



The Declaration '*Dignitas Infinita*' as a Sign of the Times in the Development of Teaching on the Dignity of the Human Person

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Deklaracja »*Dignitas infinita*« jako znak czasów w rozwoju nauczania o godności osoby ludzkiej

STRESZCZENIE

Deklaracja »Dignitas infinita« wydaje się odpowiadać na znaki czasu, podejmując refleksję nad wyzwaniami współczesności w świetle nauczania Kościoła katolickiego. Dokument podkreśla nienaruszalną godność każdej osoby ludzkiej, wynikającą z faktu stworzenia jej na obraz Boga, i reaguje na zjawiska takie, jak relatywizm moralny, uprzedmiotowienie człowieka czy kryzys tożsamości płciowej. Wskazuje również na konieczność solidarności wobec skutków globalizacji oraz akcentuje znaczenie nawrócenia ekologicznego i ochrony stworzenia. W kontekście dynamicznego rozwoju technologii i medycyny deklaracja przypomina o konieczności traktowania człowieka jako celu, a nie środka działań. W analizie znaków czasu Kościół posługuje się narzędziami rozeznawania duchowego, interpretacji wydarzeń społecznych w świetle Ewangelii oraz refleksji teologiczno-pastoralnej. Dokument nawiązuje do dziedzictwa Soboru Watykańskiego II, inspirując do odważnych działań w duchu Ewangelii, dialogu społecznego i budowania sprawiedliwych struktur. Przypomina również, że fundamentem życia społecznego jest nienaruszalna godność osoby ludzkiej.

Słowa kluczowe: godność człowieka, znaki czasu, globalizacja i etyka, odpowiedzialność ekologiczna, wyzwania technologiczne i bioetyczne

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Introduction

The recognition and interpretation of the „signs of the times” is among the most pressing challenges faced by the Catholic Church in today’s world. The Second Vatican Council, in its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, underscored the Church’s obligation to “scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel” (no. 4). This call remains as urgent as ever in a rapidly changing global reality, where emerging ethical, cultur-

al, and social challenges demand thoughtful and compassionate responses rooted in truth and love.

In this context, the *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration (2024) represents a significant and timely contribution from the Church's Magisterium in defense of the inherent dignity of the human person. The document asserts that "the dignity of the human person does not derive from social, biological, or economic conditions, but from the fact that each person is created in the image and likeness of God. This dignity is inalienable and non-negotiable" (*Dignitas Infinita*, no. 3). The Declaration addresses contemporary threats such as moral relativism, the instrumentalization of the human person, complex bioethical dilemmas, and the crisis of gender identity. Echoing this stance, Pope Francis in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* affirms: "Every human being has an inalienable dignity that must be recognized, respected, and protected" (no. 213).

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration further emphasizes the social dimension of human dignity. It calls the Church to intensify its efforts in promoting an integral Christian anthropology as an antidote to the fragmented and often dehumanizing ideologies of the modern age.

This article aims to analyze the *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration as a contemporary interpretation of the „signs of the times” in the Church's teaching. It highlights how the document continues the theological tradition of the Church, addressing present-day challenges while inspiring pastoral and social reflection. This analysis adopts the methodology articulated by the Second Vatican Council, which states that „the Church must listen to the voice of the times, discern within it the signs of God's action, and respond to them with courage” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44).

Drawing from the teachings of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration portrays the Church as a dynamic, living organism that navigates the complexities of a changing world through the guidance of the Gospel.

The structure of this article is as follows: The first section explores the methodology of interpreting the „signs of the times” in light of Church teaching. The second section examines the content and central theses of the *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration, underscoring its relevance as a response to contemporary challenges. The concluding section reflects on the Declaration as a prophetic “sign of the times,” one that inspires deeper theological engagement and pastoral action for today's world.

1. Declaration's main thesis

The interpretation of the signs of the times in relation to human dignity is a critical mission of the Church in an era marked by rapid technologi-

cal, social, and ecological changes. This mission requires deep attentiveness and discernment, enabling the Church to address contemporary challenges through the perspective of the Gospel. The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration responds to this challenge by broadening and deepening the Church's teaching on human dignity in light of these signs of the times.

As a custodian of human dignity, the Church not only preserves fundamental values but also seeks ways to renew and adapt them in response to changing realities. The document identifies key areas where contemporary developments demand deeper reflection on human dignity. It starts with technology and the redefinition of humanity.

Advances in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and robotics offer unprecedented possibilities but also raise profound ethical questions about the boundaries of human intervention and the implications of such actions. The document emphasizes the necessity of viewing human beings as ends in themselves, not as means to technological goals:

“Human beings must never be treated as tools, products, or elements of a technological system. The dignity of the person requires that technology serves life, not defines it” (DI, 5).

The modern world faces significant ethical challenges, including the instrumentalization of the human body, genetic manipulation, and automation, all of which risk undermining authentic human relationships. The Church calls for a responsible approach to ensure that technology serves as a tool for human development, rooted in solidarity and love, rather than becoming a force for dehumanization. By placing the human person above technological advancement, the Church affirms the intrinsic dignity of each individual as the cornerstone of moral decision-making in an era of rapid innovation.

The second issue reflected by the declaration is globalization. Globalization has created significant opportunities for international collaboration, cultural exchange, and technological progress, fostering interdependence among nations and enabling economic growth in certain regions. However, it has also intensified social inequalities, often leaving the weakest and most vulnerable behind. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen, while marginalized groups – such as the impoverished, migrants, and excluded communities – face increasing risks of social and economic isolation.

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration underscores the Church's mission to stand in solidarity with the weakest, placing them at the heart of the Christian response to globalization: “In a global society, the true measure of human dignity is revealed in how we treat the weakest: the poor, the excluded, migrants, and the sick” (DI,8).

This call reminds the Church of its prophetic role in advocating for the voiceless. In addressing the consequences of globalization, the Church emphasizes the need for global structures founded on justice, solidarity, and inclusion to combat systemic inequalities. This involves ensuring access to essential resources – such as food, water, education, and healthcare – for all people, regardless of their social or economic status. Issues like forced migration, economic exploitation, and environmental displacement represent urgent challenges that demand concrete action rooted in the Gospel.

The Declaration emphasizes the necessity of infusing globalization with ethical principles, ensuring it does not become a vehicle for dehumanization or oppression. It calls on societies to implement policies that promote human dignity by providing equitable access to opportunities and resources. Beyond advocacy, the Church actively works to create communities of justice, compassion, and inclusion, where every individual, particularly the marginalized, is valued and supported.

This vision inspires Christians to recommit to global solidarity, grounded in love for one's neighbor and the recognition of the equal dignity of all people. The third reflected thing is ecology. The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration builds upon the profound ecological insights of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, highlighting the inseparable link between care for the environment and care for humanity. It emphasizes that environmental destruction is not merely an ecological issue but a deeply human one, as it directly threatens the dignity and well-being of people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

Environmental degradation – manifested through pollution, deforestation, and the depletion of natural resources – disproportionately impacts those who lack the resources to protect themselves or adapt to changing conditions. The Declaration affirms: „The ecological crisis is a human crisis. Protecting creation is about safeguarding the space in which humanity can fulfill its vocation” (DI,10).

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation stand as urgent signs of the times, demanding a shared responsibility and action from all humanity. The Declaration calls for an ecological conversion – a profound transformation of hearts and minds that fosters a renewed respect for creation and an understanding of the interconnectedness of all life. This conversion must be accompanied by concrete actions that promote environmental stewardship, such as reducing carbon emissions, protecting natural habitats, and ensuring the sustainable use of resources.

The Church frames care for creation as a fundamental aspect of its mission, recognizing the Earth as a divine gift entrusted to humanity not for exploitation but for preservation and sharing. The Declaration also stresses

the importance of intergenerational justice, affirming the moral obligation to protect the environment for future generations. By integrating ecological responsibility with the Christian call to love, solidarity, and justice, the Church offers a hopeful and transformative vision for addressing the ecological crisis while affirming the dignity and worth of every human being.

The fourth reflected thing is medical and biotechnological progress. The rapid advancements in medicine and biotechnology offer extraordinary opportunities to improve human health and extend life. Innovations such as regenerative medicine, genetic engineering, and advanced biotechnology have made it possible to develop groundbreaking treatments for diseases and conditions once deemed incurable. However, these advancements also raise profound ethical questions about the boundaries of human intervention in life and the body. The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration addresses these concerns, reminding us: „Every medical intervention must adhere to the principle: the human person is the end, not the means” (DI,7).

The Declaration emphasizes that medical progress must always respect the dignity, sanctity, and uniqueness of human life. While scientific and technological innovations provide new ways to alleviate suffering and enhance quality of life, they must not undermine fundamental ethical principles. Practices such as genetic manipulation, human cloning, and the commodification of the human body raise critical concerns about the instrumentalization of human life, treating individuals as mere objects of experimentation or production.

The Church calls for discernment in evaluating medical and technological advancements, urging researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to prioritize the holistic development of the human person. This discernment involves distinguishing between interventions that genuinely support human flourishing and those that risk violating the sacredness of life. The Declaration also underscores the need to maintain a balance between scientific progress and ethical responsibility, affirming that true advancement cannot come at the cost of the inherent dignity of the human person.

The reflection on medical ethics extends further to the issue of healthcare accessibility. The Declaration challenges societies to ensure that the benefits of medical and technological progress are equitably distributed, particularly to the poor and marginalized, rather than being reserved for the privileged few. By affirming that the human person must always remain the focus of medical innovation, the Church reiterates its commitment to a vision of healthcare that is ethical, inclusive, and rooted in the dignity of every individual.

2. The Church as an Interpreter of the Signs of the Times

The role of the Church in interpreting the signs of the times lies in pointing out a path that connects traditional values with new challenges of the contemporary world. Pope Benedict XVI, in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, noted that the ability to read the signs of the times requires both faithfulness to the Gospel and openness to dialogue with the world:

„Reading the signs of the times means the ability to combine the truth brought by the Gospel with the new questions posed by contemporary reality” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 12).

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration is an example of this ability. It responds to the signs of the times not only by diagnosing challenges but also by formulating positive responses in the spirit of hope and concern for every human being.

The evolution of the Church’s teaching on the dignity of the human person, culminating in the *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration of 2024, finds its roots in the groundbreaking documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). This document marked a significant turning point in the Church’s engagement with modern societal issues, introducing the concept of discerning the „signs of the times” as a vital method for crafting responses to contemporary challenges. In *Gaudium et Spes*, we read: „The dignity of the human person is grounded in the fact that they are created in the image of God and called to communion with Him. This is a fundamental truth that demands special protection in a world of constant change” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 12).

The Second Vatican Council placed the human person at the heart of the Church’s reflection, underscoring the intrinsic and inalienable worth of every individual, regardless of social status, physical condition, or life circumstances. This innovative perspective established a solid foundation for subsequent papal documents, which further enriched and contextualized this teaching.

Pope John Paul II carried forward and deepened the Church’s reflection on human dignity through his encyclicals, including *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). In *Redemptor Hominis*, he emphasized: „The human person is the path of the Church. Every theological reflection, every pastoral initiative must aim at safeguarding and promoting the dignity of the human person, who is the image of God” (*Redemptor Hominis*, 14).

In *Evangelium Vitae*, he brought attention to the sanctity and inviolability of human life at all stages, from conception to natural death: „Human life, even in its most fragile and difficult moments, is sacred because it reflects the glory of God” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 2).

John Paul II stressed that the defense of human dignity must form the bedrock of the Church's mission. Violations of this dignity – whether through abortion, euthanasia, or violence – represent not only an offense against individuals but a grave threat to the moral fabric of society as a whole.

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration represents both a continuation and a development of the vision articulated at the Second Vatican Council. It reminds us that reflections on human dignity cannot be divorced from the realities of our time. The document challenges both the Church and society to collaborate in building a world where the dignity of every person is not only safeguarded but actively promoted in every sphere of life.

3. A Call to Hope and Action

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration shows that interpreting the signs of the times is not merely an intellectual task but also a moral obligation requiring sensitivity, reflection, and action inspired by the Gospel. It calls for the construction of a world where every person, created in the image of God, can fully realize their vocation, regardless of the shifting realities of modernity.

The Declaration is more than a theological reflection; it is a practical guide for individuals, communities, and institutions to act in defense of human dignity. By addressing critical challenges such as technological ethics, social inequalities, ecological degradation, and cultural fragmentation, the document lays the groundwork for building a world where human dignity is not just protected but celebrated.

One of the declaration's most urgent appeals is for a global ethical framework, particularly in the realm of technology. As artificial intelligence and biotechnology reshape industries, education, healthcare, and governance, ethical oversight is imperative to ensure that these advancements serve humanity rather than undermine it. The declaration highlights the risks of allowing algorithms and technological systems to replace human judgment in areas like justice, medicine, and education. It calls for technologies to be designed and deployed with principles of fairness, solidarity, and respect for human privacy – elements integral to safeguarding human dignity.

The document also emphasizes the need to strengthen human relationships and rebuild social bonds. Family, identified as the „first community” in the declaration, is presented as the foundation for nurturing respect and care for every individual. In an era where social isolation is on the rise, particularly in urban and digitalized societies, *Dignitas Infinita* advocates for love, compassion, and mutual support as antidotes to the fragmentation of human connections. The declaration challenges the Church and society to

foster new spaces of belonging and solidarity, where individuals feel valued and empowered to contribute to the common good.

The ecological aspect of the declaration is particularly forward-looking, as it ties human dignity directly to environmental stewardship. Echoing Pope Francis's call for an "ecological conversion" in *Laudato Si'*, *Dignitas Infinita* reminds us that care for creation is not an optional addendum to the Church's mission but a moral imperative rooted in the dignity of the human person. It stresses that ecological destruction harms not only the planet but also the most vulnerable populations, who are often disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

The declaration challenges governments, corporations, and individuals to adopt sustainable practices, reduce waste, and embrace lifestyles that prioritize the well-being of future generations. It underscores that protecting the environment is an act of justice and solidarity, ensuring that all people, especially the marginalized, have access to clean water, fertile land, and a safe climate.

By linking ecological justice with human dignity, the declaration broadens the Church's moral vision, urging the faithful to view environmental care as integral to their spiritual and social responsibilities. It calls for collaborative efforts among nations, religions, and communities to confront the ecological crisis as a shared human challenge.

At the heart of *Dignitas Infinita* is a call for justice, particularly for those excluded from economic and social systems. The document critiques the widening gap between the rich and poor, stressing that inequality is not only an economic issue but also a profound moral failing. The lack of access to basic rights – such as clean water, education, healthcare, and housing – threatens the dignity of millions and undermines the common good.

The declaration insists that solidarity with the poor and marginalized is a fundamental expression of respect for human dignity. It calls for structural reforms to address systemic poverty and inequality, including equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. This vision of justice is not limited to individual charity but extends to collective responsibility, urging governments, corporations, and institutions to prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable.

In an increasingly polarized and fragmented world, *Dignitas Infinita* also advocates for dialogue as a path toward unity. The declaration highlights the importance of promoting universal values that transcend cultural and religious differences, fostering a shared commitment to human dignity. It encourages intercultural and interreligious dialogue, offering a way to bridge divides and build common ground.

The document warns against the relativization of values and the loss of shared moral foundations in a pluralistic society. Instead, it calls for renewed efforts to cultivate a culture of respect, where the inherent worth of every person is acknowledged and protected. By promoting dialogue, the Church seeks to inspire a global culture rooted in empathy, understanding, and collaboration.

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration concludes with a bold challenge to all people of goodwill – believers and non-believers alike. It calls for concrete actions to protect human dignity in every sphere of life, from technology and ecology to social and cultural structures. This call is not limited to grand institutional changes but extends to daily practices of love, respect, and solidarity in personal relationships, workplaces, and communities.

For the Church, the declaration is a reminder of its prophetic mission to stand with the vulnerable, advocate for justice, and serve as a voice of hope in a world marked by uncertainty and division. The document calls the faithful to embody the Gospel's message in their lives, becoming witnesses to the dignity and sacredness of every person.

As a global society, *Dignitas Infinita* invites us to reimagine progress – not as a race toward material gain or technological dominance, but as a shared journey toward greater justice, compassion, and harmony with creation. It reminds us that true progress must always begin and end with the human person, created in the image of God, as its foundation.

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration is more than a reflection on the signs of the times; it is a roadmap for a just and dignified future. It challenges each of us to examine our values, actions, and responsibilities, inspiring a collective commitment to building a world where every person's dignity is honored and every life is cherished.

By interpreting the signs of the times through the lens of human dignity, the Church not only addresses the pressing issues of our age but also provides a timeless reminder: that the dignity of the human person is the cornerstone of any just society. The declaration leaves us with a profound call to hope, action, and transformation, inviting all of humanity to work together in creating a future marked by justice, solidarity, and peace.

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration is not merely a theoretical framework but a call to practical action across multiple domains – technological, ecological, social, and spiritual. Its vision demands that individuals, communities, institutions, and governments translate its principles into tangible efforts to protect and promote the dignity of every human being.

The declaration urges the creation of global ethical standards for emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital platforms. These standards should prioritize the protection of privacy, equity

in access, and the preservation of human autonomy. For instance, in the field of medicine, the development of decision-making algorithms must include safeguards to ensure that they enhance rather than diminish human agency. Similarly, in education, technological innovations should aim to provide equitable access to learning tools rather than deepening existing inequalities.

To achieve this, the declaration calls for collaboration between ethicists, scientists, theologians, and policymakers to ensure that technological progress remains human-centered. The Church, in its pastoral mission, is tasked with fostering awareness among the faithful about the moral implications of technology and encouraging informed, ethical engagement in their personal and professional lives.

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration places significant emphasis on addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality, and marginalization. It calls for governments and institutions to prioritize policies that ensure universal access to education, healthcare, clean water, and dignified work.

Practical implementation includes advocacy for fair labor practices, support for sustainable economic systems, and efforts to eliminate systemic barriers that exclude marginalized populations. Religious communities are invited to take an active role in these initiatives, leveraging their resources to support social justice programs, charitable activities, and public awareness campaigns.

One concrete recommendation from the declaration is the creation of community-based initiatives that empower vulnerable groups. For example, microfinance programs for impoverished communities, vocational training for the unemployed, and shelters for the homeless can be powerful expressions of solidarity and respect for human dignity.

The ecological focus of *Dignitas Infinita* demands a shift from a culture of exploitation to one of stewardship. Practical measures include adopting sustainable farming practices, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting renewable energy. The declaration highlights the moral imperative for wealthy nations to assist developing countries in adapting to climate change and protecting their natural resources.

For individuals, the declaration calls for an „ecological conversion,“ urging changes in consumption habits, waste reduction, and active participation in conservation efforts. Local parishes and dioceses are encouraged to model sustainable practices, such as creating „green parishes“ that minimize energy use, reduce waste, and support community gardens.

Furthermore, the declaration challenges industries to embrace environmentally sustainable production methods, ensuring that profits do not come at the expense of the planet or the dignity of vulnerable populations. The Church’s advocacy in this area includes engaging in dialogue with cor-

porate leaders, policymakers, and international organizations to promote systemic change.

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration recognizes the family as the fundamental community for nurturing human dignity and the broader society as its essential extension. To counteract the isolation and fragmentation of modern life, it calls for initiatives that rebuild trust and solidarity within communities.

Churches, schools, and civic organizations are encouraged to create spaces for dialogue, mutual support, and shared action. Family-centered programs, youth mentoring initiatives, and intergenerational projects can strengthen bonds and foster a sense of belonging.

On a broader scale, the declaration advocates for policies that support family life, such as parental leave, affordable childcare, and access to health-care. It also emphasizes the importance of fostering relationships within neighborhoods and workplaces, creating environments where every individual feels valued and included.

In an increasingly polarized world, the declaration calls for dialogue that transcends cultural, religious, and ideological differences. This involves creating platforms where diverse voices can come together to address shared challenges, such as poverty, climate change, and conflict.

The Church is urged to lead by example, engaging in partnerships with other faith traditions and secular organizations to promote common values rooted in human dignity. Educational institutions are encouraged to include programs that foster intercultural understanding and equip students with the skills to navigate diversity with empathy and respect.

One practical initiative could include hosting interfaith forums focused on specific issues, such as climate justice or refugee assistance, where different traditions collaborate on shared solutions. These efforts not only strengthen solidarity but also witness to the universal nature of human dignity.

At its heart, the *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration is a beacon of hope. It reminds humanity that even amid the uncertainties and complexities of the modern world, the inherent dignity of every person remains inviolable. This dignity, rooted in the image of God, calls us to act courageously in defense of life, justice, and the common good.

The Declaration does not promise easy answers but offers a guiding vision: a world where progress is measured not by material wealth or technological achievements but by the flourishing of every human being and the integrity of creation. It challenges us to see beyond individualism and short-term gains, embracing a collective responsibility to build a future marked by justice, compassion, and peace.

Conclusion

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration is both a challenge and an invitation. It calls on individuals, communities, and institutions to reflect on their role in promoting human dignity and to take concrete steps to address the pressing issues of our time. Whether through technological innovation, ecological responsibility, social justice, or cultural renewal, the declaration insists that every action must serve the human person and the common good. For the Church, the declaration is a reaffirmation of its mission to be a light in the world, offering a moral compass in an age of uncertainty. For society at large, it is a reminder that human dignity is the foundation of true progress and the measure of our shared humanity.

As we move forward, the *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of the Gospel and the Church's unwavering commitment to the dignity of every human life. It invites all of humanity to join in building a world where every person is seen, valued, and empowered to fulfill their God-given potential.

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SUMMARY

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration appears to respond to the signs of the times, offering a reflection on contemporary challenges in light of the Catholic Church's teaching. The document emphasizes the inviolable dignity of every human person, rooted in being created in the image of God, and addresses phenomena such as moral relativism, the objectification of the human person, and the crisis of gender identity. It also points to the need for solidarity in the face of globalization and highlights the importance of ecological conversion and the protection of creation. In the context of rapid technological and medical advancement, the declaration reminds us of the need to treat the human person as an end, not a means. In its discernment of the signs of the times, the Church draws on tools such as spiritual discernment, interpreting social events in the light of the Gospel, and theological-pastoral reflection. The document builds on the legacy of the Second Vatican Council, inspiring courageous action in the spirit of the Gospel, social dialogue, and the creation of just structures. It also reminds us that the foundation of social life is the inviolable dignity of the human person.

Keywords: Human Dignity, Signs of the Times, Globalization and Ethics, Ecological Responsibility, Technological and Bioethical Challenges

