anthropology supports this condemnation of crimes against humanity.

The Council's Anthropology and Vision of Human Dignity

The second chapter of *Gaudium et Spes* (points 12–22) underlines that man is the center and crown of all Creation. Man was created “to the image of God.” He is able to know God and to stay in a loving relationship with him. All earthly creation is subdued to him and he should be its master. God created man as “male and female” (Gen. 1:27), thus by his nature man is a social being. The simultaneous creation of man and woman produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. From the very beginning of his history, man rebelled against God and began to seek his goal apart from God, because the first people committed the sin of abusing their liberty to choose between good and evil. Because of the sin man is split within himself. The consequences of this sin are visible in an individual and collective dimension. But the Lord did not leave man alone in his dramatic struggle between good and evil. He became a man to free and strengthen man and to reveal to him the plenitude of human existence.

The very nature of man is the unity of living body and soul. The living body is good because it is created by God and will be raised up to live again on the day of resurrection. From this fact springs the dignity of man and the postulate to glorify God in one's living body and to do this despite all evil inclinations of the human heart wounded by sin. People are able to recognize in themselves a spiritual and immortal soul. By their intellect—one of the elements of their nature as an image of God—the human beings are aware that they surpass the material world. In this universe people are meant to search

theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. Nor does goodness or badness with regard to such things depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by William D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), II, 6, 1107a, 6–18). This classical assertion of Aristotle has undoubtedly a normative dimension, although it is based not on Biblical, like *Gaudium et Spes*, but on a metaphysical foundation. Another statement of the constitution pointing that infamies “do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury” recalls a passage from Plato's *Gorgias*. In a dialogue between Socrates and Polus the first emphasizes that doing injustice is worse than suffering it (cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, 469b.)

and discover the truth and, by means of faith, through the gift of the Holy Spirit they come to recognize in the realization of the truth the divine plan of creation.

The most secret sanctuary of each person is his/her conscience. In it the voice of God is reflected and human beings are able to distinguish between good and evil. This law is written by God in each human's heart, and by obeying it an individual expresses his/her dignity. Christians as well as the followers of other religions who are faithful to their conscience and who search for the truth in life are able to solve many problems that society has to confront. However, there is also the risk of falling victim to invincible ignorance that can lead a conscience to err, and thus the voice of conscience can become flawed as a result of habitual sin. Nonetheless, the human does not lose his/her dignity. Each person is able to choose freely, and freedom signals that he/she is a divine image and a proof of his dignity. Nevertheless, human freedom is often damaged by sin, therefore, God's grace is needed to restore it.

In Christ man can obtain an answer to the most difficult question regarding life after death. People are created to live an immortal life after their life earth ends—a state that cannot be reached even by all advances of technology promised by the new day. Divine life is given to humans by Christ who triumphed over death by rising to life. Faith endows man with the power to be united in Christ with his/her loved ones who passed away. Thus, in Christ the quest of man for the meaning of suffering and death is solved.

The final point of anthropology presented by *Gaudium et Spes* can be summarized in the following statements: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. [...] Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. [...] By His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man."⁵ "[...] Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."⁶

The truth that *Christ reveals man to man himself* and that *man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself* are the most pivotal statements of the anthropological message of the Council. These phrases are at the same time the two most-quoted passages from *Gaudium et Spes* in the magisterium of John Paul II, one of the most influential coauthors of the constitution.⁷

In his commentary to these statements, Weigel observed that both are expressing the Law of the Gift. This law is rooted in the inner life of the Holy Trinity which is reflected in a human person as the *imago Dei*. This law can

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22.

⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 24.

⁷ Cf. George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books 2001), 169.

be also perceived in the philosophical vision of the human person. As Weigel pointed out: “[...] One could get to the Law of the Gift, rationally and reasonably, through a serious reflection on human moral agency: a turn-to-the-subject that did not lead to solipsism and “autonomy,” but to love and responsibility. Freedom, lived according to its proper dignity, is always freedom tethered to truth and ordered to goodness.”⁸

The human person, created in God’s image and likeness is corporal and spiritual. The soul is a form of the living body. Spirit and the matter of the living body are not two separate natures which are juxtaposed, but rather their union forms a single nature.⁹ The relationship between body, soul, and life is so profound that it is impossible to reduce the living human body to an organic structure. Both the spirit and the living body are united in one nature. Human life exceeds the biological dimension. “In the human being the body *is* the person and the life *is* personal. The human being can be defined as *animated body* or *incarnate spirit*.”¹⁰

To summarize the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* on human dignity we have to distinguish different levels of its understanding.¹¹ There are two basics: the first one is related to the ontological dimension of a person and the second is based on the conscious actualization of the person. In the first case, we can talk about the ontological dignity of the human person. Theologically, in Christian perspective, this dignity springs from the fact that each person is created as an *image of God*. Philosophically, the ontological dignity comes from the very nature of a human person. Classically, the person can be defined not only as *individual substantia rationalis naturae* but also as *proprietate distincta ad dignitatem pertinente*.¹² This means that the person is a substance whose peculiar feature is something pertaining to dignity. In Aristotelian terms, the substantial being of a human, together with his/her potencies, lay foundations for this dignity—not only their accidental actualization. The ontological dignity is an intrinsic and objective value. It does not depend on subjective preferences. It is not an object of our feelings and consciousness. People possess this dignity when they are sleeping, and also when they fall into a state of unconsciousness, for example, coma. Both the human embryos and anencephalic babies,

⁸ George Weigel, “Rescuing *Gaudium et Spes*: The New Humanism of John Paul II,” *Nova Et Vetera* (English Edition) 8, no. 2 (2010): 264.

⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 365, accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

¹⁰ Augusto Sarmiento, “El servicio de la teología moral a la bioética,” *Scripta Theologica* 40, no. 3 (2008): 786.

¹¹ To achieve this goal I will use some thoughts forwarded by Josef Seifert. Cf. Joseph Seifert, *The Philosophical Diseases of Medicine and Their Cure: Philosophy and Ethics of Medicine. Vol. 1: Foundations* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004): 89–138.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 29, a. 3, ad. 2.

people with severe intellectual disability and the seriously demented are also endowed with such dignity because, with no exceptions, they are all human by nature.

This dignity is inalienable and inviolable. It is inherent to each human person. One can never lose it. No action can destroy it. In a moral sense, nobody can violate someone else's dignity, for example, treating someone as means for other ends. The ontological dignity prohibits killing the innocent or torturing. This dignity is independent of age, consciousness, and illness.

When *Gaudium et Spes* mentions the conscience and all kinds of conscious acts, including freedom of choice, it describes the second level of human dignity. The dignity of the conscious person is different from the ontological dignity. As Joseph Seifert precisely stressed: "The dignity of awakened rational conscious life is so essential for the human person, though not indispensable at each phase of human life, that the ordination of the person to rational life, the faculties that enable her in principle to perform rational acts, do belong to the essence of a person."¹³

The anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes* gives a solid foundation for dealing with a wide spectrum of issues in bioethics. Undoubtedly, its Biblical and theological core of anthropology is able to illuminate complicated problems arising from technological and medical progress.

New Challenges to Human Dignity

Thirty years after the promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* Saint John Paul II wrote an Encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae*.¹⁴ In the encyclical, the pope realistically pointed out that crimes against human dignity enumerated in *Gaudium et Spes* are increasing. But, sadly, there is something even more dramatic. This is a change of mentality, a new cultural climate which is called a *culture of death*. John Paul II described it in the following words: "Broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems. [...] The fact that legislation in many countries, perhaps even departing from basic principles of their constitutions, has

¹³ Joseph Seifert, *The Philosophical Diseases of Medicine and Their Cure*, 125–26.

¹⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae*, March 25, 1995, accessed June 20, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

determined not to punish these practices against life, and even to make them altogether legal, is both a disturbing symptom and a significant cause of grave moral decline. Choices once unanimously considered criminal and, rejected by the common moral sense, they are gradually becoming socially acceptable.”¹⁵

The pope did not mention what kind of practices against human dignity are legal now and socially acceptable. But obviously there are two major ones—abortion and euthanasia—which are related to the beginning and to the end of human life.

Gaudium et Spes and consecutive documents of the Church including the Catechism of the Catholic Church have condemned abortion.¹⁶ However, the Church probably did not expect that in a short time it would be so extended and sanctioned by legal regulations. The historical overview on this issue is very illustrative.¹⁷ In 1920, the abortion law was introduced in Soviet Russia for the first time. During the Nazi regime abortion was allowed and proposed to the conquered nations, in reference to Jews and to those who might produce “inferior” offspring.¹⁸ In the 1950s, it was introduced by communist regimes in the Middle and Eastern parts of Europe. Two years after the promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* the English Abortion Act was passed. In 1973, the US Supreme Court’s *Roe vs. Wade* decision opened doors to abortion in the USA. That same year abortion was introduced in Germany and Denmark. The following years it was allowed by the laws of Sweden, France, Luxembourg, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, etc. Surprisingly, the United Nations and its agencies are involved in the expansion of abortion laws all over the world. The UN is pushing the abortion agenda significantly.¹⁹ It is done in the name of the protection and improvement of human reproductive rights.

Regarding euthanasia, this practice is not legally as extensive, although it is gaining more and more support, especially in the USA and in Europe.²⁰

¹⁵ *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 4.

¹⁶ Cf. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Declaration on Procured Abortion—Quaestio de abortu*, November 18, 1974, accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19741118_declaration-abortion_en.html; Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2270–74.

¹⁷ Cf. Julián Herranz, “The Dignity or the Human Person and Law: Fundamental Rights in Classical Culture,” in *The Nature and Dignity of the Human Person as the Foundation of the Right to Life. The Challenges of the Contemporary Cultural Context: Proceedings of the Eighth Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life*, edited by Juan Vial Correa and Elio Sgreccia (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), 13.

¹⁸ Richard Weikart, *Hitler’s Ethic: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), 8.

¹⁹ Cf. Kelsey Zorzi, “The Impact of the United Nations on National Abortion Laws,” *Catholic University Law Review* 65, no. 2 (2015): 409–28.

²⁰ Giza Lopes, *Dying with Dignity: A Legal Approach to Assisted Death* (Santa Barbara—Denver: Praeger, 2015), 2.

The first legal act allowing assistance in committing suicide was introduced in 1942 in Switzerland. In the USA, the first state which introduced euthanasia was Oregon. In 1997, it passed the *Death with Dignity Act*. It was followed by similar regulations in the State of Washington (2009), Vermont (2013), and California (2016).²¹ By the decision of judges, euthanasia is permitted in Montana (Bexter vs. Montana 2009) and in New Mexico (Morris vs. Brandenburg 2014). In 2016, Canada has passed the law to legalize physician-assisted death.²² In Europe, the Benelux countries gave legal permission to euthanasia.²³ In 2002, the Netherlands established the *Termination of Life on Request and Assisted Suicide Act*. The same year Belgium published the *Act of Euthanasia*, while Luxembourg introduced the *Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide Law* in 2009.

Groningen Protocol: The Paradigm of Decadence

One of the most drastic examples of the legislation which allows the death of innocent people is present in the Netherlands. In this country infanticide is allowed although the official name of this procedure is “euthanasia of severely ill newborns.” Proponents of the termination of the life of a newborn claim that they are doing it in the best interest of such children. For procedural reasons infants and newborns are classified into three different categories.²⁴ The first group are those who will die shortly despite the use of continued invasive medical technology (e.g., children with severe lung hypoplasia). Their death is inevitable although some can be kept alive for a short period of time. The second group are infants who are dependent on intensive care but may potentially survive after the intensive care period (e.g., infants with severe congenital intracranial abnormalities, or severe acquired neurologic injury: asphyxia). Nevertheless, their expected quality of life is assessed as very low. The third group

²¹ Lisa Aliferis, “California to Permit Medically Assisted Suicide as of June 9,” accessed June 30, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/03/10/469970753/californias-law-on-medically-assisted-suicide-to-take-effect-june-9>.

²² Cf. Susan Stefan, *Rational Suicide, Irrational Laws: Examining Current Approaches to Suicide in Policy and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016): 206–11. Merrit Kennedy, “Canada Legalizes Physician-Assisted Dying,” accessed 30.06.2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/06/18/482599089/canada-legalizes-physician-assisted-dying>.

²³ Lopes, *Dying with Dignity*, 2.

²⁴ A. A. Eduard Verhagen and Pieter J. J. Sauer, “End-of-Life Decisions in Newborns: An Approach from the Netherlands,” *Pediatrics* 116, no. 3 (2005): 736–37.

includes children who are physiologically stable and do not depend on technology but their suffering is severe and without any hope of improvement. In this group there are infants with serious congenital malformations or diseases that cannot be treated (e.g., the most serious form of spina bifida or epidermolysis bullosa, a type Hallopeau-Siemens) or children from group two who were expected to die after the intensive care treatment was withdrawn but remained alive with suffering.

A specific approach to justify the ending of life is proposed for each group. The reason for terminating the life of infants from the last group is described in the following way: “There are [...] circumstances in which, despite all measures taken, suffering cannot be relieved and no improvement can be expected. When both the parents and the physicians are convinced that there is an extremely poor prognosis, they may concur that death would be more humane than continued life.”²⁵ The decision must be made by both parents and supported by diagnosis and prognosis of the competent physicians. After the death of the child, a legal investigation should determine whether the decision was justified and all necessary procedures have been followed.

When we approach the question of Groningen protocol from the conviction of the inviolability of human dignity, the key problem lies in the permission of killing the innocent. Each life is valuable. The death of the innocent and suffering infant requested by parents is the tragic fruit of a wrongful mentality. The main reason to terminate life is expressed in the statement: “the death is more human than the continuation of life full of suffering.” But who can assess the value of life and death and say that one is more human than the other? Yes, it is true that severe, unbearable suffering, dependency on medical and technical support can be something extremely difficult. Nevertheless, many adult people are in these conditions and they are not requesting death but try to live their lives up to the natural end. It is striking that supporters of infanticide repeatedly offer a false alternative: “either allow the baby to suffer or intentionally kill the infant. No mention is made of a third alternative: making use of drugs to relieve suffering even if the dosage must be high enough to induce deep sleep.”²⁶

Another reason given in defence of killing disabled newborns is the quality of life: “Not only survival of the infant but also the condition in which the child will survive, the quality of life, is extremely important. Quality-of-life considerations were operationalized [...] in terms of the child’s expected ultimate level of functioning in a number of distinct aspects: communication, suffering,

²⁵ Eduard Verhagen and Pieter J. J. Sauer, “The Groningen Protocol—Euthanasia in Severely Ill Newborns,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 352, no. 10 (10 March 2005): 960.

²⁶ Christopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion: Women’s Rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice* (New York–London: Routledge, 2010), 34.

dependency on others, autonomy, and personal development.”²⁷ These criteria seem to be really difficult to assess. Someone should be a prophet to see all these different aspects of life and to judge them. “Communication,” “autonomy,” “personal development” are such general notions that it is difficult to be objective in referring to them. The quality of life is a sociological concept and can be eventually discussed with competent patients who are able to identify the values and goals of life and determine if they are satisfied. It is impossible in the case of infants. It is not difficult to notice that “prognostic judgments about quality of life are conceptually plausible; their failing is simply that, given the available evidence, they do not appear to be reliable. The self-reported quality of life of children with handicaps does not differ from that of children without disabilities.”²⁸

It is noted that in the Groningen protocol the decision to kill an ill newborn child is made by the autonomous decision of parents. This fact creates a very dangerous pattern which resembles the tragic experience of a Nazi totalitarian system. The infamous program of genocide of handicapped children in the Third Reich began with the request of the father who appealed to Hitler to grant permission to have his infant killed. The permission was granted and the child was killed. After this case on September 1, 1939, Hitler authorized a program of killing mentally and physically handicapped children.²⁹

This crime was condemned at the Nuremberg Trials and it does not need to be discussed again. The lesson that should be learned from this tragic experience that people seem to have forgotten is that everyone is endowed with inalienable human dignity. A few years after the trial, Leo Alexander, a medical expert in the Nuremberg Trials, brought to attention the fact that a tragedy of massive killing of the innocent began with a change in the mentality of physicians who accepted euthanasia:

Whatever proportions these crimes finally assumed, it became evident to all who investigated them that they had started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitude of the physicians. It started with the acceptance of the attitude, basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived. This attitude in its early stages concerned itself merely with the severely and chronically sick. Gradually, the sphere of those to be included in this category was enlarged to encompass the socially unproductive, the ideologically unwanted, the racially unwanted and, finally, all non-Germans. But it is

²⁷ Verhagen and Sauer, “End-of-Life Decisions in Newborns,” 739.

²⁸ Frank A. Chervenak, Laurence B. McCullough and Birgit Arabin, “Why the Groningen Protocol Should Be Rejected,” *Hastings Center Report* 36, no. 5 (2006): 31.

²⁹ Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill–London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 39.

important to realize that the infinitely small wedged-in lever from which this entire trend of mind received its impetus was the attitude toward the non-rehabilitable sick.³⁰

Verhagen and Sauer in the answer to the critical notes which appeared after publishing the Groningen protocol stated that the protocol “was designed to motivate physicians to adhere to the highest standards of decision making and to reduce hidden euthanasia by facilitating reporting.”³¹ We can say that this reason is praiseworthy. And indeed, after the publication on the Groningen protocol in 2005, in the Netherlands only two cases of euthanasia in five years were reported. Before the publication there were about 20 cases of euthanasia per year.³² However, the most dangerous factor still remains—the acceptance of euthanasia of children whose lives are judged not to be worthy of living (“the death is more human than the continuation of life full of suffering”). Yes, the reason to kill is different—mostly what seems to be compassion toward non-rehabilitable sick. But the outcome is the same: the death of innocent children who did not participate in the decision to terminate their lives. Acceptance of infanticide of the ill newborns leads to a slippery slope. It is possible to logically prove that if abortion at any stage of development, and regardless of health condition, is possible and that both fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons, then killing newborns should be permissible in all cases, including those when the newborn is not disabled.³³

Final Remarks

The conclusions that spring from the analysis of the Groningen protocol are catastrophic. They are a consequence of the rejection of intrinsic human dignity. The fruit of this reductionist vision of a human being, whose ultimate ontological

³⁰ Leo Alexander, “Medical Science under Dictatorship,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 241 (1949): 44.

³¹ Verhagen and Sauer, “Correspondence: Drs. Verhagen and Sauer Reply,” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 352, no. 22 (2005): 2354.

³² A. A. Eduard Verhagen, “Neonatal Euthanasia: Lessons from the Groningen Protocol,” *Seminars in Fetal and Neonatal Medicine* 19, no. 5 (2014): 296–99. Verhagen who published the protocol suggested that the lower rate of reported deaths based on Groningen protocol might be partly caused by the lack of consensus about the dividing line between euthanasia and palliative care.

³³ Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, “After-birth Abortion: Why Should the Baby Live?” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 39 (2013): 261–63.

foundation is rejected, results in authoritarian decisions over life and death. Many times the legislation of states, which for many is the only objective norm, invites to participate in these practices that go against the inalienable dignity of man. As boldly pointed out by Robert Spaemann: “To grant to the state, [...] the right to arbitrarily determine who is human in the legal sense and who is not, means to take from human rights their character as fundamental rights. Indeed, the state could at any time restrict, by the particular definition of human being it adopts, who may lay claim to these rights. Whoever in this case actually joined in and represented part of the people could alone reserve to himself this right to life.”³⁴ The catastrophic dimensions of the “culture of death,” with abortion, euthanasia, and infanticide, invite humanity to a change of mentality. Fifty years after the promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* the words of the Church that every man is created as an “image of God” and that human life is sacred are acutely needed. The proposal of an anthropology based on the Biblical vision of man, and complemented by classical metaphysics, offers a true remedy for humanity. The model of dignity offered by Christ who *reveals man to man himself* is timeless and if it confronts the decadence of the “culture of death,” it can bring about a true revolution.

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Witold Kania

Gaudium et Spes sur la dignité humaine : implications dans la bioéthique

Résumé

La promulgation de *Gaudium et Spes* a concouru avec les commencements de la bioéthique et la révolution culturelle et technologique de la fin des années soixante. En l'occurrence, l'enseignement de l'Église est devenu une voix prophétique dans la question concernant de nombreux délits commis contre l'humanité. L'article présente tout d'abord l'anthropologie de concile, fondée sur la Bible et sur la philosophie classique qui est le fondement de la dignité. D'après elle, toute personne humaine, en tant qu'être charnel et spirituel créé à l'image et selon la ressemblance de Dieu, est gratifiée de dignité. Dans la langue philosophique, cette dignité peut être définie comme ontologique. Elle appartient à toute personne humaine, elle est inaliénable et inviolable. Par contre, la deuxième partie présente le développement historique et géographique de nouveaux défis qui porte atteinte à la dignité humaine. Dans bien des pays, la législation nationale autorise l'avortement et l'euthanasie. Cela crée un nouveau type de mentalité : « culture de la mort ». La dernière partie analyse le paradigme de la décadence morale « progressiste » contemporaine : loi hollandaise concernant l'euthanasie des nouveau-nés. Le soi-disant « Protocole de Groningen » est l'exemple d'une conviction erronée que « mourir est plus humain que continuer à vivre une vie pleine de souffrance ». Le seul moyen qui puisse guérir la mentalité atteinte de « la culture de mort » est le respect pour la dignité humaine, c'est-à-dire pour le caractère sacré de la vie.

Mots clés : *Gaudium et Spes*, dignité humaine, avortement, euthanasie, Protocole de Groningen, bioéthique

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Gaudium et Spes sulla dignità umana: implicazioni nella bioetica

Sommario

La promulgazione di *Gaudium et Spes* coincide temporalmente con gli inizi della bioetica e della rivoluzione culturale e tecnologica della fine degli anni '60. In tal modo il magistero della Chiesa sulla dignità dell'uomo divenne la voce profetica che indicava molti crimini contemporanei contro l'umanità. L'articolo presenta prima l'antropologia conciliare basata sulla Bibbia e sulla filosofia classica, che è il fondamento della dignità. Conformemente alla stessa ciascuna persona umana come essere corporale-spirituale, creato ad immagine e somiglianza di Dio, è provvista

di dignità. Nel linguaggio filosofico tale dignità può essere definita come ontologica. Appartiene a ciascuna persona umana ed è inalienabile e inviolabile. La seconda parte mostra lo sviluppo storico e geografico delle nuove sfide che insidiano la dignità umana. In molti paesi la legislazione nazionale sostiene l'aborto e l'eutanasia. Ciò crea un nuovo genere di mentalità: „la cultura della morte“. L'ultima parte esamina il paradigma della decadenza morale moderna „progressiva“: il diritto olandese relativo all'eutanasia dei neonati. Il cosiddetto „Protocollo di Groningen“ è l'esempio della convinzione errata secondo la quale „la morte è più umana della continuazione di una vita piena di sofferenza“. L'unico mezzo per risanare la mentalità interessata dalla „cultura della morte“ è il rispetto della dignità umana: della santità della vita umana.

Parole chiave: *Gaudium et Spes*, dignità umana, aborto, eutanasia, protocollo di Groningen, bioetica