

## **Bisschoppen VS verduidelijken standpunt R.K. Kerk t.o.v. COVID-19 vaccinatie**

*Vatican News, 15 december 2020*

De bisschoppen van de Verenigde Staten verduidelijken in een verklaring hoe er vanuit Rooms-katholiek perspectief tegen COVID-19 vaccinatie aangekeken moet worden. Ze concluderen dat vaccinatie tegen COVID-19 in de huidige omstandigheden met de beschikbare vaccins moreel aanvaardbaar is. Het blijft een opdracht voor alle katholieken onder de aandacht te brengen en er dus voor te pleiten dat ontwikkeling en productie van vaccins plaatsvindt zonder hiervoor materiaal te gebruiken dat in verband kan worden gebracht met abortus.



[US Bishops moral considerations COVID vaccinesDownload](#)

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## **De goede Samaritaan: zorg voor ernstig en terminaal zieken**

De Congregatie voor de Geloofsleer heeft een document gepubliceerd over de zorg voor ernstig en terminaal zieken: Samaritanus bonus.

### **The human person in the centrality of his integrity**

The address of Undersecretary Gambino at the presentation of the Letter on the care of persons in critical and terminal phases of life.

First of all, “the vulnerability of every human being, body and spirit, mysterious marked by the desire for infinite love for which he has been destined from all eternity”; secondly, “the principle that caring for others who are in a state of need is not only a question of the ethics of social solidarity or of beneficence,” but is even more “the recognition of the inestimable value of one’s life as an insurmountable limit in the face of any claim of autonomy”; and last but not least, “the foundation of any juridical order: the worth of every person at any stage of life or condition of existence.”

These are the three cornerstones which the Undersecretary of our Dicastery, Gabriella Gambino, explored in depth this morning in the Sala Stampa, commenting on the Letter “Samaritanus Bonus,” on the care of persons in critical or terminal phases of life, which was edited by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and presented today at a press conference.

“Care,” explained the Undersecretary, “cannot be reduced to simply attending to the sick from a medical or psychological perspective, but must branch out into a virtuous attitude of devotion and concern for the other, which finds its substance in caring for the whole person, for those who are in a state of need.” It is this caring which, she continued, “supports the encounter between ‘I’ and ‘You,’ thereby calling man out of the state of insignificance and anxiety into which his illness has thrown him, and helping him to rediscover the unity of body and spirit. This aspect,” she clarified, “is full of pastoral and bioethical implications, which should lead us to

modify the way the critically and terminally ill are cared for in many contexts.”

Faced with the “complexity of the medical management of sickness and death,” before a “secularized culture and legislation that confounds us on the value of suffering and of our life,” Gambino concluded that with the Letter Samaritanus Bonus “the Church desires to restore the centrality of man in his integrity, a unified totality of body and spirit; and to remind us that we are children of a Father who has loved us to the end, who is the only one who can make sweet the burden of our suffering.”



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## **Humana Communitas in het tijdperk van de pandemie: vroegtijdige meditatie over de wedergeboorte van het leven**

It is entitled “Humana Communitas in the Age of Pandemic: untimely meditations on Life’s Rebirth” and it is the second document – the first one is from 30 March 2020 – that the Pontifical Academy for Life dedicates to the consequences of the world health crisis and its interpretation.

«In the suffering and death of so many, we have learned the lesson of fragility», stresses the text.

The document underlines the importance of a change of pace: global efforts and a determined international cooperation are needed to face the challenge of a fairer and more just future, whose keywords are better health care for all and vaccination.

«We have not paid sufficient attention, especially at the global level, to human interdependence and common vulnerability. While the virus does not recognize borders, countries have sealed their frontiers. In contrast to other disasters, the pandemic does not impact all countries at the same time. Although this might offer the opportunity to learn from experiences and policies of other countries, learning processes at the global level were minimal. In fact, some countries have sometimes engaged in a cynical game of reciprocal blame».

Moreover, «The phenomenon of Covid-19 is not just the result of natural occurrences. What happens in nature is already the result of a complex intermediation with the human world of economical choices and models of development, themselves “infected” with a different “virus” of our own creation: it is the result, more than the cause, of financial greed, the self-indulgence of life styles defined by consumption indulgence and excess. We have built for ourselves an ethos of prevarication and disregard for what is given to us, in the elemental promise of creation. This is why we are called to reconsider our relation to the natural habitat. To recognize that we dwell on this earth as stewards, not as masters and lords». Then « When compared to the predicament of poor countries, especially in the so called Global South, the plight of the “developed” world looks more like a luxury: only in rich countries people can afford the requirements of safety. In those not so fortunate, on the other hand, “physical distancing” is just an impossibility due to necessity and the weight of dire circumstances: crowded settings and the lack of affordable distancing confront entire populations as an insurmountable fact. The contrast between the two situations throws into relief a strident paradox, recounting, once more, the tale of disproportion in wealth between poor and rich countries».

The crisis has shown the possibilities and limitations of those models focused on hospital care: «For sure, in all countries the common good of public health needs to be balanced against economic interests» and the nursing homes and the elderly have been hit hard. To this must then be added that «Ethical discussions of resource allocation were primarily based on utilitarian considerations, without paying attention to people experiencing higher risk and greater vulnerabilities. In most countries, the role of general practitioners was ignored, while for many people they are the first contact in the care system. The result has been an increase in deaths and disabilities from causes other than Covid-19».

The response that must be given to the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be reduced to an organizational-operational level. Re-interpreting the crisis we went through, the text highlights how much we can learn on a deeper level. The fragility, finitude and vulnerability in which all human beings have found themselves united urge us to a conversion that includes and elaborates existentially and socially the experience of loss, as a constitutive part of human condition. Only starting from this awareness will it be possible to involve our conscience in a conversion that will allow us to feel responsibly supportive in a global fraternity (cf. Francis, *Humana communitas*, 6 January 2019).

On the level of ethics and public health globally, this entails: 1. An equal risktaking and the distribution of those risks that cannot be eliminated in the conduct of human life, including as regards access to healthcare resources, among which vaccination has a strategic role; 2. A responsible attitude towards scientific research, which protects its autonomy and independence, overcoming forms of subordination to particular economic or political interests, which distort its achievements and its communication; 3. Coordination and cooperation at international and global level to put into effect the universal right to the highest levels of health care, as an expression of protection of the inalienable dignity of the human person.

«We are called to an attitude of hope, beyond the paralyzing effect of two opposite temptations: on the one hand, the resignation that passively undergoes events; on the other, the nostalgia for a return to the past, only longing for what was there before. Instead, it is time to imagine and implement a project of human coexistence that allows a better future for each and every one. The dream recently envisaged for the Amazon region might become a universal dream, a dream for the whole planet to “integrate and promote all its inhabitants, enabling them to enjoy ‘good living’” (*Querida Amazonia*, 8)».

Inter alia, prof. Henk ten Have, Academician of the Pontifical Academy for Life and one of the leading experts in Global Bioethics (Professor emeritus at the Center for Healthcare Ethics at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, USA) and prof. Roberto Dell’Oro, professor at Loyola Marymount University (California, USA) contributed to the drafting of the text. Professor ten Have points out that «The Covid-19 pandemic as a global phenomenon demonstrates that we are nowadays intrinsically interconnected. What affects human beings across the world is a concern for everyone. We all share the same vulnerability because we inhabit the same common home. This experience makes us aware that our individual well-being is dependent on the human community. As articulated in Nota 2 of the Pontifical Academy for Life, a global ethical perspective should therefore be applied which articulates the moral importance of solidarity, cooperation, social responsibility, the common good, and ecological integrity».

For his part, prof. Dell’Oro underlines how «this Nota 2, building on the premises on the first document on COVID, offers a meditation on the human family in the time of the pandemic. The tone is meditative, rather than normative. The intention of the document is not to give cheap recipes, but to recognize that together, as a human family (*humana communitas*), we have to go back to the lessons we have learned. It is life itself who teaches us, but we have to be mindful and attentive, in addition to foster action. In that sense, we need to change together, to dispose ourselves to a different attitude toward life as a whole. The church calls us to

interrogate our most profound experiences, without being preachy, but with realism: our finitude, the limits of our freedom, the shared vulnerability that opens our eyes to those who suffers greatly, especially in the Global South. The document also calls for global efforts and international cooperation and for an ethics of solidarity. I personally hope for people of good will, believers and non-believers, to see this document as a call to conversion, which is first of all, a change in our own way of looking at reality, and to build our efforts on a renewed mindfulness».

*Pontifical Academy for Life*  
Vatican City, July 22th 2020



[Humana Communitas in the age of pandemic-def-ENGDownload](#)

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## **Een duurzame ethische discussie moet onderdeel zijn van discussies over het reguleren van artificiële intelligentie**

*COMECE, 17 juli 2020*

In its contribution to the 'Consultation on the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence – A European Approach', COMECE calls the EU institutions to adopt a human-centric approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in order to promote the common good and serve the lives of all human beings both in their personal and community dimensions.

The COMECE contribution, published on 14 June 2020, welcomes the White Paper's general intention to establish a solid European approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI) deeply grounded on human dignity and protection of privacy. It highlights that "data" and "algorithms" are the main drivers of Artificial Intelligence, while humans determine and overview the goals which an AI system should attain.

As already highlighted in the April 2017 COMECE contribution to the EP consultation on robotics, COMECE expresses perplexity on the possible creation of a new dedicated EU Agency as "the current key structures of the EU ensure sufficient support for addressing AI and robotics challenges".

Should the EU opt for the establishment of some sort of EU coordination body devoted to AI, COMECE agrees with the statement made in the White Paper that the "...governance structure should guarantee maximum stakeholders participation", including Churches, which have a specific status as partners of the EU institutions under Article 17 TFEU and should be explicitly mentioned in this context.

In its contribution, COMECE underlines the necessity of establishing a sustained social ethics discourse accompanying the political discussion on regulating AI. The EU should build tools and mechanisms for such a broad interdisciplinary discourse into the existing EU structures and programmes – as effective and concrete as possible, e.g. through the new research programme Horizon Europe or the revised Coordinated Plan on AI.

The COMECE document also includes detailed proposals in relation to areas such as fundamental rights (liability, safety, algorithms, children, protection of personal data), AI and sustainability, the fight against money-

laundering and AI and cybersecurity.

In February 2019 COMECE published the reflection paper “Robotisation of Life: Ethics in view of new challenges”. In February 2020 COMECE participated in the international workshop “The ‘good’ algorithm? Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, Law, Health”, held at the Vatican on the occasion of the 26th General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life. On that occasion, H.E. Mgr. Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, signed the document “Rome Call for an AI Ethics”, supporting an ethical approach to Artificial Intelligence and the promotion of a sense of responsibility among organisations, governments and institutions in order to assure that digital innovation and technological progress serve human genius and creativity.



[COMECE contribution and annex paper for the public consultation on the White Paper on AI finalDownload](#)

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## Broeders van Liefde en euthanasie

### **Letter to the superior general of the Congregation of the “Brothers of Charity”, regarding the accompaniment of patients in psychiatric hospitals of the congregation’s Belgian branch**

*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 30 March 2020*

Most Reverend Br René, Superior General,

In March 2017, on the website of the Belgian branch of the Congregation of the “Brothers of Charity”, a document was published which permits — under certain conditions — the practice of euthanasia in a Catholic hospital. This practice, supported by the Association Provincialat des Frères de la Charité asbl, is fundamentally based on three criteria: the inviolability of life, the autonomy of the patient and the relationship of care. Such a document, however, makes no reference either to God, or to Sacred Scripture, or to the Christian vision of humanity.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith wrote to the Superior General, who had already disapproved of this document, asking for clarifications, and the then-prefect of the Dicastery informed the Holy Father about the gravity of the case in an audience on 20 May 2017.

From 27 June 2017 until now, contacts and meetings have taken place between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Secretariat of State, Representatives of the Frères and of the Association Provincialat des Frères, as well as representatives of the Episcopal Conference of Belgium, in order to offer opportunities and spaces for dialogue on an extremely delicate subject and thus to find, in a spirit of sincere ecclesiality, a convergence on Catholic doctrine on the subject.

The numerous interdicasterial meetings of 31 August and 7 November 2017, of 1 February, 15 March, 20 June and 12 October 2018, and of 20 July 2019, this Dicastery’s letter to the Superior General of the Frères dated 30 June 2017, the document Principles to be observed on the accompaniment of patients in psychiatric hospitals, and the meeting which took place in Rome on 21 March 2018 should all be recalled.

In this context, the Secretary of State and the Prefects of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of

the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life asked the Representatives of the Frères and of the Association Provincialat des Frères to unequivocally affirm in writing their adherence to the principles of the sacredness of human life and the unacceptability of euthanasia, and, as a result, their absolute refusal to carry it out in the institutions dependent on them. Unfortunately, the replies received gave no assurances on these points.

Euthanasia remains an inadmissible act, even in extreme cases, inasmuch as it “is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by the Church’s Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium” (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 65).

For his part, Pope Francis has affirmed that “the current socio-cultural context is progressively eroding the awareness of what makes human life precious. Indeed, it is increasingly valued in terms of its efficiency and utility, to the point of considering lives that do not correspond to this criterion as ‘rejected’ or ‘unworthy’. In this situation of the loss of authentic values, the inalienable duties of human and Christian solidarity and fraternity also fail. In reality, a society deserves to be recognized as ‘civil’ if it develops antibodies against the throwaway culture; if it recognizes the intangible value of human life; if solidarity is actively practiced and safeguarded as the foundation of coexistence” (Pope Francis, Address to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 30 January 2020).

Furthermore, he reiterated that “the relational — and not merely clinical — approach to the patient, considered in the uniqueness and integrality of his person, imposes the duty never to abandon anyone in the presence of incurable diseases. Human life, because of its eternal aim, preserves all its value and all its dignity in any condition, even of precariousness and fragility, and as such is always worthy of the highest consideration” (ibid.).

In these latter words, Pope Francis touches on the theme of “compassion”, which is increasingly invoked by public opinion as a justification for euthanasia.

John Paul II had already made it unequivocally clear that euthanasia is “a false mercy, and indeed a disturbing ‘perversion’ of mercy. True ‘compassion’ leads to sharing another’s pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear. Moreover, the act of euthanasia appears all the more perverse if it is carried out by those, like relatives, who are supposed to treat a family member with patience and love, or by those, such as doctors, who by virtue of their specific profession are supposed to care for the sick person even in their most painful terminal stages” (*Evangelium Vitae*, n. 66).

In short, therefore, Catholic teaching affirms the sacred value of human life; the importance of caring for and accompanying the sick and disabled; the Christian value of suffering; the moral unacceptability of euthanasia; the impossibility of introducing this practice into Catholic hospitals, even in extreme cases, and of collaborating in this regard with civil institutions.

It seems clear that the position of the Brothers of Charity group in Belgium does not conform to such principles. Indeed: 1.) it rejects the absolute nature of respect for life, or rather, it calls into doubt that the life of an innocent human being must be respected “always”, leaving open the possibility of exceptions; 2.) with regard to the importance of the care and accompaniment of psychiatric patients, it refers to the Belgian law on euthanasia, clearly opening the possibility for non-terminal psychiatric patients; 3.) it leaves the responsibility and the right to accept or reject the request for euthanasia (“medical act”) to the doctor, thereby excluding the hospital’s choice; 4.) it maintains the possibility of euthanasia within the Institute with the justification of enabling family members to avoid the effort of having to find another solution.

The report of the Apostolic Visitor, H.E. Bishop Jan Hendriks, also demonstrated no progress, since it shows the profound difficulty in maintaining the link between the works and the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity, since those responsible do not accept the commitment to finding a viable solution that avoids any form of responsibility for euthanasia on the part of the institution.

Therefore, at the end of this long and painful journey, and noting the lack of willingness to accept the Catholic Doctrine on euthanasia, it is announced, albeit with deep sadness, that the psychiatric hospitals run by the Association Provinciale des Frères de la Charité asbl in Belgium, henceforth, can no longer be considered Catholic institutions.

I gladly take this opportunity to confirm my feelings of religious respect.

Cardinal Luis F. Ladaria,  
sj Prefect

✠ Giacomo Morandi Titular  
Archbishop of Cerveteri  
Secretary

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## **Global pandemic and universal brotherhood: note on the Covid-19 emergency**

Pontifical Academy for Life

All humanity is being put to the test. The Covid-19 pandemic puts us in a situation of unprecedented, dramatic and global difficulty whose power to destabilize the plans we have for our lives is growing day by day. The pervasiveness of this threat calls into question aspects of our way of life that we have been taking for granted. We are living painfully a paradox that we would have never imagined: to survive the disease we must isolate ourselves from each other, but if we were ever to learn to live isolated from one another, we would quickly realize how essential for our lives is life with others.

In the very middle of our technological and managerial euphoria, we have found ourselves socially and technically unprepared for the spread of this contagion: it has been difficult for us to recognize and admit its impact. And now, we are rushing to limit its spread. But if we consider the existential destabilization that it is causing, we see similar unpreparedness—not to say a certain resistance—with respect to the recognition of our physical, cultural and political vulnerability in the face of the phenomenon. This destabilization is beyond the reach of science and of the technology of therapeutic devices. It would be unfair—and a mistake—to attribute the responsibility for this situation to scientists and technicians. At the same time, it is certainly true that greater depth of vision and the input that comes from more responsible reflection about the meaning and values of humanism has the same urgency as research on pharmaceuticals and vaccines. And not only that. Realizing this profundity and responsibility creates a context of cohesion and unity, of alliance and brotherhood, by reason of our shared humanity which, far from suppressing the contributions of men and women of science and government, greatly supports them and reaffirms their roles. Their dedication—to which is already owing the deserved and heartfelt gratitude of all—will certainly come through this time strengthened and appreciated.

In this context, the Pontifical Academy for Life, which by its institutional mandate promotes and supports the

alliance between science and ethics in a search for the best possible humanism, wishes to contribute its own reflections. Its intent is to locate certain elements of this situation within a renewed spirit that must nourish social relations and care for the person. The exceptional situation that today challenges the brotherhood of the *humana communitas* must finally transform itself into an occasion for this spirit of humanism to influence institutional culture at a regular pace: within individual peoples, and in the harmonious bonds between peoples.

### **Solidarity in vulnerability and in limitations.**

First, the pandemic highlights with unexpected harshness the precariousness that radically characterizes our human condition. In some regions of the world, this precariousness in individual and community existence is a daily experience due to poverty that does not allow everyone access to care, even if it is available, or to food in sufficient quantities, even if not lacking worldwide. In other parts of the world, the number of areas of uncertainty has been progressively reduced through advances in science and technology, to the point where we deceive ourselves by thinking that we are invulnerable or that we can find a technical solution for everything. Yet, however much effort we make, it has not been possible to control the pandemic that is underway, even in the most economically and technologically developed societies, where it has overwhelmed the capabilities of laboratories and health care facilities. Our optimistic projections about our scientific and technological capabilities have perhaps allowed us to imagine that we would be able to prevent the spread of a global epidemic of this magnitude, so much so that its possibility seemed increasingly remote. We have to recognize that this is not the case. And today we are even encouraged to think that, together with the extraordinary resources of protection and care that our progress produces, there are also side effects that show the weakness of our systems and we have not been vigilant enough with respect to them.

In any case, it is painfully obvious that we are not masters of our own fate. And science as well is showing its limitations. We already knew this: the conclusions of science are always partial, whether because it focuses—for convenience or for substantive reasons—on certain aspects of reality and leaves out others, or by reason of the nature of scientific theories, which are temporary in any case and subject to revision. But in the uncertainty that we have experienced in dealing with the Covid-19 virus, we have perceived with new clarity the gradualness and complexity that are part of scientific knowledge, which has its special requirements with respect to methodology and validation. Precariousness and the limits of our understanding also appear as global, real and shared; there are no real arguments that allow some civilizations or entities to consider themselves sovereign, better than others and able to isolate themselves when convenient. Now, we are close enough to “touch” our interconnectedness. Indeed, we are more interconnected by our exposure to vulnerability than by the efficiency of our tools. Contagion spreads very quickly from one country to another; what happens to one person becomes decisive for everyone. This situation makes more immediately evident what we knew but did not adequately internalize: for better or worse, the consequences of our actions always fall on others as well as on ourselves. There are no individual acts without social consequences. This applies to each individual, and to each community, society and population center. Reckless or foolish behavior, which seemingly affects only ourselves, becomes a threat to all who are exposed to the risk of contagion, perhaps without even affecting the actor. In this way we learn how everyone’s safety depends on everyone else’s.

The outbreak of epidemics is certainly a constant in human history. But we cannot hide the characteristics of today’s threat, which shows that it can adapt its pervasiveness to our current way of life very well and can circumvent protective measures. With our efficient and wide-ranging transportation and delivery network, we must be aware of the effects of our development models, which exploit hitherto inviolate forest areas where microorganisms unknown to the human immune system are found. We will probably find a solution to what is attacking us now. We will have to do so, however, with the knowledge that this type of threat is gathering long-term systemic potential.



Secondly, it will be better to address the problem with the best scientific and organizational resources that we have, avoiding ideological emphasis on the model of a society that equates salvation with health. Rather than being considered a defeat for science and technology—which must surely always excite us because of its progress, but at the same time it must make us humbly live with its limits—disease and death are a deep wound to our dearest and deepest affections, but it cannot however impose on us the abandonment of the rightness of those affections and the breakdown of affective bonds. Not even when we have to accept our inability to fulfill the love those affections and bonds contain within themselves. Even though our life is always mortal, we have the hope that such is not the case with the mystery of love in which life resides.

### **From de facto interconnection to chosen solidarity**

Never have we been called on to become aware of the reciprocity that is at the basis of our life as much as we have during this terrible emergency. Realizing that every life is a life in common, together we make up life, and life comes from “the other.” The resources of a community that refuses to consider human life as only a biological fact are a precious commodity which also accompanies, responsibly, all the other activities necessary for care. Perhaps we have thoughtlessly wasted this patrimony, whose value makes a difference in times like these, and have seriously undervalued the relational goods that it is able to share and distribute when emotional bonds and community spirit are sorely tried, precisely by our need for the very necessities that protect biological life.

Two rather crude ways of thinking that nevertheless have apparently become commonplace and reference points when we speak of freedom and rights tend to be brought up in discussions today. The first is, “My freedom ends where the other’s begins.” This formula, already dangerously ambiguous, is inadequate to the real understanding of experience, and not by accident is it affirmed by those who are in fact in a position of strength: our freedoms are always intertwined and overlapped, for better or for worse. Rather, we must learn to render our freedoms collaborative for the common good, to overcome the tendencies, which an epidemic can nourish, to see in the other an “infectious” threat from which to distance ourselves, an enemy from which to protect oneself. The second is, “My life depends solely on me.”—No, it doesn’t. We are part of humanity and humanity is part of us. We must accept this dependency and appreciate the responsibility that makes us participants and protagonists in it. There is no right that does not have a resultant corresponding duty: the coexistence of those who are free and equal is an exquisitely ethical question, not a technical one.

We are therefore called to recognize, with new and deep emotion, that we are entrusted to each other. Never as much as today has the caring relationship presented itself as the fundamental paradigm for human coexistence. The change from de facto interdependence to chosen solidarity is not an automatic transformation. But already we have various signs of a shift toward responsible actions and fraternal behavior. We see this with particular clarity in the commitment of health care personnel who generously devote all their energy, sometimes even at the risk of their own life or health, to alleviating the suffering of the sick. Their professionalism extends well beyond the confines of contractual obligations, thus testifying that work is above all an area of expression, of meaning and of values, not just “transactions” or “merchandise” to be exchanged for a price. But the same goes for researchers and scientists who put their skills at the service of others. Commitment to the sharing of forces and information has made possible the rapid establishment of cooperation among research center networks on experimental protocols to establish the safety and efficacy of pharmaceuticals.

As well, we must not forget all those other women and men who every day choose positively and courageously to guard and nourish brotherhood. It is the mothers and fathers of families, the elderly and the youth; it is the persons who, even in objectively difficult situations, continue to do their work honestly and conscientiously; it is the thousands of volunteers who have not stopped serving; it is the leaders of religious communities who

continue to serve those entrusted to their care, even at the cost of their lives, as has been revealed by the stories of so many priests who have died of Covid-19.

Politically, the current situation urges us to take a broad view. In international relations (and in the relations among the Members of the European Union) it is a short-sighted and illusory logic that seeks to give answers in terms of “national interests.” Without effective cooperation and effective coordination, which addresses the inevitable political, commercial, ideological and relational resistances firmly, viruses do not stop. Of course, these are very serious and burdensome decisions: we need an open vision and choices that do not always satisfy the immediate desires of individual populations. But given the markedly global current dynamic, our responses, to be effective, cannot be limited to what happens within one’s own borders.

### **Science, medicine and politics: the social link is put to the test**

Political decisions will certainly have to take scientific data into account, but they cannot not be limited to those factors. Allowing human phenomena to be interpreted solely on the basis of the categories of empirical sciences would mean producing answers on only a technical level. That would end in a logic that considers biological processes as the determinants of political choices, according to that dangerous path that bio-politics has taught us about. Nor is it respectful of the differences among cultures to understand them in a single technical-scientific way: the different connotations ascribed to health, disease, death and health care systems can constitute richness for all.

Instead, we need an alliance between science and humanism, which must be integrated and not separated from, or worse, set against each other. An emergency like that of Covid-19 is overcome with, above all, the antibodies of solidarity. Technical and clinical means of containment must be integrated into a broad and deep search for the common good, which will have to resist a tendency to direct benefits toward privileged persons and a neglect of vulnerable persons according to citizenship, income, politics or age.

This applies as well to all the choices made pursuant to a “care policy,” including those more closely connected with clinical practice. The emergency conditions in which many countries are finding themselves can lead to forcing doctors into dramatic and painful decisions, with respect to rationing limited resources not available to everyone at the same time. In such cases, after having done at an organization level everything possible to avoid rationing, it should always be borne in mind that decisions cannot be based on differences in the value of a human life and the dignity of every person, which are always equal and priceless. The decision concerns rather the use of treatments in the best possible way on the basis of the needs of the patient, that is, the severity of his or her disease and need for care, and the evaluation of the clinical benefits that treatment can produce, based on his or her prognosis. Age cannot be considered the only, and automatic, criterion governing choice. Doing so could lead to a discriminatory attitude toward the elderly and the very weak. In any case, it is necessary to formulate criteria, agreed upon as much as possible and based on solid arguments, to avoid arbitrariness or improvisation in emergency situations, as disaster medicine has taught us. Of course, it bears repeating: rationing must be the last option. The search for treatments that are equivalent to the extent possible, the sharing of resources, and the transfer of patients, are alternatives that must be carefully considered, within a framework of justice. Under adverse conditions, creativity has also furnished solutions to specific needs, such as the use of the same ventilator for multiple patients. In any case, we must never abandon the sick person, even when there are no more treatments available: palliative care, pain management and personal accompaniment are never to be omitted.

Even in terms of public health, the experience we are going through presents us with a serious test, even if it is one that can only be carried out in the future, in less troubled times. In question is the balance between a preventive approach and a therapeutic approach, between treatment of an individual and the collective

dimension (given the close correlation between health and personal rights, and public health). These are questions based on a deeper concern about the goals that medicine can set for itself, considering overall the role of health in social life with all its dimensions, such as education and care for the environment. One can glimpse the fruitfulness of a global bioethical perspective, which takes into account the multiplicity of interests at stake and the global scope of problems that is greater than an individualistic and reductive view of the issues of human life, health and care.

The risk of a global epidemic requires, in the context of responsibility, the introduction of global coordination in health care systems. Be aware that the strength of the process is determined by its weakest link, in terms of speed of diagnosis, rapidity of reaction and proportionate containment measures, adequate structures, systems for record keeping and ability to share information and data. It is necessary that the authorities who can deal with emergencies comprehensively, make decisions, and orchestrate communications, can also be relied upon as reference points to avoid the communication storms that have broken out (“infodemia”), with their inexact data and the fragmentary reports.

### **The obligation to protect the weak: Gospel faith put to the test**

In this scenario, particular attention should be paid to those who are most fragile, and we are thinking especially of the elderly and people with special needs. All other things being equal, the lethality of an epidemic varies in relation to the situation of the affected countries—and within each country—in terms of available resources, the quality and organization of the health care system, living conditions of the population, the ability to know and understand the characteristics of the phenomenon and to interpret information. There will be more deaths where already in everyday life people are not guaranteed simple basic health care.

This last consideration, too, on the greater negativity faced by the most fragile, urges us to pay a great deal of attention to how we talk about God’s action in this historical crisis. We cannot interpret the sufferings that humanity is going through according to the crude scheme that establishes a correspondence between “lèse-majesté” against the divine and a “sacred reprisal” undertaken by God. The mere fact that in such a scenario the weakest would suffer, precisely those whom He cares for the most and with whom He identifies (Mt 25:40-45) forestalls this possibility. Listening to Scripture and the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus accomplishes shows that being on the side of life, just as God commands us, is made real through gestures of humanity for “the other.” Gestures that, as we have seen, are not lacking in these days.

Every form of solicitude, every expression of benevolence is a victory of the Resurrected Jesus. Witness to this is the responsibility of Christians. Always and for everyone. At this juncture, for example, we cannot forget the other calamities that affect the most fragile, such as refugees and immigrants, or those peoples who continue to be plagued by conflict, war and hunger.

### **Intercessory prayer**

Where evangelical closeness meets a physical limit or hostile opposition, intercession—founded in the Crucifix—retains its unstoppable and decisive power, even should people seem not to live up to God’s blessing (Es 32: 9-13). This cry of intercession from the people of believers is the place where we can come to terms with the tragic mystery of death, fear of which is part of all our stories today. In the cross of Christ, it becomes possible to think of human existence as a great passage: the shell of our existence is like a chrysalis waiting for the liberation of the butterfly. The whole of creation, says St. Paul, is living “the pains of childbirth.”

It is in this light that we must understand the meaning of prayer. As an intercession for everyone and for all those who are in suffering—and Jesus has brought them as well into solidarity with us—and as a moment in which to learn from Him the way to live suffering as an expression of trust in the Father. It is this dialogue with

God that becomes a font that enables us to trust men as well. From here we gain the inner strength to exercise all our responsibility and make ourselves open to conversion, according to what reality makes us understand about how a more human coexistence is possible in our world. We remember the words of the Bishop of Bergamo, one of the most affected cities in Italy, Bishop Francesco Beschi: “Our prayers are not magic formulas. Faith in God does not magically solve our problems, rather it gives us an inner strength to exercise that commitment that one and all, in different ways, are called to live, especially those who are called to contain and overcome this evil.”

Even someone who does not share the profession of this faith can in any case draw from the witness of this universal brotherhood insights that point toward the best part of the human condition. Humanity that, for the sake of life as an unwaveringly common good, does not abandon the field in which human beings love and toil together earns the gratitude of all and the respect of God.

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## Rome Call for Artificial Intelligence Ethics

*Pontifical Academy for Life, February 28th, 2020*

The Pontifical Academy for Life, Microsoft, IBM, FAO, the Italia Government, today signed as first the “Call for an AI Ethics”, a document developed to support an ethical approach to Artificial Intelligence and promote a sense of responsibility among organizations, governments and institutions with the aim to create a future in which digital innovation and technological progress serve human genius and creativity and not their gradual replacement.

The sponsors of the call express their desire to work together, in this context and at a national and international level, to promote “algor-ethics”, namely the ethical use of AI as defined by the following principles: 1) Transparency: in principle, AI systems must be explainable; 2) Inclusion: the needs of all human beings must be taken into consideration so that everyone can benefit and all individuals can be offered the best possible conditions to express themselves and develop; 3) Responsibility: those who design and deploy the use of AI must proceed with responsibility and transparency; 4) Impartiality: do not create or act according to bias, thus safeguarding fairness and human dignity; 5) Reliability: AI systems must be able to work reliably; 6) Security and privacy: AI systems must work securely and respect the privacy of users. These principles are fundamental elements of good innovation.

First signatories: Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life (sponsor of the initiative); Mr. Brad Smith, President of Microsoft; Mr. John Kelly III, Executive Vice President of IBM, Mr. Dongyu Qu, General Director FAO; Mrs. Paola Pisano, Italian Government. To the ceremony has participated Mr. David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament.

During the morning Abp. Paglia has read *the speech prepared by Pope Francis*.

Msgr. Paglia said: “The Call’s intention is to create a movement that will widen and involve other players: public institutions, NGOs, industries and groups to set a course for developing and using technologies derived from AI. From this point of view, we can say that the first signing of this call is not a culmination, but a starting point for a commitment that appears even more urgent and important than ever before. Joining this initiative implies for the industries that sign it an engagement that also has a relevance in terms of costs and industrial contribution to developing and distributing their products. If the Academy feels called to intensify its efforts to facilitate the

knowledge and signature of other international actors, none the less the Call is a first step which is a prelude to others. The Call's text is also characterized by being a first attempt to formulate a set of ethical criteria with common reference points and values, offering a contribution to the development of a common language to interpret what is human".

"Microsoft is proud to be a signatory of the Rome Call for AI Ethics, which is an important step in promoting a thoughtful, respectful, and inclusive conversation on the intersection of digital technology and humanity. I am inspired by his Holiness' commitment and contributions to this important dialogue, and thank him, the Pontifical Academy for Life and the other representatives of the Holy See for today's announcement." – Brad Smith, President, Microsoft.

Mr. John Kelly III, Vice President of IBM has said: "AI is incredibly promising technology that can help us make the world smarter, healthier and more prosperous, but only if it is shaped at the outset by human interests and values. The Rome Call for AI Ethics reminds us that we have to choose carefully whom AI will benefit and we must make significant concurrent investments in people and skills. Society will have more trust in AI when people see it being built on a foundation of ethics, and that the companies behind AI are directly addressing questions of trust and responsibility."



[AI Rome Call for EthicsDownload](#)

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## **No Euthanasia, Yes Palliative Care: Position Paper of the Abrahamic Monotheistic Religions**

On October 28, 2019 in the Casina Pio IV (Pontifical Academy for Sciences, Vatican City), Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, and other Representatives, have signed the Position Paper Of The Abrahamic Monotheistic Religions On Matters Concerning The End-Of-Life.

The Position Paper was prepared by the Pontifical Academy for Life under the mandate of Pope Francis. On October 28th Pope Francis has received the main signers, the deputies of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, of the Patriarchate of Moscow and others from the Islam world, and the Jewish world, between the Chief Rabbi of Rome.

Excerpts from the Position Paper:

**"We encourage and support validated and professional palliative care everywhere and for everyone.** Even when efforts to continue staving off death seems unreasonably burdensome, we are morally and religiously duty-bound to provide comfort, effective pain and symptoms relief, companionship, care and spiritual assistance to the dying patient and to her/his family.

**We commend laws and policies** that protect the rights and the dignity of the dying patient, in order to avoid euthanasia and promote palliative care.

**We call upon all policy-makers and health-care providers** to familiarize themselves with this wide-ranging Abrahamic monotheistic perspective and teaching in order to provide the best care to dying patients and to their families who adhere to the religious norms and guidance of their respective religious traditions.

**We are committed to involving the other religions and all people of goodwill“.**



[Position Paper Abrahamic Monotheistic Religions on EuthanasiaDownload](#)

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## **Overlijden van Vincent Lambert - Gezamenlijke verklaring van de religieuze leiders van Reims**

De heer Vincent Lambert is overleden. Als verantwoordelijken voor de verschillende religies in de stad Reims bidden we voor onze stadgenoot. We doen dat al jaren, met veel van onze landgenoten die diep getroffen zijn door zijn lot. De bevelen hem aan bij de levende en barmhartige God, bij Hem die de mensen vanuit de dood tot het leven roept. We bidden voor de vrouw en de dochter van de heer Vincent Lambert, voor zijn ouders, zijn broers en zusters en voor al de zijnen. Dat zij door hun verdriet heen troost en hoop mogen vinden. Wij spreken tegenover hen ons broederlijk medegevoel uit.

We denken vandaag intens aan hen die de zorg voor de heer Lambert hadden: de artsen en de afdelingsmedewerkers van het ziekenhuis van Reims, en ook de advocaten en rechters die tot taak hadden helderheid te brengen in de situatie van de heer Lambert.

De situatie van de heer Lambert was eenmalig. De besluiten, die met betrekking tot hem genomen zijn, kunnen dus niet als zodanig worden overgenomen voor gevallen die schijnbaar gelijkaardig zijn. Gezien de debatten die hebben plaatsgevonden menen wij dat het nuttig is om de volgende punten naar voren te brengen in het licht van ons geloof in een God die schepper is en het leven geeft:

1. We erkennen zonder terughoudendheid dat het eigen is aan de waardigheid van ieder menselijk wezen om af te zien van een behandeling die geacht wordt nutteloos, of niet geproportioneerd te zijn of die het risico inhoudt dat zij een toestand van nog meer lijden kan veroorzaken, zolang als een dergelijk besluit het leven van niemand anders in gevaar brengt;
2. Wij menen dat het voor mensen mogelijk is elkaar te ondersteunen, elkaar te helpen, elkaar te begeleiden tijdens de meest pijnlijke momenten van het leven, zodat geen enkele burger in de verleiding komt om van de maatschappij te eisen dat zij zijn dood veroorzaakt;
3. Wij zouden onze medeburgers eraan willen herinneren dat het feit dat iemand van anderen afhankelijk wordt voor verzorging of voor de handelingen van het gewone dagelijkse leven niet betekent dat deze persoon zijn waardigheid verliest; we willen ons ervoor inzetten om bij te dragen tot een opwekking tot toewijding, edelmoedigheid en solidariteit voor personen die afhankelijk zijn, op grond van welke oorzaak dan ook en ook bij hun naasten die de verantwoordelijkheid voor de zorg dragen, hen die men tegenwoordig de 'mantelzorgers' noemt;
4. We willen allen danken die hebben bijgedragen aan het nadenken over de situatie van het levenseinde en over de uitzonderlijke situatie van mensen die zich in een toestand van zeer geringe

communicatiemogelijkheid bevinden, die noch helemaal vallen in de categorie van zieken, noch geheel in die van de mensen met een handicap. Zonder twijfel is nog medisch en filosofisch onderzoek nodig om hen op de beste manier te begeleiden. Een overweging aangaande de de praktijk van de reanimatie lijkt ons eveneens noodzakelijk. Het lijkt ons van groot belang dat verstandige en diepgaande discussies over deze medische en ethische kwesties worden voortgezet.

5. Wij geven uitdrukking aan ons vertrouwen in de artsen van ons land. Ons gemeenschappelijk vertrouwen in hun wetenschappelijke en menselijke capaciteiten is noodzakelijk opdat zij kunnen voortgaan met het nemen van de beste en meest wijze beslissingen, door in waarheid met de personen, die aan het einde van hun leven staan, in gesprek te gaan of met de naasten van hen die niet meer in staat zijn tot communiceren.
6. Omdat wij in het eeuwige leven geloven, verklaren we dat het leven van de mens veel meer is dan het lichamelijke leven, maar zich nu eenmaal wel afspeelt in de lichamelijke situatie. Wij willen onze diepe verbondenheid uitdrukken met al diegenen die hun naasten in beproeving bijstaan met fijngevoeligheid, edelmoedigheid, zonder iets terug te verwachten, in vreugde over hun lichamelijke aanwezigheid. We willen nogmaals onze dankbaarheid uitspreken aan het medische en verpleegkundige personeel van onze ziekenhuizen.

Ons land heeft zich tot nu toe moeite gegeven om een juiste weg te vinden om mensen aan het einde van hun leven en zij, die gedeeltelijk of geheel verstoken zijn van het vermogen tot communiceren, te begeleiden in de sterk technologische context waarin we leven.

We wensen dat ons land steeds meer een zorg zal weten te ontwikkelen die in staat is de therapeutische vooruitgang, de palliatieve zorg, een echte relationele beschikbaarheid van het verplegend personeel en een samenwerking met mantelzorgers en vrijwilligers tot een geheel te maken alsook een maatschappelijke zorg die in staat is om uitgesloten en verlaten personen op te nemen, opdat voor allen een samenleving in solidariteit en broederschap kan worden zeker gesteld.

Ondertekenaars:

Rabbijn Amar, Reims

Aomar Bendaoud, imam van de Grote Moskee van Reims

Dominee Xavier Langlois, van de Verenigde Protestantse Kerk te Reims

Dominee Pasca Geoffroy, van de Verenigde Protestantse Kerk te Reims

+ Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, aartsbisschop van Reims

+ Bruno Feillet, hulpbisschop van Reims

*Vertaling uit het Frans: dr. J.A. Raymakers*

Décès de Vincent Lambert – Déclaration commune des responsables religieux de Reims

*Diocese de Reims, 11 juli 2019*

Déclaration commune des responsables religieux rémois, à propos de la mort de M. Vincent Lambert

M. Vincent Lambert est mort. Responsables des différents cultes dans la ville de Reims, nous prions pour notre

concitoyen. Nous le faisons depuis des années, avec beaucoup de nos compatriotes profondément affectés par son sort. Nous le recommandons au Dieu vivant et miséricordieux, à celui qui appelle les êtres humains de la mort à la vie. Nous prions pour la femme et pour la fille de M. Vincent Lambert, pour ses parents, ses frères et ses sœurs, pour tous les siens. Qu'ils puissent trouver consolation et espérance par-delà leur chagrin. Nous leur exprimons notre fraternelle compassion.

Nous pensons fortement en ce jour à ceux qui ont eu à s'occuper de M. Lambert : les médecins et les équipes de l'hôpital de Reims, et aussi les avocats et les magistrats qui ont eu la responsabilité d'éclairer la situation de M. Lambert.

La situation de M. Lambert était singulière. Les décisions prises à son sujet ne peuvent donc être transposées telles quelles à des cas apparemment analogues. Au vu des débats qui ont eu lieu, nous pensons utile, dans la lumière de notre foi en Dieu qui crée et qui donne la vie, de rappeler les points suivants :

1. Nous reconnaissons sans réserve qu'il appartient à la dignité de tout être humain de renoncer à un traitement jugé inutile, disproportionné ou risquant de provoquer un état de souffrance supplémentaire, du moment qu'une telle décision ne met en danger la vie d'aucun autre ;
2. Nous croyons qu'il est possible aux êtres humains de se soutenir, de s'entraider, de s'accompagner dans les moments les plus douloureux de la vie, de sorte qu'aucun citoyen ne soit tenté d'exiger de la société qu'elle provoque sa mort ;
3. Nous voudrions rappeler à nos concitoyens que devenir dépendant des autres pour des soins ou pour les actes de la vie ordinaire ne signifie pas perdre sa dignité ; nous voulons œuvrer pour contribuer à susciter les dévouements, les générosités et les solidarités nécessaires auprès des personnes dépendantes, à quelque titre qu'elles le soient, et auprès de leurs proches qui en portent la responsabilité, ceux que l'on appelle aujourd'hui « les aidants » ;
4. Nous voulons remercier tous ceux qui ont contribué à la réflexion sur la situation de la fin de vie et sur la situation singulière des personnes en état pauci-relationnel, qui n'entrent ni tout à fait dans la catégorie des personnes malades ni tout à fait dans celle des personnes handicapées. Des recherches médicales et philosophiques sont sans doute encore nécessaires pour les accompagner au mieux. Une réflexion sur la pratique de la réanimation nous paraît également nécessaire. Poursuivre des débats prudents et approfondis sur ces questions médicales et éthiques nous paraît important.
5. Nous exprimons notre confiance aux médecins de notre pays. Notre confiance collective dans leurs capacités scientifiques et humaines est nécessaire pour qu'ils puissent continuer à prendre les décisions médicales les meilleures et les plus sages en dialoguant en vérité avec les personnes en fin de vie ou les proches des personnes devenues incapables de communiquer ;
6. Croyants en la vie éternelle, nous affirmons que la vie humaine est bien plus que la vie corporelle mais se joue pourtant dans la condition corporelle. Nous exprimons notre profonde union à tous ceux qui entourent leurs proches dans l'épreuve avec délicatesse, avec générosité, sans attendre de retour, en se réjouissant de leur présence corporelle. Nous redisons notre gratitude pour le personnel médical et soignant de nos hôpitaux.

Notre pays s'est efforcé jusqu'ici de trouver une voie juste pour accompagner au mieux, dans le contexte de haute technicité dans lequel nous vivons, les personnes en fin de vie et celles qui sont privées partiellement ou



totalement de capacités de communication.

Nous souhaitons que notre pays développe toujours davantage aussi bien le soin médical capable d'intégrer les progrès thérapeutiques, les soins palliatifs, une véritable disponibilité relationnelle des soignants et une collaboration des aidants et des bénévoles, que le soin social capable d'intégrer les exclus et les délaissés, afin de garantir à tous une vie commune dans la solidarité et la fraternité.

Signataires :

Rabbin Amar, de Reims

Aomar Bendaoud, imam de la Grande Mosquée de Reims

Pasteur Xavier Langlois, de l'Eglise Protestante Unie de France à Reims

Pasteur Pascal Geoffroy, de l'Eglise Protestante Unie de France à Reims

+ Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, archevêque de Reims

+ Bruno Feillet, évêque auxiliaire de Reims

*Engelse vertaling op ZENIT*

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## **Man en vrouw schiep hij hen. Naar een dialoog over de gendertheorie in het onderwijs**

### **“Male and female he created them”. Towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education**

Congregation for Catholic Education (for Educational Institutions)

Vatican City, June 10, 2019

#### **Introduction**

1. It is becoming increasingly clear that we are now facing with what might accurately be called an *educational crisis*, especially in the field of affectivity and sexuality. In many places, curricula are being planned and implemented which “allegedly convey a neutral conception of the person and of life, yet in fact reflect an anthropology opposed to faith and to right reason”. [1: Benedict XVI, *Address to Members of the Diplomatic Corps*, 10 January 2011.] The disorientation regarding anthropology which is a widespread feature of our cultural landscape has undoubtedly helped to destabilize the family as an institution, bringing with it a tendency to cancel out the differences between men and women, presenting them instead as merely the product of historical and cultural conditioning.

2. The context in which the *mission of education* is carried out is characterized by challenges emerging from varying forms of an ideology that is given the general name ‘gender theory’, which “denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programs and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time”. [2: Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, 19 March 2016, 56.]

3. It seems clear that this issue should not be looked at in isolation from the broader question of education in the call to love, [3: Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 22 November 1981, 6; Cf. John Paul II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, 2 February 1994, 16; Cf. John Paul II, *General Audience*, 8 April 1981 in *Insegnamenti*, IV/1 (1981), pp. 903-908.] which should offer, as the Second Vatican Council noted, “a positive and prudent education in sexuality” within the context of the inalienable right of all to receive “an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth”. [4: Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decl. On Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28 October 1965, 1.] The Congregation for Catholic Education has already offered some reflections on this theme in the document ‘Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education’. [5: Congregation For Catholic education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, Outlines for Sex Education, 1 November 1983.]

4. The Christian vision of anthropology sees sexuality as a fundamental component of one’s personhood. It is one of its mode of being, of manifesting itself, communicating with others, and of feeling, expressing and living human love. Therefore, our sexuality plays an integral part in the development of our personality and in the process of its education: “In fact, it is from [their] sex that the human person receives the characteristics which, on the biological, psychological and spiritual levels, make that person a man or a woman, and thereby largely condition his or her progress towards maturity and insertion into society”. [6: Congregation for The Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana, Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, 29 December 1975, 1.] As each person grows, “such diversity, linked to the complementarity of the two sexes, allows a thorough response to the design of God according to the vocation to which each one is called”. [7: *Educational Guidance in Human Love, Outlines for Sex Education*, 5.] In the light of this, “affective-sex education must consider the totality of the person and insist therefore on the integration of the biological, psycho-affective, social and spiritual elements”. [8: *Ibid.*, 35]

5. The Congregation for Catholic Education, as part of its remit, wishes to offer in this document some reflections which, it is hoped, can guide and support those who work in the education of young people, so as to help them address in a methodical way (and in the light of the universal vocation to love of the human person) the most debated questions around human sexuality. [9: Cf. *Ibid.*, 21-47, in which the Christian vision of sexuality is set out.] The methodology in mind is based on three guiding principles seen as best-suited to meet the needs of both individuals and communities: to *listen*, to *reason* and to *propose*. In fact, listening carefully to the needs of the other, combined with an understanding of the true diversity of conditions, can lead to a shared set of rational elements in an argument, and can prepare one for a Christian education rooted in faith that “throws a new light on everything, manifests God’s design for man’s total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human”. [10: Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965, 11.]

6. If we wish to take an approach to the question of gender theory that is based on the path of dialogue, it is vital to bear in mind the distinction between the ideology of gender on the one hand, and the whole field of research on gender that the human sciences have undertaken, on the other. While the ideologies of gender claim to respond, as Pope Francis has indicated, “to what are at times understandable aspirations”, they also seek “to assert themselves as absolute and unquestionable, even dictating how children should be raised”, [11: *Amoris Laetitia*, 56.] and thus preclude dialogue. However, other work on gender has been carried out which tries instead to achieve a deeper understanding of the ways in which sexual difference between men and women is lived out in a variety of cultures. It is in relation to this type of research that we should be open to listen, to reason and to propose.

7. Against this background, the Congregation for Catholic Education has seen fit to offer this text to all who have a special interest in education, and to those whose work is touched by the question of gender. It is intended for the educational community involved in Catholic schools, and for all who, animated by the Christian vision of life, work in other types of school. The document is offered for use by parents, students, school leaders and personnel, bishops, priests, religious, ecclesial movements, associations of the lay faithful, and other relevant bodies.

## Listening

### **Brief Overview**

8. The primary outlook needed for anyone who wishes to take part in *dialogue* is *listening*. It is necessary, above all, to listen carefully to and understand cultural events of recent decades. The 20th century brought new anthropological theories and with them the beginnings of gender theory. These were based on a reading of sexual differentiation that was strictly sociological, relying on a strong emphasis on the freedom of the individual. In fact, around the middle of the last century, a whole series of studies were published which accentuated time and again the role of external conditioning, including its influence on determining personality. When such studies were applied to human sexuality, they often did so with a view to demonstrating that sexuality identity was more a social construct than a given natural or biological fact.

9. These schools of thought were united in denying the existence of any original given element in the individual, which would precede and at the same time constitute our personal identity, forming the necessary basis of everything we do. According to such theories, the only thing that matters in personal relationships is the affection between the individuals involved, irrespective of sexual difference or procreation which would be seen as irrelevant in the formation of families. Thus, the institutional model of the family (where a structure and finality exist independent of the subjective preferences of the spouses) is bypassed, in favor of a vision of family that is purely contractual and voluntary.

10. Over the course of time, gender theory has expanded its field of application. At the beginning of the 1990s, its focus was upon the possibility of the individual determining his or her own sexual tendencies without having to take account of the reciprocity and complementarity of male-female relationships, nor of the procreative end of sexuality. Furthermore, it was suggested that one could uphold the theory of a radical separation between gender and sex, with the former having priority over the latter. Such a goal was seen as an important stage in the evolution of humanity, in which “a society without sexual differences” could be envisaged. [12: *Amoris Laetitia*, 56.]

11. In this *cultural context*, it is clear that *sex* and *gender* are no longer synonyms or interchangeable concepts since they are used to describe two different realities. Sex is seen as defining which of the two biological categories (deriving from the original feminine-masculine dyad) one belonged. Gender, on the other hand, would be the way in which the differences between the sexes are lived in each culture. The problem here does not lie in the distinction between the two terms, which can be interpreted correctly, but in the *separation of sex from gender*. This separation is at the root of the distinctions proposed between various “sexual orientations” which are no longer defined by the sexual difference between male and female, and can then assume other forms, determined solely by the individual, who is seen as radically autonomous. Further, the concept of gender is seen as dependent upon the subjective mindset of each person, who can choose a gender not corresponding to his or her biological sex, and therefore with the way others see that person (*transgenderism*).

12. In a growing contraposition between nature and culture, the propositions of gender theory converge in the concept of 'queer', which refers to dimensions of sexuality that are extremely fluid, flexible, and as it were, This culminates in the assertion of the complete emancipation of the individual from any *a priori* given sexual definition, and the disappearance of classifications seen as overly rigid. This would create a new range of nuances that vary in degree and intensity according to both sexual orientation and the gender one has identified oneself with.

13. The duality in male-female couples is furthermore seen as in conflict with the idea of "polyamory", that is relationships involving more than two. Because of this, it is claimed that the duration of relationships, as well as their binding nature, should be flexible, depending on the shifting desires of the individuals concerned. Naturally, this has consequences for the sharing of the responsibilities and obligations inherent in maternity and paternity. This new range of relationships become 'kinship'. These are: based upon desire or affection, often marked by a limited time span that is determined, ethically flexible, or even (sometimes by explicit mutual consent) without any hope of long-term meaning. What counts is the absolutely free self-determination of each individual and the choices he or she makes according to the circumstances of each relationship of affectivity.

14. This has led to calls for public recognition of the right to choose one's gender, and of a plurality of new types of unions, in direct contradiction of the model of marriage as being between one man and one woman, which is portrayed as a vestige of patriarchal societies. The ideal presented is that the individual should be able to choose his or her own status, and that society should limit itself to guaranteeing this right, and even providing material support, since the minorities involved would otherwise suffer negative social discrimination. The claim to such rights has become a regular part of political debate and has been included in documents at an international level, and in certain pieces of national legislation.

#### **Points of Agreement**

15. From the whole field of writing on gender theory, there have however emerged some positions that could provide points of agreement, with a potential to yield growth in mutual understanding. For instance, educational programs on this area often share a laudable desire to combat all expressions of unjust discrimination, a requirement that can be shared by all sides. Such pedagogical material acknowledges that there have been delays and failings in this regard. [13: Cf. Francis, *Address to the Participants in the General Assembly of the Members of the Pontifical Academy for Life*, 5 October 2017.] Indeed, it cannot be denied that through the centuries forms of unjust discrimination have been a sad fact of history and have also had an influence within the Church. This has brought a certain rigid *status quo*, delaying the necessary and progressive inculturation of the truth of Jesus' proclamation of the *equal dignity of men and women*, and has provoked accusations of a sort of masculinist mentality, veiled to a greater or lesser degree by religious motives.

16. Another position held in common is the need to educate children and young people *to respect every person* in their particularity and difference so that no one should suffer bullying, violence, insults or unjust discrimination based on their specific characteristics (such as special needs, race, religion, sexual tendencies, etc.). Essentially, this involves educating for active and responsible citizenship, which is marked by the ability to welcome all legitimate expressions of human personhood with respect.

17. A further positive development in anthropological understanding also present in writing on gender has centered on *the values of femininity*. For example, women's 'capacity for the other' favours a more realistic and mature reading of evolving situations, so that "a sense and a respect for what is concrete develop in her, opposed to abstractions which are so often fatal for the existence of individuals and society". [14: Congregation For The Doctrine Of the Faith, *Letter to Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, 31 May 2004, 13.] This is a contribution that enriches human relationships and

spiritual values “beginning with daily relationships between people”. Because of this, society owes a significant debt to the many women “who are involved in the various *areas of education* extending well beyond the family: nurseries, schools, universities, social service agencies, parishes, associations and movements”. [15: John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 29 June 1995, 9.]

18. Women have a unique understanding of reality. They possess a capacity to endure adversity and “to keep life going even in extreme situations” and hold on “tenaciously to the future”. [16: Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, *Letter to Bishops*, 13.] This helps explain why “wherever the work of education is called for, we can note that women are ever ready and willing to give themselves generously to others, especially in serving the weakest and most defenseless. In this work, they exhibit a kind of *affective, cultural and spiritual motherhood* which has inestimable value for the development of individuals and the future of society. At this point, how can I fail to mention the witness of so many Catholic women and Religious Congregations of women from every continent who have made education, particularly the education of boys and girls, their principal apostolate?”. [17: John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 29 June 1995, 9.]

### **Critique**

19. Nonetheless, real-life situations present gender theory with some valid *points of criticism*. Gender theory (especially in its most radical forms) speaks of a gradual process of denaturalization, that is a move away from *nature* and towards an absolute option for the decision of the feelings of the human subject. In this understanding of things, the view of both sexuality identity and the family become subject to the same ‘liquidity’ and ‘fluidity’ that characterize other aspects of post-modern culture, often founded on nothing more than a confused concept of freedom in the realm of feelings and wants, or momentary desires provoked by emotional impulses and the will of the individual, as opposed to anything based on the truths of existence.

20. The underlying presuppositions of these theories can be traced back to a *dualistic anthropology*, separating body (reduced to the status of inert matter) from human will, which itself becomes an absolute that can manipulate the body as it pleases. This combination of physicalism and voluntarism gives rise to relativism, in which everything that exists is of equal value and at the same time undifferentiated, without any real order or purpose. In all such theories, from the most moderate to the most radical, there is agreement that one’s gender ends up being viewed as more important than being of male or female sex. The effect of this move is chiefly to create a cultural and ideological revolution driven by relativism, and secondarily a juridical revolution, since such beliefs claim specific rights for the individual and across society.

21. In practice, the advocacy for the different identities often presents them as being of completely equal value compared to each other. This, however, actually negates the relevance of each one. This has particular importance for the question of sexual difference. In fact, the generic concept of “non-discrimination” often hides an ideology that denies the difference as well as natural reciprocity that exists between men and women. “Instead of combatting wrongful interpretations of sexual difference that would diminish the fundamental importance of that difference for human dignity, such a proposal would simply eliminate it by proposing procedures and practices that make it irrelevant for a person’s development and for human relationships. But the utopia of the ‘neuter’ eliminates both human dignity in sexual distinctiveness and the personal nature of the generation of new life”. [18: Francis, *Address to the Participants in the General Assembly of the Members of the Pontifical Academy for Life*, 5 October 2017, 3.] The anthropological basis of the concept of family is thus emptied of meaning.

22. This ideology inspires educational programmes and legislative trends that promote ideas of personal identity and affective intimacy that make a radical break with the actual *biological difference* between male and female. Human identity is consigned to the individual’s choice, which can also change in time. These ideas are the

expression of a widespread way of thinking and acting in today's culture that confuses "genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily as if there were no truths, values, and principles to provide guidance, and everything were possible and permissible". [19: *Amoris Laetitia*, 34.]

23. The Second Vatican Council, wishing to express the Church's view of the human person, stated that "though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition, he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator". [20: *Gaudium et Spes*, 14.] Because of this dignity, "man is not wrong when he regards himself as superior to bodily concerns, and as more than a speck of nature or a nameless constituent of the city of man". [21: *Gaudium et Spes*, 14.] Therefore, "the expressions 'the order of nature' and 'the order of biology' must not be confused or regarded as identical, the 'biological order' does indeed mean the same as the order of nature but only in so far as this is accessible to methods of empirical and descriptive natural science, and not as a specific order of existence, with an obvious relationship to the First Cause, to God the Creator God". [22: K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1981, pp.56-57.]

## Reasoning

### **Rational Arguments**

24. Taking into account our historical overview, together with certain points of agreement identified, and the critique that has been made of gender theory, we can now move to some considerations on the issue based on the light of reason. In fact, there are rational arguments to support the *centrality of the body* as an integrating element of personal identity and family relationships. The body is subjectivity that communicates identity of being. [23: Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, 6 August 1993, 48.] In the light of this reality, we can understand why the data of biological and medical science shows that 'sexual dimorphism' (that is, the sexual difference between men and women) can be demonstrated scientifically by such fields as genetics, endocrinology, and neurology. From the point of view of genetics, male cells (which contain XY chromosomes) differ, from the very moment of conception, from female cells (with their XX chromosomes). That said, in cases where a person's sex is not clearly defined, it is medical professionals who can make a therapeutic intervention. In such situations, parents cannot make an arbitrary choice on the issue, let alone society. Instead, *medical science* should act with purely therapeutic ends, and intervene in the least invasive fashion, on the basis of objective parameters and with a view to establishing the person's constitutive identity.

25. The *process of identifying sexual identity* is made more difficult by the fictitious construct known as "gender neuter" or "third gender", which has the effect of obscuring the fact that a person's sex is a structural determinant of male or female identity. Efforts to go beyond the constitutive male-female sexual difference, such as the ideas of "intersex" or "transgender", lead to a masculinity or femininity that is ambiguous, even though (in a self-contradictory way), these concepts themselves actually presuppose the very sexual difference that they propose to negate or supersede. This oscillation between male and female becomes, at the end of the day, only a 'provocative' display against so-called 'traditional frameworks', and one which, in fact, ignores the suffering of those who have to live situations of sexual indeterminacy. Similar theories aim to annihilate the concept of 'nature', (that is, everything we have been given as a pre-existing foundation of our being and action in the world), while at the same time implicitly reaffirming its existence.

26 Philosophical analysis also demonstrates that *sexual difference* between male and female is constitutive of human identity. Greek and Roman thinkers posit *essence* as the aspect of being that transcends, brings together and harmonizes male-female difference within the unity of the *human person*. Within the tradition of

hermeneutical and phenomenological philosophy, both sexual distinction and complementarity are interpreted in symbolic and metaphorical terms. Sexual difference in relationships is seen as constitutive of personal identity, whether this be at the level of the horizontal (in the *dyad* “man-woman”) or vertical (in the *triad* “man-woman-God”). This applies equally to interpersonal “I-You” male-female relationships and to family relationships (You-I-We).

27. The *formation of one’s identity* is itself based on the principle of otherness since it is precisely the direct encounter between another “you” *who is not me* that enables me to recognize the essence of the “I” who is me. Difference, in fact, is a condition of *all cognition*, including cognition of one’s. In the family, knowledge of one’s mother and father allows the child to construct his or her own sexual identity and difference. Psychoanalytic theory demonstrates the *tri-polar value* of child-parent relationships, showing that sexual identity can only fully emerge in the light of the synergetic comparison that sexual differentiation creates.

28. The physiological *complementarity* of male-female sexual difference assures the necessary conditions for procreation. In contrast, only recourse to reproductive technology can allow one of the partners in a relationship of two persons of the same sex to generate offspring, using ‘in vitro’ fertilization and a surrogate mother. However, the use of such technology is not a replacement for natural conception, since it involves the manipulation of human embryos, the fragmentation of parenthood, the instrumentalization and/or commercialization of the human body as well as the reduction of a baby to an object in the hands of science and technology. [24: Cf. Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and the Dignity of Procreation, *Donum Vitae*, 22 February 1987, 4]

29. In so far as this issue relates to the world of education, it is clear that by its very nature, education can help lay the foundations for peaceful dialogue and facilitate a fruitful meeting together of peoples and a meeting of minds. Further, it would seem that the prospect of a broadening of reason to include the *dimension of the transcendent* is not of secondary importance. The dialogue between Faith and Reason, “if it does not want to be reduced to a sterile intellectual exercise, it must begin from the present concrete situation of humanity and upon this develop a reflection that draws from the ontological-metaphysical truth”. [25: Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants of the sixth European Symposium of University Professors*, Rome, 7 June 2008.] The evangelizing mission of the Church to men and women is carried out within this horizon.

## Proposing

### **Christian Anthropology**

30. The Church, mother and teacher, does more than simply listen. Remaining rooted in her original mission, and at the same time always open to the contribution of reason, she puts herself at the service of the community of peoples, offering it a way of living. It is clear that if we are to provide well-structured educational programmes that are coherent with the true nature of human persons (with a view to guiding them towards a full actualisation of their sexual identity within the context of the vocation of self-giving), it is not possible to achieve this without a clear and convincing *anthropology* that gives a meaningful foundation to sexuality and affectivity. The first step in this process of throwing light on anthropology consists in recognising that “man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will”. [26: Benedict XVI, *Address at the Reichstag Building*, Berlin, 22 September 2011.] This is the fulcrum on which to support a human ecology that moves from the “respect for our dignity as human beings” and from the necessary relationship of our life to “moral law, which is inscribed into our nature”. [27: Francis, Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home *Laudato Si’*, 24 May 2015, 154-155.]

31. Christian anthropology has its roots in the narrative of human origins that appears in the Book of Genesis, where we read that “God created man in his own image [...] male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1,27) These words capture not only the essence of the story of creation but also that of the life-giving relationship between men and women, which brings them into intimate union with God. The *self* is completed by the one who is *other than the self*, according to the specific identity of each person, and both have a point of encounter forming a dynamic of reciprocity which is derived from and sustained by the Creator.

32. The Holy Scripture reveals the wisdom of the Creator’s design, which “has assigned as a task to man his body, his masculinity and femininity; and that in masculinity and femininity he, in a way, assigned to him as a task his humanity, the dignity of the person, and also the clear sign of the interpersonal communion in which man fulfils himself through the authentic gift of himself “. [28: John Paul II, *General Audience*, 8 April 1981 in *Insegnamenti*, IV/1 (1981), p. 904.] Thus, *human nature* must be understood on the basis of the *unity of body and soul*, far removed from any sort of physicalism or naturalism, since “in the unity of his spiritual and biological inclinations and of all the other specific characteristics necessary for the pursuit of his end”. [29: *Veritatis Splendor*, 50.]

33. This “unified totality” [30: *Veritatis Splendor*, 50.] integrates the vertical dimension (human communion with God) with the horizontal dimension constituted by the interpersonal communion that men and woman are called to live. [31: “Man and woman constitute two modes of realising, on the part of the human creature, a determined participation in the Divine Being: they are created in the ‘image and likeness of God’ and they fully accomplish such vocation not only as single persons, but also as couples, which are communities of love. Oriented to unity and fecundity, the married man and woman participate in the creative love of God, living in communion with Him through the other.” *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education*, 26. See also Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*, 28 October 2013, 35-36.] One’s identity as a human person comes to authentic maturity to the extent that one opens up to others, for the very reason that “in the configuration of our own mode of being, whether as male or female, is not simply the result of biological or genetic factors, but of multiple elements having to do with temperament, family history, culture, experience, education, the influence of friends, family members and respected persons, as well as other formative situations”. [32: *Amoris Laetitia*, 286.] In reality, “the essential fact is that the human person becomes himself only with the other. The ‘I’ becomes itself only from the ‘thou’ and from the ‘you’. It is created for dialogue, for synchronic and diachronic communion. It is only the encounter with the ‘you’ and with the ‘we’ that the ‘I’ opens to itself “. [33: Benedict XVI, *Address to the General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference*, 27 May 2010.]

34. There is a need to reaffirm the metaphysical roots of sexual difference, as an anthropological refutation of attempts to negate the male-female duality of human nature, from which the family is generated. The denial of this duality not only erases the vision of human beings as the fruit of an act of creation but creates the idea of the human person as a sort of abstraction who “chooses for himself what his nature is to be. Man and woman in their created state as complementary versions of what it means to be human are disputed. But if there is no pre-ordained duality of man and woman in creation, then neither is the family any longer a reality established by creation. Likewise, the child has lost the place he had occupied hitherto and the dignity pertaining to him”. [34: Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2012.]

35. Seen from this perspective, education on sexuality and affectivity must involve each person in a process of learning “with perseverance and consistency, the meaning of his or her body” [35: *Amoris Laetitia*, 151.] in the full original truth of masculinity and femininity. It means “learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning [...] Also, valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognise myself in an encounter with someone who is different [...] and find mutual



enrichment". [36: *Laudato Si'*, 155.] Therefore, in the light of a *fully human and integral ecology*, women and men will understand the real meaning of sexuality and genitality in terms of the intrinsically relational and communicative intentionality that both informs their bodily nature and moves each one towards the other mutually.

### **The Family**

36. The family is the natural place for the relationship of reciprocity and communion between man and woman to find its fullest realisation. For it is in the family that man and woman, united by a free and fully conscious *pact of conjugal love*, can live out "a totality in which all the elements of the person enter – appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will". [37: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1643] The family is "an anthropological fact, and consequently a social, cultural fact". On the other hand, to "qualify it with ideological concepts which are compelling at only one moment in history, and then decline" [38: Francis, *Address to Participants in the International Colloquium on the Complementarity Between Men and Women Sponsored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, 17 November 2014, 3.] would mean a betrayal of its true significance. The family, seen as a natural social unit which favours the maximum realisation of the reciprocity and complementarity between men and women, precedes even the socio-political order of the State whose legislative freedom must take it into account and give it proper recognition.

37. Reason tells us that two fundamental rights, which stem from the very nature of the family, must always be guaranteed and protected. Firstly, the family's right to be recognised as the primary pedagogical environment for the educational formation of children. This "primary right" finds its most concrete expression in the "most grave duty" [39: *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1136; cf. *Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches*, can. 627.] of parents to take responsibility for the "well-rounded personal and social education of their children", [40: *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3.] including their sexual and affective education, "within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving" [41: *Amoris Laetitia*, 280.]. This is at once an *educational right and responsibility* that is "essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others". [42: *Familiaris Consortio*, 36.]

38. Children enjoy another right which is of equal importance: to "grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's development and emotional maturity" and "continuing to grow up and mature in a correct relationship represented by the masculinity and femininity of a father and a mother and thus preparing for affective maturity". [43: Francis, *Address to Members of the Delegation of the International Catholic Child Bureau*, 11 April 2014.] It is precisely within the *nucleus of the family unit* that children can learn how to recognise the value and the beauty of the differences between the two sexes, along with their equal dignity, and their reciprocity at a biological, functional, psychological and social level. "Faced with a culture that largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something common place, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure, the educational service of parents must aim firmly at a training in the area of sex that is truly and fully personal: for sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person – body, emotions and soul – and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love". [44: *Familiaris Consortio*, 37.] Of course, such rights exist hand in hand with all the other fundamental rights of the human person, especially those concerning freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Wherever such things are held in common, those involved in education can find room for collaboration that is fruitful for all.

### **The School**

39. The primacy of the family in educating children is supplemented by the subsidiary role of schools.

Strengthened by its roots in the Gospel, “The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons. ‘The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ’s teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school’. This affirmation, stressing man’s vital relationship with Christ, reminds us that it is in His person that the fullness of the truth concerning man is to be found. For this reason the Catholic school, in committing itself to the development of the whole man, does so in obedience to the solicitude of the Church, in the awareness that all human values find their fulfilment and unity in Christ. This awareness expresses the centrality of the human person in the educational project of the Catholic school”. [45: Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 28 December 1997, 9.]

40. The Catholic school should be an educating community in which the human person can express himself and grow in his or her humanity, in a process of relational dialogue, interacting in a constructive way, exercising tolerance, understanding different points of view and creating trust in an atmosphere of authentic harmony. Such a school is truly an “*educating community*, a place of differences living together in harmony. The school community is a place for encounter and promoting participation. It dialogues with the family, which is the primary community to which the students that attend school belong. The school must respect the family’s culture. It must listen carefully to the needs that it finds and the expectations that are directed towards it”. [46: *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, 58.] In this way, girls and boys are accompanied by a community that teaches them “to overcome their individualism and discover, in the light of faith, their specific vocation to live responsibly in a community with others”. [47: Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, 19 March 1977, 45.]

41. Christians who live out their vocation to educate in schools which are not Catholic can also offer witness to, serve, and promote the truth about the human person. In fact, “the integral formation of the human person, which is the purpose of education, includes the development of all the human faculties of the students, together with preparation for professional life, formation of ethical and social awareness, becoming aware of the transcendental, and religious education”. [48: Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in School: Witnesses to Faith*, 15 October 1982, 17.] *Personal witness*, when joined with professionalism, contributes greatly to the achievement of these objectives.

42. *Education in affectivity* requires language that is appropriate as well as measured. It must above all take into account that, while children and young people have not yet reached full maturity, they are preparing with great interest to experience all aspects of life. Therefore, it is necessary to help students “to develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform sexuality”. [49: *Amoris Laetitia*, 281.] In the face of a continuous bombardment of messages that are ambiguous and unclear, and which end up creating emotional disorientation as well as impeding psycho-relational maturity, young people “should be helped to recognise and seek out positive influences, while shunning the things that cripple their capacity for love”. [50: *Amoris Laetitia*, 281.]

### **Society**

43. An overall perspective on the situation of contemporary society must form a part of the educational process. The *transformation of social and interpersonal relationships* “has often waved ‘the flag of freedom’, but it has, in reality, brought spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. It is ever more evident that the decline of the culture of marriage is associated with increased poverty and a host of other social ills that disproportionately affect women, children and the elderly. It is always they who suffer the most in this crisis”. [51: Francis, *Address to Participants in the International Colloquium on the Complementarity Between Men and Women Sponsored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, 17 November 2014, 2.]

44. In the light of all of this, the family must not be left to face the challenges of educating the young on its own. The Church, for its part, continues to support families and young people within communities that are open and welcoming. Schools and local communities are called, in particular, to carry out an important mission here, although they do not substitute the role of parents but complement it. [52: Cf. *Amoris Laetitia*, 84.] The notable urgency of the challenges faced by the work of human formation should act as stimulus towards reconstructing the *educational alliance between family, school and society*.

45. It is widely acknowledged that this educational alliance has entered into crisis. There is an urgent need to promote a new alliance that is genuine and not simply at the level of bureaucracy, a shared project that can offer a “positive and prudent sexual education” [53: *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1.] that can harmonise the primary responsibility of parents with the work of teachers. We must create the right conditions for a constructive encounter between the various actors involved, making for an atmosphere of transparency where all parties constantly keep others informed of what each is doing, facilitating maximum involvement and thus avoiding the unnecessary tensions that arise through misunderstandings caused by lack of clarity, information or competency.

46. Across this educational alliance, pedagogical activity should be informed by the *principle of subsidiarity*: “All other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities *in the name of the parents, with their consent* and, to a certain degree, *with their authorization*”. [54: John Paul II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, 2 February 1994, 16; cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Human Sexuality: Truth and Meaning. Educational Guidelines in the Family*, 8 December 1995, 23.] If they succeed in working together, family, school and the broader society can produce educational programmes on affectivity and sexuality that respect each person’s own stage of maturity regarding these areas and at the same time promote respect for the body of the other person. They would also take into account the physiological and psychological specificity of young people, as well as the phase of neurocognitive growth and maturity of each one, and thus be able to accompany them in their development in a healthy and responsible way.

### **Forming Formators**

47. All who work in human formation are called to exercise great responsibility in the work of effectively implementing the pedagogical projects in which they are involved. If they are people of personal maturity and balance who are well-prepared, this can have a strongly positive influence on students. [55: Cf. *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education*, 79.] Therefore, it is important that their own formation includes not only professional qualifications but also cultural and spiritual preparedness. The *education of the human person*, especially developmentally, requires great care and ongoing formation. Simply repeating the standard points of a discipline is not enough. Today’s educators are expected to be able “to accompany their students towards lofty and challenging goals, cherish high expectations for them, involve and connect students to each other and the world”. [56: Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Today and Tomorrow. A Renewing Passion*, Vatican City, 2014, Chapter II, 7.]

48. School managers, teaching staff and personnel all share the responsibility of both guaranteeing delivery of a high-quality service coherent with the Christian principles that lie at the heart of their educational project, as well as interpreting the challenges of their time while giving the daily witness of their understanding, objectivity and prudence. [57: Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in the Catholic School. A Mission Shared by Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful*, 8 September 2007, 34-37.] It is a commonly-accepted fact that “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”. [58: Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, 41.] The *authority of an educator* is therefore built upon the concrete combination “of a general formation, founded on a positive and professional constructive concept of life, and of constant effort in realising it. Such a formation goes

beyond the purely necessary professional training and addresses the more intimate aspects of the personality, including the religious and the spiritual". [59: *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, 80.]

49. When the 'formation of formators' is undertaken on the basis of the Christian principles, it has as its objective not only the formation of individual teachers but the building up and consolidation of an entire *educational community* through a fruitful exchange between all involved, one that has both didactic and emotional dimensions. Thus, dynamic relationships grow between educators, and professional development is enriched by well-rounded personal growth, so that the work of teaching is carried out at the service of humanization. Therefore, Catholic educators need to be sufficiently prepared regarding the intricacies of the various questions that gender theory brings up and be fully informed about both current and proposed legislation in their respective jurisdictions, aided by persons who are qualified in this area, in a way that is balanced and dialogue-orientated. In addition, university-level institutes and centres of research are called to offer their own specific contribution here, so that adequate, up-to-date and life-long learning on this topic is always made available to educators.

50. Regarding the specific task of education in human love, undertaken "with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching", [60: *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1.] formators need to have "a suitable and serious psycho-pedagogic training which allows the seizing of particular situations which require a special solicitude". [61: *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, 81.] As a consequence, "a clear vision of the situation is required because the method adopted not only gradually conditions the success of this delicate education, but also conditions cooperation between the various people in responsibility". [62: *Ibid.*, 83.]

51. The autonomy and freedom of teaching is recognised today in many legal systems. In such a context, schools can collaborate with Catholic institutes of higher education to develop a deepened understanding of the various aspects of education in sexuality, with the further aim of creating new teaching materials, pedagogic reference works and teaching manuals that are based on the "Christian vision of man and women". [63: *Ibid.*, 22.] To this end, pedagogues, those who work in teacher-training and experts on literature for children and adolescents alike can all contribute to the creation of a body of innovative and creative tools that, in the face of other visions that are partial or distorted, offer a solid and integrated education of the human person from infancy onwards. Against the background of the renewal of the education alliance, collaboration at local, national and international level between all parties involved must not limit itself to sharing of ideas or useful swapping of best practice but should be made available as a key means of permanent formation of educators themselves.

## Conclusions

52. In conclusion, the *path of dialogue*, which involves listening, reasoning and proposing, appears the most effective way towards a positive transformation of concerns and misunderstandings, as well as a resource that in itself can help develop a network of relationships that is both more open and more human. In contrast, although ideologically-driven approaches to the delicate questions around gender proclaim their respect for diversity, they actually run the risk of viewing such difference as static realities and end up leaving them isolated and disconnected from each other.

53. The Christian educational proposal fosters deeper dialogue, true to its objective "to promote the realisation of man and woman through the development of all their being, incarnate spirits, and of the gifts of nature and of grace by which they are enriched by God". [64: *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, 21.] This requires a

sincere effort to *draw closer to the other* and it can be a natural antidote to the “throw-away” and isolation culture. In this way, we restate that “the original dignity of every man and woman is therefore inalienable and inaccessible to any power or ideology”. [65: Francis, *Address to the Delegation from the ‘Dignitatis Humanae’ Institute*, 7 December 2013.]

54. Catholic educators are called to go beyond all ideological reductionism or homologizing relativism by remaining faithful to their own gospel-based identity, in order to *transform positively the challenges of their times into opportunities* by following the path of listening, reasoning and proposing the Christian vision, while giving witness by their very presence, and by the consistency of their words and deeds [66: Cf. *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, conclusion.]. Formators have the attractive educational mission to “teach them sensitivity to different expressions of love, mutual concern and care, loving respect and deeply meaningful communication. All of these prepare them for an integral and generous gift of self that will be expressed, following a public commitment, in the gift of their bodies. Sexual union in marriage will thus appear as a sign of an all-inclusive commitment, enriched by everything that has preceded it”. [67: *Amoris Laetitia*, 283.]

55. The culture of dialogue does not in any way contradict the legitimate aspirations of Catholic schools to maintain their own vision of human sexuality, in keeping with the right of families to freely base the education of their children upon an *integral anthropology*, capable of harmonizing the human person’s physical, psychic and spiritual identity. In fact, a democratic state cannot reduce the range of education on offer to a single school of thought, all the more so in relation to this extremely delicate subject, which is concerned on the one hand with the fundamentals of human nature, and on the other with natural rights of parents to freely choose any educational model that accords with the dignity of the human person. Therefore, every educational institute should provide itself with organizational structures and didactic programmes that ensure these parental rights are fully and concretely respected. If this is the case, the Christian pedagogy on offer will be able to provide a solid response to anthropologies characterized by fragmentation and provisionality.

56. The programmes dealing with formation in affectivity and sexuality offered by Catholic centres of education must take into consideration the age-group of the students being taught and treat each person with the maximum of respect. This can be achieved through a *way of accompanying* that is discrete and confidential, capable of reaching out to those who are experiencing complex and painful situations. Every school should therefore make sure it is an environment of trust, calmness and openness, particularly where there are cases that require time and careful discernment. It is essential that the right conditions are created to provide a patient and understanding ear, far removed from any unjust discrimination.

57. The Congregation for Catholic Education is well aware of the daily effort and unstinting care shown by those who work in schools and in the whole range of formal and informal pedagogic endeavour. The Congregation wishes to encourage them in their pursuit of the work of forming young people, especially those among them who are affected by any form of poverty, and those in need of the love shown them by their educators, so that, in the words of St. John Bosco, young people are not only loved, but know they are loved. This Dicastery would also like to express its warmest gratitude to all Christians who teach in Catholic schools or other types of school, and, in the words of Pope Francis, encourages them “to stimulate in the pupils the openness to the other as a face, as a person, as a brother and sister to know and respect, with his or her history, merits and defects, riches and limits. The challenge is to cooperate to train young people to be open and interested in the reality that surrounds them, capable of care and tenderness”. [68: Francis, *Address to the Italian Catholic Primary School Teachers Association*, 5 January 2018.]

Vatican City, 2 February 2019, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.



Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, Prefect  
Archbishop Angelo Vincenzo Zani, Secretary



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