

INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

Quo vadis, humanitas?

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THINKING THROUGH CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY
IN THE FACE OF CERTAIN SCENARIOS FOR THE
FUTURE OF HUMANITY

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About this edition

This edition preserves the wording of the Vatican's HTML text of *Quo vadis, humanitas?* while rebuilding its structure for reading. The Circulars adds clearer navigation, keeps notes and links close at hand, and typesets the document for print.

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Preliminary Note

The International Theological Commission is not merely a group of people who meet just to draft a text, but rather a space for free exchange and discussion that benefits from the wealth of perspectives offered by a variety of people coming from very different contexts.

During its tenth quinquennium, the International Theological Commission had the opportunity to deepen its study of Christian anthropology in the face of contemporary cultural challenges, inspired by the sixtieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965-2025). The work was carried out by a special sub-commission, chaired by Rev. Javier Prades López and composed of the following members: Rev. Alberto Cozzi, Rev. Simon Francis Gaine, O.P., Rev. Carlos Maria Galli, Prof. Reinhard Huetter, Rev. Victor Ronald La Barrera Villarreal, Prof. Isabell Naumann, I.S.S.M., Rev. Josée Ngalula, R.S.A., Rev. Bernard Pottier, S.J.

General discussions on the topic took place during both the various meetings of the Sub-Commission and during the Plenary Sessions of the Commission itself in the years 2022-2025, under the coordination of the Secretary General, Monsignor Piero Coda. This

text was put to a vote and unanimously approved *in forma specifica* by the members of the International Theological Commission during the plenary session of 2025. The document was then submitted for approval to its President, His Eminence Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, who, after obtaining the approval of the Holy Father Pope Leo XIV, authorised its publication on 9 February 2026.

Introduction

1. The recent acceleration of technological development and scientific progress has reawakened our wonder at humanity's great potential and our perception of its greatness. Yet, there is no lessening of dismay at humanity's fragility, subject as it is to death and disease, as demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as temptation to resignation to the seemingly inevitable evil of wars and conflicts, inequalities and indifference. Thus, the ambivalence of greatness and fragility remains, and this cannot be denied.

We must avoid any attempt to oversimplify this ambivalence by choosing one of two sides: we cannot censor natural fragility and limitations, exalting only greatness and strength, perhaps relying blindly on the results of technological research and scientific discoveries; but neither must we resign ourselves to all the

limitations and fragilities of life, forgetting the potential inscribed in our intelligent and spiritual nature. The task entrusted to each of us to shape our own identity with responsibility requires us not to oversimplify what it means to be human.

2. Being a human person, with infinite dignity, is not something we have constructed or acquired, but is the result of a free gift that precedes us.¹ And it is not a gift that we simply received in the past, but something that exists for ever as a gift in every circumstance of our existence, becoming a non-transferable task. Appropriating this gift, giving shape to one's own identity, is the adventure of life, a task to be undertaken freely and within the relationships in which we know ourselves, others and reality, so that we can make our original and unique contribution to human history, corresponding to our vocation. The gift is welcomed within a 'we', a community to which each person belongs and in which they grow.

3. Religious experience, and in particular Christian faith, propose that we live, without oversimplification, this ambivalence between human greatness and limitation, interpreting it in the light of our original and fundamental relationship with God. In Psalm 8:5, addressing God in a heartfelt dialogue, the psalmist asks what human beings are such that he is mindful of them and cares for them. The psalmist responds by noting the greatness God has bestowed upon human beings in his creation: 'You have made them a little lower than the angels; you have crowned them with

¹Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, nn. 6, 11.

glory and honour. You have given them power over the works of your hands; you have put everything under their feet.' (Ps 8:6-7)² This paradox receives definitive light from the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, where limitation, finitude and transience, but also the disorder introduced by sin, are overcome by the work of grace with the gift of divine sonship, which makes us participants in the life of the Risen One, according to the Father's plan and thanks to the renewal of all things in the Spirit.

4. Pope Francis took up the question of Psalm 8, emphasising the response of biblical anthropology, centred on the fundamental elements of a free and responsible relationship with creation, with others and with God. But then he noted how 'today we realise that the great principles and fundamental concepts of anthropology are often called into question, also on the basis of a greater knowledge of the complexity of the human condition, and they require further in-depth examination.'³ Pope Leo XIV justified his choice of name by recalling that 'in our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human

²Psalm 144 asks the same question, but highlights the fragility of human beings: 'Lord, what are human beings that you care for them, the son of man that you think of him? Human beings are like breath, their days like a passing shadow.' (Ps 144:3-4) Job also questions the meaning of God's interest in human beings: 'What are human beings that you should regard them so much and turn your mind upon them?' (Job 7:17)

³Francis, *Address to participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 18 November 2017. See also the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Che cosa è l'uomo?* (Sal 8,5). *Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, 2019, 8, which uses Psalm 8 as the basis for discourse on biblical anthropology.

dignity, justice and labour.’⁴

5. Reflection on anthropology in the light of revelation is called upon to interpret the complex conditions of a world that is undergoing change so profound that it can be described as ‘epochal’. Since the understanding of the human in the history of thought (particularly in the Western tradition) had achieved well-defined results, it might seem that further reflection should focus on clarifying certain particular aspects of human action. Instead, we find ourselves today once again engaged in exploring the mystery of the human being as such, in his or her identity. Today’s challenges force us to leave behind our acquired certainties and can also arouse fears, which are often not unfounded. Reflection on the human being, in various areas of personal and social life, seems to go beyond the human, questioning the specificity of human nature itself.

*1. The method of the document on the sixtieth anniversary
of Gaudium et spes*

6. Reason enlightened by faith must establish a critical comparison between new anthropological horizons and the perennial needs of the human condition: ‘Discernment must carefully distinguish between elements compatible with the Gospel and those contrary to it, between positive contributions and ideological aspects, but the more acute understanding of the world that results cannot fail

⁴Leo XIV, *Address to the College of Cardinals*, 10 May 2025.

to prompt a more penetrating appreciation of Christ the Lord and of the Gospel, since Christ is the Saviour of the world.⁵

7. This discernment is inspired by the sixtieth anniversary of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965-2025), an anniversary that points the present document towards a new reflection linked to the personal and social anthropology proposed in the Constitution and in the subsequent Magisterium that has received and developed its teaching. The unique nature of *Gaudium et spes* must be emphasised, a conciliar Constitution with specific magisterial value, expressed in its commitment to consider carefully the condition of humanity in today's world. For the first time in history, a document of this level systematically proposed a vision of the human being illumined by the mystery of Christ. In its wake, therefore, we have the question of re-proposing Christian anthropology today in an open and critical dialogue with the more recent questions coming from human experience and cultures. Precisely in reference to *Gaudium et spes*, the document places at its centre the human being, 'whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will',⁶ in order to promote that '*integral and solidary humanism* capable of creating a new social, economic and political order, founded on the dignity and freedom of every human person, to be brought about in peace, justice and

⁵International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, 2012, 55.

⁶Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 3.

solidarity.⁷

2. The structure of the document: key categories

8. So as to complete in an adequate way this task of critical discernment in the face of some of the most relevant scenarios for the future of humanity, the document proposes four main categories in each of the chapters of which it is composed. It begins by considering the notion of *development*, which underpins many of the technological and social innovations currently underway. The need to ensure integral human development then leads to a reflection on the category of *vocation* as a key to anthropological understanding, which in turn refers to the question of *human identity*, on both a personal and social level. Finally, it explores the historical and free *dramatic condition* that characterises human identity, understood as vocation, and its dialogue with new techno-scientific challenges.

9. Reflecting on *development*, we want to take note, on the one hand, of the historical-temporal condition of a humanity that has grown as never before in its history, tripling its population in the space of seventy years. On the other hand, this orientation offers an opportunity for a critical examination of the concrete conditions of life of individuals and peoples in this movement of the twenty-first century, marked as it is by the exponential growth of techno-scientific resources and their impact on the life of

⁷Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 19.

humanity. Current development oscillates between striving for a concrete improvement in the living conditions of peoples and dreams even of replacing humanity.

10. The second category is that of *integral vocation*, taken from *Gaudium et spes*, inasmuch as, starting from an analysis of the concrete conditions of time, space and intersubjectivity that characterise common human experience, Christian anthropology appears to be constitutively relational and responsive, and as such responsible.

11. The third notion, that of *identity*, has not been explicitly explored in previous documents.⁸ The question of human identity is indeed a sign of our times, precisely because of the dimensions assumed by technological and scientific progress, which today seems to allow interventions on human nature that were unthinkable until recently, to the point of encouraging the claim of individuals and societies to absolute self-determination.⁹

12. The fourth key word in the document refers to the *dramatic condition* of the process of realising human identity. The path to its discovery, maturation and fulfilment is complex: it passes through

⁸The term 'identity' appears in the anthropological documents of the International Theological Commission, but it is not among the most frequent. It is used in a sense that is not specifically anthropological but Christological or Trinitarian, and sometimes in a generic sense.

⁹On the notion of human nature – also in relation to that of the person – see International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at Natural Law*, 2009, 64–66; Id., *Religious Freedom for the Good of All*, 2019, 32–39. This is a complex notion, which designates the principle of the specific ontological identity of a subject, that is, its 'essence' as understood in terms of a set of stable characteristics. However, it is not something fixed and static, since it is a dynamic internal principle that inclines the subject towards its fulfilment through specific activities in a complex interrelationship first and foremost with God in Christ, with other persons, and with all realities.

concrete historical circumstances, in which each individual person and each people must freely put themselves on the line and expose themselves also to risks, falls and suffering. The human search for identity is not a predefined matter to be applied deductively. The revelation of the Triune God opens up the horizon of an asymmetrical reciprocity in the encounter between divine and human freedom (according to the biblical categories of covenant and spousal relationship). In this reciprocity, God's freedom and love are 'absolute', in that they are original and unconditioned; human freedom, on the other hand, is elicited and responsive, called to decide for the true good, in accordance with God's will. Each person, in realising the humanity given to them by God, represents something new and irreducible. One's identity must therefore always be (re)discovered and implemented personally, thanks to dialogue with the living God, in the context of the different circumstances of a situated humanity, where one experiences what Pope Francis has called 'bipolar tensions'.¹⁰

3. The focus of the document: an engagement with the challenges of trans- and post-humanism

13. The dramatic condition of the historical process of humanisation – redeemed and brought to gratuitous fulfilment in Christ – unfolds in the awareness that every human being has of

¹⁰Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 221.

*their own finitude in the inescapable encounter with the infinite.*¹¹

Human beings are the only creatures on earth who know they are finite and so must face the fact of finitude. It is possible to consider several options that thus open up before each human being: one can attempt to absolutize finitude; one can attempt to escape finitude in a fictitious infinity; one can try to come to terms with finitude; one can inhabit the tension between finitude and infinity, in the hope of fulfilment received as a gift.

The four possibilities attest, in different ways, that human beings cannot find fulfilment in their finite condition, but are referred to the 'other of every finitude', to the 'unconditioned'. They have at least to conceive of the opposite of the finite, even if they are convinced that nothing is truly infinite, unconditioned, absolute. And precisely because they are aware of their finitude, human beings ardently desire to transcend all that is finite. They may, of course, also despair because of their own insurmountable finitude. However, the various forms of despair reveal themselves, when examined closely, to be human attempts at overcoming the tension between finitude and infinity, either by fleeing finitude or by absolutizing it. This analysis, while making us aware of tensions that belong to the human experience of all times, also invites us to consider what new forms they take in certain

¹¹For this characterization of the existential condition, see S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Kierkegaard's Writings, XIX), Princeton 1980, 'Despair as Defined by Finitude/Infinity', 29–35; Id., *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and trans. with Introduction and Notes by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson (Kierkegaard's Writings, VIII) Princeton 1980, 'V. Anxiety as Saving through Faith', 155–162.

currents of thought that are highly influential in contemporary societies, such as *transhumanism* and *posthumanism*.

14. *Transhumanism and posthumanism*, although related and sometimes considered identical (due to their respective definitions still being somewhat fluid), represent different perspectives in understanding human nature and the future of humanity.

Transhumanism is a philosophical movement that operates on the belief that human beings can and should use the resources of science and technology to overcome the physical and biological limitations of the human condition, in particular ageing and even death, thus shaping their own evolution and maximising their own potential to the point of redesigning human beings to make them fitted to ‘go beyond’. With its programmatic emphasis on increasing individual human capabilities, it develops a distinctly anthropocentric perspective, subscribing to an ideological and naively uncritical view of scientific and technological progress.¹²

Transhumanism imagines a future in which human beings will perfect the current biological form that defines human nature, in order to achieve the goal of individual immortality, supported by technology. In the utopian scope of its quest for immanent

¹²See N. Bostrom, ‘Transhumanist Values’, *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30/Supplement (2005): 3–14, 4. For more on *transhumanism*, see S. Young, *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto*, Amherst NY 2005; *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More, New York/London 2013; Y. N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, New York 2017; R. Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Nearer: When We Merge with AI*, New York 2024. See the *Humanity Plus* website: <https://www.humanityplus.org> [accessed online on 19 August 2025].

immortality, *transhumanism* can be interpreted as the existential expression of a presumption that is both naive and arrogant.

15. *Posthumanism*, understood in the strict sense, criticises traditional humanism, questioning the specificity of human beings and the existence of a ‘human form’ that, as such, deserves to be preserved because it carries a universally valid meaning. It therefore emphasises the ‘hybrid’ (*cyborg*) to the point of deconstructing the human subject, making the boundary between humans and machines completely fluid,¹³ and rejecting the anthropocentrism that remains characteristic of *transhumanism*.¹⁴ Ultimately, *posthumanism* in the strict sense can be understood as an existential expression of escapism, which starts from a radical devaluation of the human.

16. Understanding the Christian faith urges us to seek in Christ the Redeemer, who died and rose again, a synthesis of the profound tensions that characterise human beings, and which are presented today in a new and challenging form by *transhumanism* and *posthumanism*, and to do so without creating alternatives or oppositions between them or within them, as often happens in the contradictions that recur in current debates between ‘given

¹³On *posthumanism*, see R. Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Cambridge 2002; *The Posthuman*, Cambridge 2013; C. Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis 2009. M. Rosendahl Thomsen and J. Warnberg (Eds.), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Posthumanism*, London/New York 2020; F. Ferrando, *The Art of Being Posthuman: Who Are We in the 21st Century?* Cambridge 2024.

¹⁴However, in some versions, *transhumanism* appears to be oriented towards a ‘posthuman ideal’ to the point of conflation with *posthumanism*. The articulation of a ‘posthuman ideal’ can be found in N. Bostrom’s paradigmatic *Transhumanist FAQ* (<https://nickbostrom.com/views/transhumanist.pdf> [accessed online on 19 August 2025]).

identity' and 'constructed identity', between 'nature' and 'culture', between 'community/social dimension' and 'individual/personal dimension', between belonging to a 'concrete historical culture' and belonging to the 'universal human'. In a specifically Christian and theological vision, the dramatic condition of the historical process of humanisation, starting from the polarity of the finite and the infinite, is in fact saved and brought to fulfilment in Jesus Christ, and cannot find a solution in any form of substitution or suppression of the human.

4. Discernment and the kerygmatic dimension of theology: the integral vocation of the human being

17. The purpose of this document is not only to offer a discernment capable of weighing the anthropological consequences of techno-scientific discoveries and the corresponding ethical choices of people and societies today. It also draws out a prophetic proposal in the light of the Gospel.¹⁵ The theoretical-practical nature of theology encompasses the proclamation of faith (*kerygma*) and education in a vision of humanity, in dialogue with scientific progress, in which everything that is good can be integrated (cf. *1 Thessalonians* 5:21) and what is limiting or penalising with regard to the definitive fulfilment of each person and of humanity as a whole can be overcome.

¹⁵Cf. Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium*, 27 December 2017, Preface.

18. The document is therefore positively orientated towards a theological and pastoral proposal regarding human life understood as *a vocation*. The deepest level of every personal and social experience is that of being called by another in the perspective of a gift that precedes and makes possible the response, according to a dynamic of co-responsibility towards others and towards God. It is this theoretical-practical understanding of the human that the community of the Church wishes to offer to all.

19. In summary, what is at stake is the question of human identity, individual and collective, in a developing world, in the light of vocation in Christ, that is to say, the reaffirmation of humanity's 'total vocation'.¹⁶ This integral vocation is placed in the context of a 'situated anthropocentrism',¹⁷ that is, a worldview that, on the one hand, upholds the unique and central value of human beings in the midst of the wonderful accord of all beings and, on the other, recognises that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. Within this world, vocation in Christ is primary, preceding and giving a foundation to the Christian response, so that the illusions or disappointments of the journey do not negate the filial identity to which we are called in Christ through the gift of the Spirit.

20. Phenomenological analysis and critical evaluation of culture in its various dimensions are illumined by Christian hope, founded

¹⁶Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 11.

¹⁷Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, 4 October 2023, 67, citing Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 89. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 2 and 57.

on the certainty of faith in the good destiny held out to every person in Jesus Christ in the fullness of risen life. This is the horizon of every transformation that people can desire for themselves and for others in the historical journey of the human family. This positive outlook is supported in particular by the figure of the Virgin Mary, whose response to the divine call reflects all the beauty of life in Christ, not closed in on herself and plans of her own, but open to the faithful will of the Lord of history and of all things.

Chapter 1: Development: Humanism and Posthumanism

21. Let us begin by analysing the notion of ‘development’. It is a category that is present in debates on current changes and concerns very different human and social problems. This chapter aims to contextualise the potential of the various ways in which science, technology and cultures today conceive of the ‘development’ of the individual, of societies and of the global world. It is a category that points towards the future of humanity, which many today feel is at risk and which requires the urgent contribution of all social agents in order to defend it. Precisely for this reason, the same question arises forcefully in many social, cultural and political contexts: where are we as humanity going? *Quo vadis, humanitas?*¹⁸

22. Any conception of ‘development’ implies a specific axiological and anthropological understanding, according to which what is progress or regression is judged with respect to a certain ideal. To facilitate discernment of these challenges, we begin with a brief presentation of magisterial teaching on ‘development’ from

¹⁸The Council had already asked questions about the future of humanity: Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 11.

the Second Vatican Council onwards. The magisterial texts express concern for the 'integral development' of humanity, which respects its dignity and authentic identity, as well as its ultimate goal, which refers to a mystery of full communion with the Triune God and among ourselves. This balance can be compromised by two temptations. First is the dream of using technology to make an evolutionary leap that transforms humanity as we know it, enhancing it with the wonders of science and technology, almost in the manner of self-generation, allowing us to invent and 'create' ourselves beyond the conditions and limitations of human nature. Secondly, such dreams are built on an individualistic view of the subject and his or her destiny and rely solely on scientific innovations, hoping that they can improve individual well-being, even though in reality the strong impact of the anonymous laws of the market and profit often negatively affect the existence and future of real people. The result comprises our common humanity and bonds of fraternity on the one hand, and at the same time the space for real freedom for people who have few or no opportunities, on the other.

23. It is precisely the acceleration triggered by scientific and technological discoveries, fostered by favourable economic conditions and political constellations, that calls for a review of the meaning and direction of this 'development', both in comparison with other categories, such as 'progress' or 'evolution' rather than 'regression' or 'decline', and above all in relation to the demand for

human improvement to the point of seeking a ‘superhuman’.¹⁹ The question remains whether this dream of a transition to a superhuman phase will not rather lead to a ‘subhuman’ condition. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that this desire to ‘go beyond’, to surpass oneself and one’s current condition in order to be fully human, represents a tension that is constitutive of human nature. We can therefore distinguish between a positive meaning of ‘surpassing’, in which we recognise an openness to what lies beyond human nature, and a negative meaning, where the idea of overcoming implies the replacement or suppression of the human.

24. The correct meaning of this ‘going beyond’ that is proper to human beings is found in the ‘transumanar’ spoken of by Dante in the first Canto of the *Paradiso*,²⁰ as in other expressions of the experience of ‘divinisation’, the effect of intimate union with God through grace rather than the product of more or less elaborate human techniques: ‘Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being.’²¹ At this level of discourse, we

¹⁹Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Culture and Education, Note *Antiqua et Nova*, 28 January 2025, note 9.

²⁰D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Paradiso*, Canto I, 70: ‘*Transumanar significar per verba non si porria; però l’esempio basti a cui esperienza grazia serba*’, which could be translated as ‘transcending the human [reserved for those who enter into communion with God in Paradise] cannot be expressed in words, but only intimated by way of example to those who will one day be able to experience it.’

²¹Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 8.

can measure the profound distance that exists between certain forms of *transhumanism*'s or *posthumanism*'s dream of 'becoming like gods' (cf. *Gen* 3:4) and the gift of 'divinisation' understood as participation in the divine life in the transfigured humanity of the children of God in Christ.²²

1. The Magisterium's discernment regarding development and technology

25. *Progress as historical development entrusted to humanity.* Taking up John XXIII's call to read the 'signs of the times'²³ and recognising the global impact of technological transformations that affect the whole of society, the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* placed the development of

²²Patristic and scholastic tradition is rich in statements proclaiming the deification of Christians, their communion with the Son, with the Spirit and with the Father, the dwelling of the faithful in God and of God in them. The axiom 'God became what we are so that we might become what He is', is a common heritage, albeit with different nuances, in this tradition. Among others: Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V praef: SC 153, 14: 'Following the one steadfast and truthful teacher, the Logos of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, who, through the superabundance of his love, became what we are, so that he might make us capable of being what he himself is'; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* II, 27, 7: SC 368, 164.166: 'God became human so that human beings might be taught to act divinely. God acted as an equal with the human, so that human beings might act as an equal with God. God was found small, so that human beings might become very great'; Cyprian, *Quod idola* 11: CSEL 3/1, 28: 'Christ wanted to be what human beings are, so that human beings could also be what Christ is'; Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 54, 3: SC 199, 458: 'For the Son of God became human to make us God'; Thomas Aquinas, *Officium de festo corporis Christi*, Ad Matutinas, In primo Nocturno, Lectio 1: *Opera omnia*, v. 29 (Paris 1876) p. 336: 'The only-begotten [...] Son of God, wishing us to share in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that, having become human, he might make human beings gods.' For a summary presentation of the Christian meaning of 'divinization and how it is achieved, see International Theological Commission, *Theology, Christology, Anthropology*, I, E, 1, 1–5.

²³John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April 1963, 21ff. Cf. also Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 4 and 44.

technology within the dynamic of progress through which humanity realises itself in history: 'Through their labours and native endowments human beings have ceaselessly striven to better their life. Today, however, especially with the help of science and technology, they have extended their mastery over nearly the whole of nature and continue to do so.'²⁴ The intensity of development, thanks to which human beings procure for themselves things they once considered beyond their reach, raises certain questions: 'In the face of these immense efforts which already preoccupy the whole human race, human beings agitate numerous questions among themselves. What is the meaning and value of this feverish activity? How should all these things be used? To the achievement of what goal are the strivings of individuals and societies heading?''²⁵

26. *The call for 'integral development'*. These questions are taken up by Paul VI, who recognises the valuable contribution of technological progress as necessary for economic growth and human development. At the same time, he warns against the risk that the human person is no longer the author of progress: 'It is not enough to develop technology so that the earth may become a more suitable living place for human beings. [...] Economics and technology are meaningless if they do not benefit human beings, for it is human beings they are to serve. Human beings are truly human only if they are the masters of their own actions and the

²⁴Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 33.

²⁵*Ibid.*

judges of their worth, only if they are the architects of their own progress. They must act according to their God-given nature, freely accepting its potential and its claims upon them.’²⁶

This concern gives rise to a fundamental criterion: if technology is part of the characteristic activity of human beings in the course of history, we must be vigilant to ensure ‘*integral and solidary development*’, that is, the development ‘of each human being and of the whole human being’,²⁷ avoiding the exaltation of technology as the dominant form of life, as an all-consuming way of existing, without really posing the question of its meaning.²⁸

27. *Technological development and moral development: towards an integral humanism.* John Paul II, in explaining the need for development to remain centred on the human person and not lose its moral dimension, echoes a widespread concern about technological development that seems to be spiralling out of control: ‘Humanity today seems ever to be under threat from what it produces, that is to say from the result of the work of human hands and, even more so, of the work of the human intellect.’²⁹ The essential question that emerges concerns the ‘human’ quality of such development: ‘Does this progress, which has the human being for its author and promoter, make human life on earth “more human” in every aspect of that life? Does it make it more “worthy

²⁶Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum progressio*, 26 March 1967, 34.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 14.

²⁸Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens*, 14 May 1971, 29.

²⁹John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, 4 March 1979, 15.

of humanity”?’³⁰ What guarantees technological development as a positive force is attention to the ethical dimension of development and therefore attention to the person, to his or her inalienable dignity and responsibility. The goal of development, in fact, cannot be entrusted to anonymous laws or mechanisms, regulated only by the potential of scientific and technological innovations.

Development must always have a personal and social horizon, commensurate with the common good and the ultimate goal of the person.³¹

28. The potential of technology and the temptation to create oneself. Benedict XVI warns against the dream of ‘creating oneself’ without taking into account the gift that precedes us: ‘*A person’s development is compromised, if he or she claims to be solely responsible for producing what he or she becomes.* By analogy, the development of peoples goes awry if humanity thinks it can re-create itself through the “wonders” of technology [...]’³² At the same time, he welcomes the positive value of technological progress, which indeed corresponds to a true vocation that comes from God.³³ However, this is also the source of the ambivalence of technology: ‘Technological development can give rise to the idea that technology is self-sufficient when too much attention is given to the “how” questions, and not enough to the many “why”

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ In particular, on the ethics of technology, see John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 30 December 1987, IV, 27–34.

³² Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 68.

³³ Cf. *ibid.*, 16–17.

questions underlying human activity.’³⁴ When human beings give in to a purely functional view of technology, they may see it as a tool for unconditional freedom, allowing them to disregard the limitations inherent in life and in things, dreaming of an absolute autonomy that authorises them to create or recreate themselves. In reality, the mystery of a creation which must be respected no longer resonates, but everything is reduced to pure ‘fact’, the result of chance or some necessity, to be exploited according to the interests of the powers of the day.

29. The power of technocracy and the environmental sustainability of development. Francis denounces the devastating effects produced by forms of ‘technocracy’ before which human beings ‘stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it.’³⁵ What is lacking is a sufficiently solid ethic, a culture and spirituality that truly set limits and contain it within a lucid self-control. At the root of this problematic situation is the tendency to set the methodology and objectives of technoscience according to a paradigm of power, which conditions the life of persons and the functioning of society. This *technocratic paradigm* reveals a conception of the subject who possesses the object in a logic of domination and transformation for his or her own use and consumption. It is as if the subject were faced with a formless reality, entirely available for manipulation. Human intervention in nature is no longer limited to accompanying and supporting the possibilities offered by things

³⁴*Ibid.*, 70.

³⁵ Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 105.

themselves: ‘Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth [...]’.³⁶ This concern about potential abuses is accompanied, however, by wonder at the beauty of the results of technological development: ‘Technoscience [...] can also produce art and enable men and women immersed in the material world to “leap” into the world of beauty. Who can deny the beauty of an aircraft or a skyscraper?’³⁷

30. On several occasions, Leo XIV has expressed a position of critical openness towards the potential of technology, emphasising the importance of promoting a model of technological development that serves the person and the common good and warning against the ‘harmful’ consequences of uncontrolled progress. Acknowledging the challenge posed by a pervasive and irreversible ‘new digital humanism’, he invites us to know how to live with it in the right way: ‘Science and technology influence the way we live in the world, even affecting how we understand ourselves and how we relate to God, how we relate to one another. But nothing that comes from human beings and their creativity should be used to undermine the dignity of others. [...] Faced with cultural changes throughout history, the Church has never

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

remained passive; she has always sought to illuminate every age with the light and hope of Christ by discerning good from evil and what was good from what needed to be changed, transformed, and purified.’³⁸

2. Some anthropological consequences of recent technological development

31. Magisterial discernment regarding development and its ambivalences recognises first and foremost the positive value of technological innovations which, when used well, constitute a great resource for humanity in many aspects of civilisation and culture. It therefore seems to many that it would suffice to distinguish between good and positive applications and harmful and dangerous applications, on the assumption that technology is nothing more than a tool in our hands. But, as Pope Leo XIV warns, the recent acceleration of technological development in certain specific areas such as communication, data management and artificial intelligence, biotechnology and robotics, makes discernment more complex and delicate: ‘Humanity is at a crossroads, facing the immense potential generated by the digital revolution driven by Artificial Intelligence. The impact of this revolution is far-reaching, transforming areas such as education, work, art, healthcare, governance, the military, and communication. This epochal transformation requires responsibility and discernment to ensure that AI is developed and

³⁸Leo XIV, *Address to Catholic digital missionaries and influencers*, 29 July 2025.

utilized for the common good, building bridges of dialogue and fostering fraternity, and ensuring it serves the interests of humanity as a whole. [...] Therefore, the development of such technological advancements must go hand in hand with respect for human and social values, the capacity to judge with a clear conscience, and growth in human responsibility. It is no coincidence that this era of profound innovation has prompted many to reflect on what it means to be human, and on humanity's role in the world.³⁹

32. The relationship with technological tools is complex, as the relationship between the technological tool and the person using it is circular, implying *mutual conditioning*. Those who use technological tools are, to some extent, conditioned by the possibilities that the tools offer and may imagine the organisation of their lives in a different way. For example, the construction of motorways and high-speed railway lines encourages the distribution of work over larger areas and allows for rapid travel, which facilitates exchanges, contacts and activities over distances that were previously unthinkable. This leads to greater mobility and a different organisation of working and family life. This dynamism has a greater impact on the individual when we move from technological tools that increase the speed of travel (cars, trains, aeroplanes) to 'intellectual technologies' that aim to enhance knowledge, that is, what and how we think (digital technology, social media, artificial intelligence).

³⁹Leo XIV, *Message on the occasion of the AI for Good Summit*, 10 July 2025.

33. Since these tools are more *closely connected to our self-understanding*, used to express ourselves in various forms of social communication, to shape personal or collective identities, and to cultivate relationships with others, a more intimate transformation ensues. Digital technology is no longer just a tool, but constitutes a real living environment, with its own way of structuring human activities and relationships. This technological development has a strong impact on the self-understanding of the individual, inscribed in new cognitive and communicative potentialities. The digital age inaugurates a new horizon of meaning in which we think and communicate. The notion of what is universal also changes, referring less to the idea of a common nature and more to what is shared in global connections.⁴⁰

Let us now give consideration to some of the anthropological implications that are emerging in relation to these phenomena, analysing them on the basis of the four fundamental relationships in which human persons express themselves: with the environment, with others, with oneself and with God.⁴¹

2.1. *Relationship with the natural environment*

34. Our *relationship with the environment* is modified by synthetic reality, or rather by the artificial, which pervades all

⁴⁰Cf. A. Barba-Kay, *A Web of Our Own Making: The Nature of Digital Formation*, Cambridge 2023.

⁴¹The anthropological impact of new technologies, and in particular digital technology, had already been analysed by a group of scholars commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication. The results can be found in the volume *The Onlife Manifesto. Being human in a Hyperconnected Era*, 2009 (<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04093-6>) [consulted online on 19 August 2025]).

areas of life, from food (preservation of food; genetically modified organisms) to living space (urbanisation) to bodily transformations (biotechnology). The *expansion of the artificial world*, with materials not found in nature such as plastic, steel and concrete, makes our relationship with nature and its laws more fluid and indeterminate, and can create the illusion that only human freedom, based on the transformative power of technology, offers a right relationship with the real world.⁴² In this way, the very relationship between nature and culture is transformed and becomes more complex: it is not nature with its laws and limitations that regulates and directs development, understood as the drive to overcome unfavourable living conditions, but rather technological potential, with its ‘unlimited’ resources. Following this direction, a mentality guided by an economic logic of maximum profit often prevails, according to which nature must be corrected, modified and transformed with a view to ever-increasing productivity. The exploitation of the earth’s resources is then intensified without measure, promoting, for example, the deforestation of vast areas for intensive cultivation, which ends up impoverishing the land. The tragic consequence of this is the ‘ecological debt’, especially between the North and the South.⁴³ A similar logic guides projects of uncontrolled and abusive urbanisation, which disfigure entire ecosystems, as well as policies for the extraction of materials needed for technological products,

⁴²Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 115.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 51, where the North-South polarity does not have an immediately geographical meaning, but indicates a socio-economic distinction, which cuts across different situations of poverty: cf. Leo XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te*, 4 October 2025, 11–12.

which pollute entire natural areas.⁴⁴ In short, the artificial relativises what is ‘natural’ as a normative reference for human action, causing, in vast regions of the earth, especially in the South, the phenomena of impoverishment of the plundered natural environment and of situations of impoverishment of the existence of entire populations, creating situations of great social injustice.⁴⁵

2.2. Relationship with others in the digital world

35. *Relationships with others* have been revolutionised in the digital age through radical transformations in communication (*mass media*) and information (*big data*). These have reached unprecedented levels of universality, immediacy and involvement, increasing widespread awareness of belonging to one large human family. However, individuals ‘online’ can often feel like insignificant dots within an ungovernable and therefore destabilising flow of information, which pushes them to develop their identity within virtual bonds (contacts) that are timeless and placeless. This immense mass of data in which we are immersed, constantly revisable and therefore fluid, intensifies the perception of the complexity of reality, generating anxiety, insecurity and fear.

36. In this context of increasing complexity, advances in *artificial intelligence* offer a process of data management, organised on a statistical basis, and the development of effective solutions,

⁴⁴Cf. K. Crawford, *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*, New Haven/London 2021.

⁴⁵Some criteria for discernment can be found in *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 461–487.

based on algorithms, which are not always controllable by individuals, and sometimes not even by companies or states (the algorithms of some systems have not been disclosed to any public authority). The development objectives are managed independently by the system. This highlights the power of artificial intelligence, with its ability to manage enormous amounts of data, identifying correlations and proposing decisions based on inferences that are unavailable to human calculation.

37. AI actually refers to a vast field of research and applications that have various implications for people's lives, both at work and in their family and social lives.⁴⁶ Without going into an analysis of the different forms of AI, it is useful to clarify the distinction between AI *in the narrow sense*, with its many applications, and *general* AI (AGI).⁴⁷ This distinction highlights two different ways of conceiving artificial intelligence and imagining its meaning and use. AI in the narrow sense offers fast processing of large amounts of data using algorithms that perform complex analysis and probability calculations, including artificial intelligence systems that autonomously generate training data and refine their own internal processes. These forms of use are widespread in civil (individual and corporate) and military contexts in many parts of

⁴⁶See the interdisciplinary work of M. J. Gaudet et al. (ed.), AI Research Group of the Centre for Digital Culture of the Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See, *Encountering Artificial Intelligence: Ethical and Anthropological Investigations*, vol. 1 (Eugene, OR 2024).

⁴⁷Cf. Francis, *Message for the 57th World Day of Peace, 'Artificial Intelligence and Peace'*, 1 January 2024, 2. Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Culture and Education, Note *Antiqua et Nova*, 28 January 2025, 7–12.

the world.⁴⁸

38. AGI refers to a future, pervasive technology capable of replacing all computational and operational aspects of human intelligence thanks to extremely high computing speeds, made possible by the future development of quantum processors. Where specific aspects of human intelligence are consciously weakened or abandoned, AGI could have profound consequences that risk escaping human control. Some therefore hypothesise that AI will be asked to manage the problems it has created, according to a dynamic that would become irreversible. This vicious circle is presented by some as an almost necessary process, as in natural processes, a destiny that would bring to extreme consequences what human beings would themselves have originally caused.

39. In the context of fundamental anthropology, we must ask ourselves whether we can consider as exhaustive the understanding of the human being as *homo faber* and *homo technologicus*, supported both individually and collectively by AI that subtly saturates and determines every aspect of life. The result is a 'hyperconnected' world, with an increasing acceleration of economic, political, social and military dynamics, which risk becoming uncontrollable and therefore ungovernable. In such a world, human action itself becomes material to be analysed and shaped according to power or market objectives that are not always transparent. Social control and the risk of manipulation increase.

⁴⁸Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Culture and Education, Note *Antiqua et Nova*, 28 January 2025, 49–103.

40. At the application level, AI *in the strict sense* raises questions about the reliability of data and the criteria by which programmers process it so as to make it available. It is unclear what biases or power systems influence the work. In particular, serious doubts arise regarding automated, AI-based decision-making processes in sensitive areas of human life: when deciding whether to provide medical care or grant loans or mortgages or insurance, or when prosecuting criminal cases in court or assessing the conduct of prisoners and the likelihood of reoffending with a view to reducing sentences, or when deciding on military attacks or law enforcement interventions.⁴⁹

41. As for AGI, there is an intense race to increasingly bridge the gap between the self-improvement of AI systems and the achievement of AGI. Although the goal is still far off, it is being pursued with great determination, but sometimes without the caution generated by the wise recognition that good always involves appropriate limits and proportions. Whether it is a distant dream or an imminent innovation, this form of *general AI* stimulates the search for a deeper understanding of the nature of human intelligence, its uniqueness among living beings, its irreplaceability, especially in relation to moral responsibility and its intrinsic openness to transcendence. A type of knowledge and calculation that dispenses with intelligence that is experienced in a body and situated, as well as with a type of relational knowledge which is transmitted from generation to generation through

⁴⁹Cf. Leo XIV, *Message to participants in the second annual conference on "Artificial Intelligence, Ethics and Corporate Governance"*, 17 June 2025.

educational processes that play on identity and the meaning to be given to one's destiny and role in the world, constitutes a threat to the true good of humanity. Yet, the dreams of *transhumanism*, which in *posthumanism* even imagines an evolutionary leap, are based on this type of knowledge without a body, without limits, without ties, and without moral sense. Such imagination forcefully raises the question of the ultimate goal of technological progress.⁵⁰

42. In this context, it is understandable how *interpersonal communication* has undergone profound changes in the *society of mass communication* (radio, television, internet, social media), especially in recent times. There are advantages to this technological development, such as active citizenship or more direct and participatory information at the social and political level. But often, contacts are created without bonds, functional relationships without real solidarity, in an infinite market of news and personal data that is not always verifiable and is often manipulated. Communication is not always fully transparent. The pervasiveness of social media, which has become so indispensable that the existence of the human family without it is unthinkable, requires greater vigilance regarding cultural and economic conditioning. These are not neutral means: 'Often such views, stressing the strictly technical nature of the media, effectively support their subordination to economic interests intent on dominating the market and, not least, to attempts to impose cultural models that

⁵⁰Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Culture and Education, Note *Antiqua et Nova*, 28 January 2025, 38.

serve ideological and political agendas.⁵¹ Their influence on the ethical-cultural dimension of globalisation is a challenge to anthropology.⁵²

43. In many areas of the infosphere, there is a perceived insistence on being recognised, a constant sharing of thoughts and emotions online, which must be ‘given recognition by others’. Despite the legitimate human need for recognition, this excessive phenomenon is a symptom of uncertainty of identity.⁵³ Precisely because identity must be ‘invented’ without objective external references (nature, cultural values, social roles, shared customs), it is weaker: it calls for recognition but must negotiate, attract and conquer it, even by shouting or by distorting reality. Today, the self struggles in the hope of being recognised by someone, yet it often does so by asserting its individual rights *against* the other, *challenging* the other. This leads to an increase of social conflicts, which often become identity conflicts. The current crisis in Western democracies cannot be understood without taking into account this growing difficulty in the shared recognition of what unites us as human beings. This context leaves the way open for political leaders to make important decisions based solely on their own will.

⁵¹Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 73.

⁵²Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Culture and Education, Note *Antiqua et Nova*, 28 January 2025, 85–89.

⁵³Many exponents of contemporary culture have addressed this issue: cf. E. Erikson, *Gioventù e crisi di identità*, Roma 1995.

44. A sensitive social area that is symptomatic of the possible ethical and cultural implications of *social media* is the world of children and young people: ‘The web and social networks have created a new way to communicate and bond. They are “a public square” where the young spend much of their time and meet one another easily [...]’⁵⁴ On the positive side, these media offer new opportunities for dialogue and are often a source of independent information, protecting the most vulnerable and denouncing human rights violations. But they also have limitations and serious risks: ‘the digital environment is also one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, even to the extreme case of the ‘dark web’. [...] New forms of violence are spreading through social media, for example cyberbullying. The internet is also a channel for spreading pornography and the exploitation of persons for sexual purposes or through gambling.’⁵⁵

45. New forms of social communication have a strong impact on political debate because, while on the one hand they allow for experimentation with forms of direct democracy, in which every citizen can express and make known his or her opinion, on the other hand they can generate strong polarisation between groups that think differently and confront each other in a conflictual and violent manner, treating each other as enemies simply because they think differently. Social exchange itself undergoes a ‘tribalisation’ that fragments society into opinion groups

⁵⁴Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 87. Cf. also Pontifical Academy of Sciences, *Final Statement of the Workshop on Risks and Opportunities of AI for Children. A Common Commitment for Safeguarding Children*, 24 March 2025.

⁵⁵Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 88.

homogenised by ‘likes’. Political debate risks no longer being based on shared arguments, but rather on opposing sides in a logic of power driven by pressure groups. There is often a lack of ‘social dialogue’ that patiently builds consensus from the bottom up, starting from a common world and bonds of solidarity: ‘These closed circuits facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate. The proliferation of fake news is the expression of a culture that has lost its sense of truth and bends the facts to suit particular interests.’⁵⁶

2.3. *Understanding oneself: consciousness and corporeality*

46. The information revolution (‘infosphere’) is changing the way knowledge is exercised: it is no longer a question of developing theories to interpret data and find solutions to problems, but rather of establishing correlations between data and calculating success rates. The risk is that, in this way, we tend to overlook critical knowledge, while delegating certain operations such as calculation, reasoning and translation could diminish the mental agility and creativity of the individual. But the greatest danger is that of reducing the horizon of human knowledge, limiting it to those forms of knowledge that correspond to what AI can process, with a strong impact on the educational environment (in schools and universities).⁵⁷ Questions of meaning and ethical

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 89; cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 199–202; Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Culture and Education, Nota *Antiqua et Nova*, 28 January 2025, 77–84.

⁵⁷ See various recent studies by MIT, such as N. Kosmyna et al., ‘Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt when Using an AI Assistant for Essay Writing Task’, <https://www.media.mit.edu/publications/your-brain-on-chatgpt/> [accessed online 19 August 2025].

issues, but also philosophical (ontological) and theological questions, may be excluded as irrelevant. Thus, AI could effectively decide what is permissible to know, relegating other issues to the subjective realm or to matters of taste. Self-awareness itself can be considered as a series of pieces of information to be transferred to digital media that are more resistant than human flesh and organised according to algorithms, while sensory perception is enhanced by the digital revolution (cyborgs, neuroscience, the internet), which provides images, sounds and situations in real time, creating strong emotions in a system of immediate communication and therefore without any mediation of meaning that would allow for understanding and reasoning.

47. With the development of *biotechnology*, neuroscience and DNA mapping, combined with advances in pharmacology and robotics (*cyborgs*), our *perception of the body* and its meaning is also changing. The obvious gains for the health and well-being of many sections of the population should be appreciated: prevention campaigns, early diagnosis, calculation of the risks of various therapies or the side effects of drugs on the body have greatly improved the possibilities for medical intervention and so of public health. However, we cannot ignore the trends that reduce the body to biological material to be enhanced, transformed and remodelled at will, with the dream of achieving conditions of existence capable of avoiding pain, ageing and death. Especially in the West, advances in cosmetic surgery, combined with pharmacology (hormonal treatments, substances that enhance emotions or concentration) offer tools that greatly change the relationship with

one's own body and therefore with reality and with others. The result is a widespread 'cult of the body', which tends towards a frantic search for a perfect figure that is always fit, young and beautiful. Once modified, often with relentless frenzy, the body becomes a body-object in which the person-subject mirrors themselves, creating a relationship in which the person is no longer his or her body but 'owns' a body, from which arises the search for a 'borrowed' identity. In this dynamic, it is no longer necessary to accept one's own body in order to realise one's identity. It can be transformed according to the tastes of the moment. A curious situation is created: the ideal body is exalted, sought after and cultivated, while the real body is not truly loved, being a source of limitations, fatigue and ageing. One desires a perfect body, while dreaming of escaping from one's own concrete body and its limitations.⁵⁸

2.4. *Relationship with God*

48. Digital technologies offer many opportunities to religions that mobilise digital communication resources in service of their mission. Today, the internet is a 'place' where one can find many positive proposals for religious and Christian life, facilitating knowledge and information in ways that were unimaginable until recently. One need only recall how much religious communication 'exploded' during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁹ However, there is a

⁵⁸Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 74; Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 82.

⁵⁹Cf. T. Berger, *@ Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds* (Liturgy, Worship, and Society Series), New York/London 2019.

risk that a wide variety of digital religions will fill the internet like a giant 'religious market', offering *à la carte* choices according to individual interests. These are religious offerings without real ties or community belonging, closer to the emotional tastes of individuals than to a shared experience. One may also doubt the authentically ecclesial character of certain Christian communication on social networks, especially when used to fuel controversy, create divisions and even destroy the good reputation of other people. Furthermore, some of these new online spiritual practices end up producing a metamorphosis in the mode of believing, since digital technology has a very strong hold on the religious imagination. Not infrequently, the result is a new paradigm that redefines religious identities: technology itself also acts as a spiritual guide and mediator of the sacred. In fact, devotees of various religions and spiritual seekers often place indiscriminate trust in online search engines, rendering human mediations of the sacred superfluous, replaced by the digital. Extreme cases include requests for virtual blessings and exorcisms, digital spiritualism and three-dimensional 'false religions'.

49. This trust in a world governed by machines, which not only facilitates the provision of religious resources but also the direct reception of proposals for the meaning of life and access to the divine through digital technology, is not far from the logic of *transhumanism* and *posthumanism*: digital religion presents itself as if it even had the power to create a 'God in its own image and likeness' to offer to a humanity that places total trust in technology. The 'living God' can be replaced by a 'virtual God'

with the claim to ‘save’ humanity on the basis of technological performances made available to the spiritual aspirations of human beings.⁶⁰

50. In sum, these transformations affect our relationship with the Mystery of the origin and ultimate purpose of human life. When human beings reduce created nature (persons, the cosmos) to matter to be transformed, they no longer manifest the glory of the Creator, but take His place. The same happens when the task of giving meaning to existence and pointing out its ultimate end is identified with the implementation of technological potential. In this context, religious and spiritual traditions have something essential and indispensable yet to offer regarding the wisdom of living in relationship with God.⁶¹

3. The cultural impact of technological revolutions: towards a critical discernment

51. The impact of the anthropological transformation linked to scientific and technological development is already leaving its mark on the *social imaginary of mass culture*, but it finds its strongest expression in the *movements of transhumanism and posthumanism*. The study of the myths developed by mass culture regarding the future of humanity (science fiction, dystopias) and the critical analysis of the founding principles of the *transhumanist*

⁶⁰Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Culture and Education, *Nota Antiqua et Nova*, 28 January 2025, 104–107.

⁶¹Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 85, 199–201, 222.

and *post-humanist* movements highlight the significance and scope of the anthropological changes taking place.

52. The *social imaginary*, expressed in cinema and television series, but also in novels, artistic creations and music, reveals an acute perception of the hopes and risks associated with possible future worlds. Cinema imagined possible scenarios related to epidemics and planetary catastrophes long before we had to go through the Covid-19 pandemic. Dystopias suggested the theme of many of the most important films and novels as early as the twentieth century, exerting a significant influence on these forms of popular culture. These artistic creations convey the perception of the inevitability of a process of technological development that will have a significant impact on people's lives and the fate of humanity, in awareness of the risks involved. As a result, there is often fear of the unknowns that accompany the uncontrollable evolution of machines or technological devices, which could lead to the creation of autonomous entities capable of determining the future and dominating the planet.

53. Science fiction films and novels help us to become aware of many difficult issues concerning human identity and destiny that are thus brought into play. They question what can be the value of affection and what bonds are possible, or what will be the powerful forces that will drive progress. They imagine grim scenarios in which new forms of exploitation of the weak will prevail, perhaps reducing them to human material for dangerous experiments. The type of social structure also raises concerns, leaving us uncertain as to whether it will be elitist and unequal,

homogenising and hostile to individual freedoms, or open and pluralistic, democratic and participatory; whether there will be a technocratic oligarchy that dominates or a better political organisation based on human dignity and the common good. Finally, there is concern about the environmental impact of progress: what pollution will there be, what energy resources will be available and at what price? What will be the quality of life? These widespread questions reveal a strong ambivalence between, on the one hand, unquestioning faith in technology and its ability for auto-correction and, on the other, mistrust about its being used correctly with the suspicion that the hidden interests of some powerful lobby could lead to devastating results.

54. Today, it is precisely *the transhumanism and posthumanism movements* that provide the conceptual and narrative framework in which this imagery about the future of humanity emerges most strongly. These two forms of interpretation and cultural planning, more or less ideological, of the potential of technology stimulate the collective imagination with the claim of a greater theoretical rigour that would offer a realistic prediction of the future of humanity. Ultimately, they make a proposal for a new vision of reality which involves a new anthropology. They can be considered as ‘systems’ of thought that promote a crusade in favour of science and its progress in light of the slogan ‘everything that technology can do must be done to improve the human condition’. It would thus be a matter of preparing for a new, unprecedented phase in human history.

55. Behind these movements' proposals lies the unrestrained and uncritical adoption of the concept of *human enhancement*: a primarily biomedical notion that is very prevalent in the field of biotechnology. It can be defined as the set of biomedical, genetic, pharmacological and cybernetic technologies aimed at improving the physical, cognitive or sensory abilities of human beings beyond what is considered normal or average. Its fields of application include the introduction of advanced prostheses to enhance human physical or mental performance, including by way of technological and electronic devices inserted into the human body; the use of techniques for artificial human fertilisation; the use of drugs that improve the physical and cognitive abilities of human beings in the fields of sport, physical or mental work, and military activity. Now, it is precisely the proposal of *human enhancement* that prompts a critical reflection on *transhumanism* insofar as it invites us to ask the question: 'Up to what point is it permissible to improve living conditions, enhance performance and overcome limitations, while maintaining the good of the human being as the ultimate goal?' In fact, in the field of *human enhancement*, it is already clear that, in order to be authentically human, any desire to improve the human condition must maintain a balance between what is technically possible and what is humanly sensible.

56. Based on the above reflections, we can see the importance of focusing on the anthropological question, asking not so much how to go 'beyond the limits of the human', but rather what makes our existence 'authentically human'. In light of this fundamental

anthropological question, it is possible to develop some criteria for a critical discernment of the anthropology underlying these philosophical and cultural movements.

57. A first element that is problematic is the *negative judgement on the human condition as it is, and ultimately on its identity*. This leads to the dream of reinventing it, a dream motivated by dissatisfaction with what it is, with its limitations and defects. We must ask ourselves, however, whether ‘resentment’ towards real life is a good starting-point for progress or rather a temptation to rebel against or escape from reality. This is not about the necessary struggle to change unjust conditions and structures, but about the rejection of the nature of things and of oneself. In particular, it is necessary to warn against a fundamentally negative perception of corporeality, which can be seen more as an obstacle than as an integral part of human identity.

58. The second aspect, connected to the first, is the *dream of individualistic and elitist perfectionism*. It seems that every concrete human being can exist or be accepted only on condition that they ‘become more perfect’,⁶² so much so that one might wonder whether the current human condition still has a right to exist or whether particular human beings have become ‘superfluous’. Some hyper-technological theories seem to challenge the fundamental principle inherited from humanism: ‘Act so that the

⁶²In *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 25, a. 6 ad 3 and ad 4, Thomas Aquinas rejects the idea of a best possible world that God was obliged to create, arguing that the world God has actually created cannot have been ‘made better’ than it has been in regard to the gift of grace and in particular the grace of the union of the divine infinite with the finite in the hypostatic union.

effects of your actions are compatible with the permanence of an authentically human life on earth. Act so that the effects of your actions are not destructive of the future possibility of such a life.’⁶³ This principle can even be considered to be a useless and harmful limitation on technological progress.

59. A third factor is *the social impact of this view of humanity*. In fact, it can lead to the assertion of a separation between a superior form of humanity, equipped with tools that empower it to the point of immortality, and a primitive, pre-technological humanity ultimately doomed for extinction. It is not clear on what basis the different conditions that humanity can achieve will be established: wealth, culture, heritage, openness to experimentation or invention. Nor is it clear who will have the power to make decisions. In this perspective, the bonds between people are in danger of disappearing, as is belonging to a people and a culture on the basis of which the common good can be assessed. Furthermore, if we consider that many social and political structures arise from shared needs and the organisation of institutions and bonds capable of meeting these challenges (hospitals, schools, prisons and rehabilitation centres), we can imagine the difficulty transhumanists and posthumanists have in saying what will become of the social and political world in which we live. Transformations are no longer bound by mutual recognition in a logic of fraternity and solidarity, and the negative consequences of this are reflected primarily in the idea of the family. There is no longer any talk of procreation as the

⁶³H. Jonas, *Il principio responsabilità*, Torino 2009 (orig. 1979), p. 54.

communication of life, nor is there any interest in new births. It is only discussed in terms of planning the lives of other human 'offspring', made genetically perfect. But issues such as the generativity of conjugal love or the emotional support of families end up disappearing from view.

60. Finally, we must not forget *the generally negative view of religious experience*. It is often presented as a resigned and fatalistic position, which sacralises the current human condition with dogmas and precepts that inhibit research and progress. Any 'sacralising visions' that emphasise the value of the body or nature as expressions of God's creation would stand in the way of free research. The idea that biological life is a gift to be treated with care would imply the prohibition of certain experiments and improvements, putting a block on progress. It is no longer clear what is meant by personal identity when the person is reduced to a bundle of sensations or 'optimised projects', to a sort of enhanced subjective experience and increased cognitive ability, while the body is reduced to imperfect biological material or, in any case, material that must be enhanced.

61. Christian anthropology can identify in these contemporary philosophical and cultural trends many features of the mentality that Francis has described as a form of 'neo-Gnosticism'. These are ways of thinking and attitudes that are to be understood in a sense analogous to the ancient forms of Gnosticism. Such an approach, in considering human persons and their salvation, seeks to free them from all dependence and limitation, separated from the body,

the cosmos, community and history.⁶⁴ It ‘puts forward a model of salvation that is merely interior, closed off in its own subjectivism. [...] It thus presumes to liberate the human person from the body and from the material universe, in which traces of the provident hand of the Creator are no longer found, but only a reality deprived of meaning, foreign to the fundamental identity of the person, and easily manipulated by human interests.’⁶⁵

62. The mindset that can be recognised in *transhumanist* and *posthumanist* movements effectively loses sight of the integral nature of the human being and, in particular, human identity and vocation according to God’s plan, exalting some dimensions at the expense of others. The fundamental anthropological question that arises is clear: is this a proposal that transforms or distorts human beings in terms of their essence? Will we arrive at an exceptional human being or at forms of exception to the authentic human being? According to the Christian vision, human beings are defined by a specific form that guarantees the unity and integrity of each one, both in reference to their identity, in the actions through which they become themselves, and in the ultimate end in which they find their fulfilment. At the individual level it is the immortal soul that gives form, that is, unifies and organises matter into a living body, giving human beings a transcendence that *post-* and *transhumanism* can neither achieve nor surpass. However,

⁶⁴Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, 19 March 2018, 36–39; see also Apostolic Constitution *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 94.

⁶⁵Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Placuit Deo*, 22 February 2018, 3, which specifies both the similarities and differences between the forms of Gnosticism in antiquity and these tendencies in modern and postmodern thought.

what unifies and guides personal development does not emerge only from nature and the cosmos, but is also realised through relationships, in which personal identity is anticipated by the expectations of others, and in an original and fundamental way through free dialogue with God. This is why Paul can recommend: ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind’ (*Rom* 12:2), ‘until Christ is formed in you’ (*Gal* 4:19; cf. also *Phil* 3:10-11 and *Phil* 2:6-11). The form of humanity finds its measure and fulfilment in Christ, who died and rose again, and opens up an integral humanism in which all persons are enabled to realise themselves beyond themselves, by virtue of the immeasurable gift of the Holy Spirit. Begun in our earthly existence, this participation in ‘eternal life’ in Christ is consummated – as the Church’s faith professes – ‘in the resurrection of the flesh and in the life of the world to come.’

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven, body and soul, is a sign that we are all called to participate as full human persons in the glory of Christ at the right hand of God the Father.

Chapter 2: Life as Vocation: the Human Person as an Agent in History

63. The prospect of a *transhumanist* anthropological transformation, as well as dreams of *posthumanism*, may seem like a remote possibility, like an exaggeration far removed from the real condition of humanity. In fact, the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly diminished confidence in unlimited technological progress, and it is better understood that humanity needs above all a solidarity that cares for everyone and thanks to which each people can live in peace. Yet *transhumanism's* demands for progress, especially when they encourage the drive towards *posthumanism*, exert a strong impact on the common imagination and risk acting as a sort of mass distraction from humanity's most urgent problems, diverting resources and energy from the daily struggles for the possible good of so much of suffering humanity, on the one hand, and favouring distortions in the perception of the real conditions of experience, on the other.

64. It is therefore necessary to recall some fundamental dimensions of human experience that are compromised or

overshadowed by a certain idea of technological progress. We shall focus first on two constitutive dimensions: the *historical* dimension of human experience, which requires knowing how to inhabit *time* and *space*; and the *intersubjective* dimension, which brings into play the sense of belonging to a family, a community, a people and to the whole of humanity, where we are ‘all brothers and sisters’. We shall conclude the chapter by placing these dimensions of human experience within an overall proposal of life as *an integral vocation*, in line with recent indications from the conciliar and pontifical Magisterium.

1. The historical dimension of human experience: time and space

65. We place ourselves first and foremost in the context of the constitutive historical-temporal dimension of human experience. Historical consciousness is a fundamental factor in the construction of identity, both of the individual and of a people, understood in their differences but also in their connection. Human beings are historical and cultural subjects, capable of transforming nature, cultivating their humanity and giving meaning to history. The notion of history as a temporal process moving towards a promised and hoped-for future is a precious legacy of Judaism and Christianity. In the light of revelation, Christian theology has reflected on the anthropological and salvific meaning of personal time and the history of humanity. Historical consciousness is a constitutive element of the Christian

faith, which encounters the God who brings salvation within the historical journey of a people. For this reason, revelation also shows the mysterious and indelible value of the present, understood as a privileged and unrepeatable moment of the anticipation of eternity in time. At the same time, it becomes a critique of various reductionisms concerning time, the present and memory, as well as eschatology.

66. Peoples are subjects of particular cultures and histories, which are related to a greater or lesser extent to world history.⁶⁶ Therefore, the human family, the subject of universal history, presents itself as a plural unity extended in space and time. History has meaning because events are signs that embody meanings and values through which people realise and express themselves. This symbolic or ‘sacramental’ structure of historical events invites us to seek their meaning not only by considering their origin or proximate causes, but also their ultimate purpose. Thus, history takes place in processes that transform the conditions of experience and become public events with more general effects. Today, historical processes are undergoing a clear

⁶⁶The notion of a ‘people’ is not synonymous with that of a ‘nation’, which has a more political and legal meaning, even if the two are not mutually exclusive. On the meaning proposed here, see Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 157–158: ‘If we wish to maintain that society is more than a mere aggregate of individuals, the term “people” proves necessary. There are social phenomena that create majorities, as well as megatrends and communitarian aspirations. Men and women are capable of coming up with shared goals that transcend their differences and can thus engage in a common endeavour. Then, too, it is extremely difficult to carry out a long-term project unless it becomes a collective aspiration. All these factors lie behind our use of the words “people” and “popular.”’ Cf. also paragraphs 90–92 below.

acceleration and universalisation:⁶⁷ the human community is rushing towards a common destiny, in which there is an ever-increasing interdependence between national histories and world history. This intertwining requires us to articulate well the value of local cultures, with their processes and times, and the meaning of universal fraternity.⁶⁸

1.1. *Living time with a healthy sense of history*

67. For human beings, history is an indispensable dimension of their being and acting. They assume time by way of an intelligent and spiritual interiority, bringing together the dimensions of the flow of time in the distention of the soul and thus coming to experience reality.⁶⁹ Memory, understood as the recovery of the past in the present, as well as the horizon of hope for eternity, open to the future, provides the context for discovering the meaning of life and for an impetus of human initiative that enlarges the horizons of action.

68. One of the first repercussions of recent technological developments concerns the experience of time.⁷⁰ Today, there is a loss of the sense of history and a reduction of experience to the

⁶⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 5.

⁶⁸ Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 9–17. See also numbers 151–153, in which Pope Francis locates regional realities between local and universal ones.

⁶⁹ In a paradigmatic way: Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 14. 31. 41. Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit I–III*, Paris 1983–1985.

⁷⁰ There is a widespread perception of a ‘lack of time’, where time is consumed but not lived: Z. Bauman, *Consumo dunque sono*, Roma-Bari 2009; Id., *L’etica in un mondo di consumatori*, Roma-Bari 2010. On the loss of the sense of history and memory: J. B. Metz, *Sul concetto della nuova teologia politica 1967–1997*, Brescia 1998.

fleeting moment, together with an ambiguous focus on the present. Digital culture tends to dissolve the ‘anamnestic culture’ of history and transform the living culture of memory and hope into a postmodern culture of a present closed in on itself.

The organisation of information on the internet is concerned with collecting and organising immense amounts of data based on probability calculations, rather than with seeking hypotheses of understanding or explanation. Even the question of the foundation of experience, the explanatory cause or a founding meaning, is now considered a matter superseded by the analysis of connections between data. Instead of living memories and traditions forged by memories, the processing of available data through computerisation takes over, data that can then be retrieved at any time. But computers do not remember; they merely store data. This can result in the elimination of the consciousness of time and the transposition of different times into the space of an indefinite contemporaneity, leading to what has been described as a spatialisation of the world. Through technology, we can presume to overcome the power of time (fleeting and at the same time open to eternity) and make all times contemporary. But a present that no longer knows the past no longer has a future either. And the lack of an end, which opens us up to eternity, becomes a ‘bad infinity’.

69. All this weakens people’s confidence in their ability to interpret and shape the world, which escapes practical understanding and social control and is left in the hands of gigantic bureaucracies overloaded with information thanks to

complex, interdependent and ungovernable technological systems, by which individuals often feel besieged and threatened. Total dependence on these complex and sophisticated systems, over which the individual has no influence, creates feelings of powerlessness and pushes people to close themselves off in limited and protected horizons of meaning and life.⁷¹ Reality becomes a connection, through which one enters a network of contacts and encounters that require agility, speed and immediate reactions rather than reflection and critical thinking. In this scenario, universal narratives and stories based on lasting choices are less interesting than assuming identities that weigh light and are multidimensional.

70. It is not surprising that (post)modern culture tends to cultivate the oblivion of being, memory and eternal destiny. In such a landscape, human beings are less and less their own memory and more and more their own unlimited experiment.⁷² Among the various reasons for this ‘cultural amnesia’ we can list the one found in the biblical story: human beings in prosperity forget their God and the history they have lived with Him (cf. *Jud* 2:10; *Dt* 4:23, 30; *Lk* 12:31-21), disregarding the divine commandment that commits them to care for the poor and marginalised. Added to this is the impact of a scientistic mentality,

⁷¹Cf. for example: C. Lasch, *L'io minimo. La mentalità della sopravvivenza in un'epoca di turbamenti*, Milano 1985.

⁷²Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*, 29 June 2013, 25, with its emphasis: ‘In contemporary culture, we often tend to consider the only real truth to be that of technology: truth is what we succeed in building and measuring by our scientific know-how, truth is what works and what makes life easier and more comfortable.’

which imagines science as the possible solution to every problem, capable of healing wounds and thus freeing us from the pain of memory. A third factor is resignation to one's own limited fragility, devoid of great hopes, which becomes a simple exhortation to 'move forward' without criteria, as if the only important thing were to advance, to proceed even without a specific goal: an emancipatory consciousness draws from the past a minimal memory as a stimulus to go further, without desiring a goal, whether immanent or much less transcendent. Furthermore, this form of amnesia leaves room for ideological reconstructions of the past or forms of revisionism and denialism, which seek to legitimise power games or justify painful conflicts. In reality, we cannot build a future without a solid memory of the history from which we come and which has generated us, nor without hope for the future.

71. These situations are also the result of a globalised economy, which favours a single, mass-produced cultural model, in which powerful forces assert themselves, protecting their own interests at the expense of weaker cultures. The result is the loss of the integral meaning of history.⁷³ Therefore, there prevail dynamics of standardisation in what we might call *false cultures* of 'consumerism', 'waste', 'walls', 'isolation and withdrawal' or even the spread of an 'empty culture, focused on the immediate and lacking a common project'.⁷⁴ These false cultures are at work both in populisms that disfigure the term 'people', confining it to a logic

⁷³Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 13.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 17; also 188, 27, 30, 36.

of closure, and in ‘individualistic liberal visions’, which reject the very category of people and the positive enhancement of the community and the cultural ties it contains.⁷⁵ The result of these cultural forms, in the context of a globalised contemporary digital world, is further disorientation. Compared to these false cultures, the Gospel presents itself as a kind of counterculture, not in the sense that the inspiration of the Gospel imposes its own unique hegemonic culture, but in the sense that it values and promotes all cultures, or dimensions of them, that are authentically human.

72. In order to cope with this experience of the horizontal acceleration of historical time, it is necessary to recover the origin and ultimate goal of history, as they can be experienced in the present, in order to understand their true meaning. The encounter between human time and God’s eternity in Jesus Christ freely offers a meaning of history that corresponds deeply to the expectations of the human experience of time, without detracting from the intersection of the three dimensions of past experience, present initiative and future expectation, in the horizon of eternity that qualifies them.

73. The Christian experience of time offers the coordinates of a salvation that takes place in history, insofar as it places the fullness of time within a specific historical context, in a present charged with eternity, thanks to the incarnation of the Son of God (cf. *Gal* 4:4-6). In this way, it opens historical processes to the expectation of a promised fulfilment, which realises the needs of

⁷⁵Cf. *ibid.*, 160 and 163.

the human heart of every age in an unimaginable way (cf. *Rev* 21-22).⁷⁶ It corresponds to a need of the historical consciousness of peoples to be able to read events in a more comprehensive and meaningful context, one that is capable of understanding historical events in the unity of a universal process endowed with meaning, while respecting particular histories and grasping unity in the diversity of the manifold. The eschatological fulfilment promised in Jesus Christ in no way detracts from the value of concrete historical events in the present, but illumines their meaning, reactivating the character of experience that brings promise and with it the active expectation of a new world.⁷⁷ This is possible because the end of history does not coincide with its conclusion, but refers to a final goal that transcends historical events from within and directs them towards a new fulfilment, towards which everything converges.

74. The history of salvation is not presented simply as enclosed in a particular history of its own, alongside universal history, because God's concrete saving action in history is articulated *with the cultural movements of peoples* in a unity that maintains the distinction: 'The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: "The Spirit of God with marvellous foresight directs the

⁷⁶Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, 14 September 1998, 12.

⁷⁷Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 38-39.

course of the ages and renews the face of the earth.”⁷⁸ The relationship between God and his people, but also with humanity and the whole of creation, comes about through the gifts of the Spirit and the Word, which do not simply rain down from above, but germinate within the human being who welcomes them and with responsibility nurtures them so that they bear fruit (cf. *Is* 55:10-11; *Mt* 25:14-30). In this way, the divine opens up to the human the space for its own fulfilment, re-establishing human beings in a new and surprising communion, which neither annuls nor absorbs humanity, but sustains it in its historical fulfilment. The unifying of historical processes in Christ does not detract from the substance of local histories and cultures, nor does it standardise their different riches by flattening them to the interests of a few or to the laws of the market or the communicative logic of the global digital world.

75. It is an experience full of joy that Mary expresses in the *Magnificat* (cf. *Lk* 1:46-55). This prayer reveals Mary’s own awareness of history: in her, as the Mother of Christ, is present the entire economy of salvation in which the eternal is united in a new way with time.⁷⁹ The *Magnificat* echoes in Mary’s personal experience that of the entire people of God in the history of salvation.⁸⁰ We find in it another kind of experience of time, one that is visited by God’s grace, in which Mary’s obedience to the Angel’s announcement opens up the fullness of grace that

⁷⁸John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 7 December 1990, 28.

⁷⁹Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987, 36.

⁸⁰Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010, 30.

expanded her present (“The Almighty has done great things for me”) to a positive future (“From now on, all generations will call me blessed”), in conscious remembrance of God’s saving action and its style of acting (“From generation to generation his mercy is on those who fear him. He has shown the strength of his arm. [...] He has lifted up the lowly...”).⁸¹

1.2. *Inhabiting space: from one’s own space to the ‘thresholds’*

76. Human beings inhabit space in different ways: they are both ‘domestic beings’, living in a home, and ‘political beings’, putting down roots and organising themselves in a city and a homeland, and finally ‘cosmopolitan beings’, situated in the world. The human dwelling encompasses this triangle formed by the home, as the sphere of family and nature; by the city and the people/nation, as the space of history and culture; and by the whole world, as the horizon of belonging to human nature. Local and global are constitutive dimensions of human experience, now transformed by the processes of globalisation, as can be seen, for example, in megacities and in changes in mobility.⁸²

77. A significant phenomenon is the organisation of urban space in megacities. We are living in the ‘*Urban Age*’, a new moment in human history. The formation of huge cities is a phenomenon of our time, which began in the mid-twentieth century. Since the early years of the twenty-first century, more

⁸¹Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, 24 October 2024, 19.

⁸²Cf. Synod of Bishops, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops – Second Session: *Final Document. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*, 26 October 2024, 111–113.

than half of the world's population has been living in cities, leading to a shift from rural to urban contexts, typical of today's media and information culture. The type of life in which human beings seek fulfilment has changed greatly in these 'metropolitan regions', as Paul VI called them, which unite centres and peripheries in immense agglomerations, with large suburban complexes often lacking essential services.⁸³

78. Today's changes in mobility also have an impact on the human experience of space. The possibility already mentioned of shortening distances with faster means of transport, reorganising the space of life (work, home, friendships, school) but also the spread and distribution of goods, with the possibility of always having products from different parts of the world and distant countries available, has led to a 'de-territorialisation' of personal identity and cultures. Even food is no longer linked to its natural environment of origin and its seasons. Thus, customs, ways of life and values are in constant tension between a defined territorial belonging and a borderless planetary civilisation. We are increasingly citizens of the world. A certain global culture, made up of undifferentiated and universal values, goods and commodities that belong to everyone and no one, increasingly determines the way we dress, eat, entertain ourselves, celebrate and relax, according to the offerings of the leisure industry. The places of meeting and transit where contacts are established are increasingly anonymous and uniform 'non-places' (stations, airports, large shopping centres), expressions of an artificial world

⁸³Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens*, 14 May 1971, 8–12.

rather than human and cultural environments defined by a precise history and identity.

79. In this type of space, people risk moving like nomads wandering in search of new experiences. Thus, the figure of the pilgrim is lost, who sets out on a journey leaving his or her home and his possessions behind, in search of the true homeland in which to live, the promised land to which God calls them. Moreover, pilgrims do not lose their relationship with their own land: 'The solution is not an openness that spurns its own richness. Just as there can be no dialogue with "others" without a sense of our own identity, so there can be no openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one's own land, one's own people, one's own cultural roots.'⁸⁴

80. The global organisation of space does not in itself make us more hospitable and open to others. On the contrary, it often leads to strong identity reactions, which tend to define one's 'own space' by creating insurmountable boundaries that establish clear separations between 'us and you', one's own world and that of others. It is thought-provoking that the first impact of theories of 'multiculturalism' has regard precisely for the perception of space and the unity of the world we inhabit. One can comprehend the alternative metaphors associated positively with this discovery: 'expanding spaces', 'making room for others', 'expanding boundaries'; or, conversely, 'defending one's boundaries', 'erecting barriers', 'defining one's own space'. The imaginary that

⁸⁴Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 143.

dominates so much contemporary culture is that of an individual or a people at the centre of a 'sphere of their own', in relation to which the other or the stranger appears as a secondary determination, on the periphery or at the boundaries.

81. In discovering the other, the different and even the stranger, it is easier today to awaken the perception that 'no one is master in their own house', since otherness has been with us from the beginning, it is with us 'at home'. This means that the other is not a derivative of one's own, but is co-original. Unfortunately, 'what is one's own' is often defined by processes of exclusion towards the other, that is, by creating boundaries. This applies to the consciousness of one's own self as well as to cultures. We must therefore not forget that at origin there is a common humanity that is an intertwining, a network in which the self and the stranger, the self and the other, are co-implicated.⁸⁵ The difficulty in accepting this original intertwining in a logic of encounter and hospitality should make us reflect on the functioning of globalisation, which seems to open up common spaces for encounter, but in reality allows feelings of 'invasion' to grow, revealing the perception of the other as a threat.

82. The Christian faith shifts the axis of the experience of space: 'Christians are indistinguishable from other human beings either by nationality, language or customs. They do not live in special cities, speak a strange language, or follow a peculiar way of life. [...] They live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as it happens,

⁸⁵ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Lectures 1. Autour du politique*, Paris 1991; also B. Waldenfels, *Topographie des Fremden. Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden*, Frankfurt am Main 1997.

and while they follow the customs of the place in their dress, food, and other aspects of life, they propose a wonderful and, as everyone has admitted, incredible way of life. They live in their own countries, but as if they were foreigners; they respect and fulfil all the duties of citizens, and bear all burdens as if they were foreigners; every foreign region is their homeland, yet every homeland is foreign to them.’⁸⁶ Christians do not claim a space of their own, except in the service of mission and worship, and in any case their space is already inhabited by a radical otherness – that of God – which can also assume, in Christ, the figure of the stranger who challenges, questioning what was taken for granted and tranquil.

83. Rethinking ‘one’s own space’ implies redefining boundaries as ‘thresholds’, that is, areas that bring people into contact, spaces of transition. Those who cross the threshold of another human experience do not simply arrive in another place, but are called to ‘become an other’. No one can master this difference and mediate between cultures from a neutral position. The challenge, then, is to expand our boundaries in order to be open to the call of the other. In this sense, the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:1-15) offers an unsurpassed model of the culture of ‘becoming neighbour’ and of encounter.⁸⁷

84. The presence of Jesus Christ, in whom the beginning, the centre and the end of history are gathered together (cf. *Rev* 22:13),

⁸⁶ *Letter to Diognetus* 5:1.

⁸⁷ Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 77–86.

opens up the space of life for peoples and individuals, keeping it open as a welcoming place for differences, without walls or closures. Indeed, it regenerates time, which lives in a present full of salvific meaning (*kairos*), while still on a journey, open to a transcendent future fulfilment that will realise the promise inscribed in its origin.

2. Relationships and the sense of belonging: intersubjectivity

85. Intersubjectivity, that is, belonging to a family, a people and a tradition, is situated in this space-time context. These ways of belonging, in which personal identity begins and is shaped in history, constitute almost a barrier to the spread of a uniform globalisation, which does not always help to form authentic bonds: ‘As society becomes ever more globalized, it brings us closer together, but it does not make us brothers and sisters.’⁸⁸ To speak of intersubjectivity is to emphasise how human life immediately implies a community horizon: the life of the individual must be situated within the framework of relationships that form a community. These relationships, which constitute personal identity, are structured within the family, within a people with its traditions, and within a broader belonging to common humanity.

86. *The family* is the original place of intersubjectivity precisely because it is the place of the gift and acceptance of the miracle of life, which is realised in every new birth. Intersubjectivity arises

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 12; cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, 25 December 2005, 19.

precisely where life is given, not produced, much less self-produced. At the origin of every life there is an unexpected gift, in an experience of original passivity, by which we find ourselves in existence, preceded and welcomed by the desire of others. Today's dominant culture does not pay sufficient attention to the fact that we 'are born', and *transhumanism*, and even more so *posthumanism*, forget that the human being is first and foremost a child, who discovers that he or she has been generated and given to himself or herself in the wonderful adventure of being and growing up.

87. The family as the original community finds in *the child*, and precisely in the child's reception of and coming to self-awareness in the smiling gift of the parents, a particularly significant realisation of human existence that no *transhumanism* or *posthumanism* can make us forget. Life as the fullness of being and promise finds its point of fulfilment in *the child precisely as one who is filial, son or daughter*.⁸⁹ In fact, the articulation of the human in the love between man and woman, and above all in the becoming one of man and woman in the fruitfulness of the child, shows forth the transparency of being as a gift from God. In the child as filial, a reflection of this origin is manifested, with its accompanying wonder and fullness, trust and bliss, gift and gratitude. It is this nexus of bonds and feelings that constitutes the complex interweaving of the beginning, the mirror of the origin in

⁸⁹ Among the authors who have worked in this perspective, see the philosophers G. Siewerth, *Metaphysik der Kindheit*, Einsiedeln 1962; F. Ulrich, *Der Mensch als Anfang. Zur philosophischen Anthropologie der Kindheit*, Einsiedeln 1970. In theology, there is the well-known essay by K. Rahner, 'Gedenken zu einer Theologie der Kindheit': *Schriften zur Theologie*, VII, 313–329.

which filial truth is preserved. The human being as filial child is the anthropological correlate of being as gift and love, its splendid attestation. It is precisely this fullness of being in the simplicity of the child's gaze that is the secret of the intuitive, but also rational, ability to unify reality in its dimensions of necessity and freedom, of spirit and nature, in the embrace of love.

88. The child is a sign of filial humanity understood as dwelling in a fullness: precisely because the child is not thrown into existence, but welcomed and surrounded by parental care, he or she does not have to be conquered in an effort of continuous development, but is received in an attitude of gratitude. The child is not a void to be filled, but a fullness that is given and promised, to be accompanied in the adventure of giving shape to existence in the experiences of life. Filial identity is the object of recognition mediated by family care in the home: in this space of life, the passivity of coming into being is the condition of freedom to act, and dependence on love is the condition of autonomy. This is why reason develops in the child against the backdrop of an original unity of reality, as an articulation of being, goodness and beauty. Thought has an affective root in its origin. This condition is to be rediscovered, not overcome, in an exchange in which the child receives the love of his or her parents and with their child they rediscover their own filial being.

89. The desire to enhance the human should therefore focus less on planning a transhuman that goes beyond the state of (having been) children, and rather seek to guarantee every family the social and economic conditions to welcome and accompany this

‘miracle of the beginning’ in a context of life favourable to the birth and growth of children.

90. Secondly, we must emphasise the human value of belonging to a *people*, with its traditions, and also the theological value of belonging to the People of God in history. The category of ‘people’ in this twofold secular and religious sense takes on significant weight as a subject of a development that is fully human. ‘People’ is a historical category that identifies a communal subject in a given territory, formed over time through processes of integration and with reference to a culture.⁹⁰ Belonging to a people is a complex human reality, made up of existential and emotional sharing.⁹¹ It is realised through the sharing of a culture, that is, a set of values, practices, customs and habits, which allows people to recognise each other, to live normally in a common geographical environment, with a particular language and history. Being part of a people means inhabiting a space together as a sphere of relationships. Each person seeks fulfilment in a set of relationships within a given situation, which shapes their mentality and the way they perceive themselves. There is no identity without belonging – even if experienced critically – to a people.

⁹⁰On the relationship between the political community and the people, cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 385. On the symbolic richness of the people, see R. Guardini, *Dostoevskij. Il mondo religioso*, Brescia 1951, p. 15.

⁹¹Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 268, where he emphasizes the ‘spiritual taste’ of belonging to a people and participating in ‘the gaze of Jesus [which], burning with love, expands to embrace all his people’.

91. We thus also rediscover the value of *the land* as a people's symbolic place of culture and identity. This experience is opposed to the globalist vision that cancels out differences and identities linked to a particular context. The bond with place offers an opportunity for people to meet and build social friendships, starting not from abstract ideas but from shared areas of life and values in the local area (home, work, celebrations). It is precisely this life of a people with a situated identity that is found in contact with other peoples, where there is a calling to an exchange, under the rule of creativity, with different cultures and in a dynamic process, often even one that is conflictual, which is to be taken up and transformed into a mutual exchange of gifts. There is no openness between peoples except in love for one's own land, one's own people and one's own culture.⁹²

92. In belonging to a people, it is necessary to avoid the twofold risk of seeking unifying factors only in ethnicity, language or the defence of territory, understood as a closed and exclusive space, or of dissolving the identity of the people in an anonymous and globalised cosmopolitan culture, which exposes them to the laws of the market and finance, without concern for protecting the common good of society. The fundamental bond is represented by culture, that is, by a certain way of life, which encompasses reference to shared values and therefore oriented towards unity in diversity, which allows us to go beyond conflicts and move towards bonds of fraternity open to all.

⁹²Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 144–145.

93. Within this dynamic search for unity among all peoples in dialogue with one another, we find the historical journey of *the people of God*, which is the Church, the people of God in which the Body of Christ is historically expressed.⁹³ As such, the people of God is not based on territorial, sociological or institutional dynamics, but on faith understood as the bedrock of religious, existential and cultural meaning. She therefore promotes a culture of encounter, since the Church cannot be separated from the journey of humanity. She accompanies the history of peoples, maintaining the tensiety towards universal communion in Christ, the mediator of a new life, stronger than evil and death, but also stronger than conflicts and divisions. This tensiety towards communion does not lose sight of differences, but keeps them open to a greater unified project. This is what happened at Pentecost (cf. *Acts* 2:1-13), when the descent of the Spirit made the Apostles a plural unity, capable of speaking all languages, a 'People of peoples' (cf. *Acts* 15:14-18). The Spirit of God acts in the different cultures and histories of peoples with a universalising but not homogenising work: 'With your blood you have redeemed for God people of every tribe, language, people and nation.' (*Rev* 5:9; cf. also 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6)

94. The insertion of the people of God into the historical journeys of various peoples highlights the challenge of reconciling the particular histories of peoples with the global development of

⁹³On the value of the experience of the people of God, cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 377–383. On the 'theology of the people', see L. Gera, *La religione del popolo*, Bologna 2015 (orig. 1977).

humanity. There is a growing awareness that, on one side, the common good of individual peoples cannot be safeguarded solely through local political strategies, which may be governed by a logic of isolation and closure. Rather, it requires the convergence and harmonisation of local projects with global dynamics that transcend the boundaries of individual countries. But such a synthesis also requires the mediation of international institutions that are sufficiently authoritative and just, and therefore capable of reconciling the good of individual peoples with the common good of humanity as a whole, for the effective protection of what are now called 'common goods' (land, water and air). It is precisely in the crisis linked to the Covid-19 pandemic that we have experienced what it now means 'to be all in the same boat', engaged in a common struggle for the good of all.

95. There is a need for ongoing critical discernment of historical and political choices affecting the human family, from the perspective of the responsibility assumed by various international organisations, as well as by the Church with her social doctrine, in order to clarify the question of who is qualified to decide on the common good and the destiny of all.⁹⁴ In particular, the global economic and monetary systems require, on the one hand, responsibility on the part of financial institutions, which must be attentive to the real economy rather than to the logic of profit, and on the other, they must not lose sight of an ethical approach that is sensitive to the dignity of the person, the common good in a spirit

⁹⁴On the importance of the international community, cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 428–450.

of solidarity, and the well-being of societies, especially the most fragile ones.⁹⁵

96. It is essential to value the unity of the ‘human family’, journeying through history, in reference to the present and eschatologically to the total Christ, in whom the goal and direction of the journey is fully revealed: the communion of Trinitarian love, the fulfilment of the redemption of the human family. This is a journey that takes place in an Easter rhythm, in which what is in the human heart is revealed at the foot of the Cross, as it is freed from everything that hinders communion with God, with creation and with our brothers and sisters. It is precisely in reference to Christ crucified and risen that we can understand the grace of the time given to us, the most just way of inhabiting space and living the quality of relationships in which we become ourselves, and the belonging in which we find the authentic meaning of life.

97. In contrast to any *transhumanist* triumphalism or radical pessimism of *posthumanism*, reference to the mystery of the Cross draws our attention to history from the perspective of *the victims*. The true *pathos* of history lies not only in humanity’s great achievements, but also in the silent sufferings of so many people throughout the generations and throughout the world. History is made up of action and passion, and this attention to the dimension of suffering gives concrete form to the Christian vision of history, which cannot be reduced to an anonymous and inexorable process of development that tends towards an immanent progress, which

⁹⁵Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Oeconomicae et pecuniariae quaestiones*, 6 January 2018, 18–33.

risks trampling over the corpses of the defeated and abandoning the weak. There can be no human fulfilment of history without justice for the victims, nor any sense of the historical process that does not take into account the needs of the weakest. The true and decisive meaning of justice is at stake. In Christ, we are authorised to look with hope to the destiny that awaits us, without forgetting the victims of history, but rather gathering together their cry.

98. In Jesus crucified, God takes on the full weight and provocation of innocent suffering with respect to a hope for full justice, connected to faith in eternal life.⁹⁶ Faith in Christ offers a hope that is already credible in life, transforming it, and also confronts death, transcending it. The Church, as a communion of saints, uniting those who are already fully in the Kingdom of God and those who are still pilgrims on this earth, is a community that transcends death without abandoning history and offers a universal hope that responds to the thirst for full justice and eternal life.

3. The integral vocation to fulfilment in love

99. Personal existence is situated in a specific history, time and space, and awakens to self-awareness within relationships that express a belonging which precedes and grounds it. In this way, it rediscovers its original meaning as a *call to life*: ‘This refers us to an elementary and fundamental truth, which we need to

⁹⁶Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi*, 30 November 2007, 43.

rediscover in all its beauty: *the life of the human being is vocation*. Let us not forget this: the anthropological dimension, which underlies every calling within the community, which is associated with an essential characteristic of the human being as such: namely, that *the human being is himself or herself a vocation*.⁹⁷

100. The existence of each human being is properly understood when it is recognised as the fruit of the Father's creative love, according to the dynamic of a *call* to life and happiness. Every human being comes into being because he or she has been thought of and willed by God, who loved each one even before forming them in the womb (cf. *Jer* 1:5; *Isa* 49:1, 5; *Gal* 1:15). This divine vocation explains at its root the mystery of human life, inasmuch as it is a mystery of predilection and absolute gratuitousness. Therefore, even though human beings are finite, they cannot be imprisoned in a mere creaturely dimension, and no definition can capture and exhaust them completely.⁹⁸ The eternal love of the Father excludes the possibility that the existence of persons is a result of necessity or chance: every human existence has infinite value in itself. From this perspective, it is understandable that human beings cannot be subjected to any exclusively political, economic or social measure that diminishes their infinite dignity.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Francis, *Address to participants in the International Conference "Man-Woman. Image of God: Towards an Anthropology of Vocations"*, 1 March 2024. Cf. also Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 248–277.

⁹⁸Cf. International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at Natural Law*, 2009, 66. Id., *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004, 7.

⁹⁹Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 1.

101. The perception that life is a gift from God inspires gratitude in people, who respond to the call by accepting the ‘invitation to be part of a love story’.¹⁰⁰ Divine love, which created human beings, ensures that no one should feel ‘superfluous’ in the world, since everyone is called to respond according to a plan designed by God for them. Life as a vocation, understood in a broad sense, is proper to every human being and derives from the simple fact of our filial existence. As an expression of the providential mind of the Creator, the divine plan is addressed to every living being in different ways.¹⁰¹ Christians recognise that they are called to ‘missionary service to others’¹⁰² to the point of being able to say of themselves: “I am a mission.”¹⁰³ Human beings, precisely because they are called, are true interlocutors of God; they do not receive the gift with mere passivity but, by virtue of the gift, become free agents, capable of offering an increase in good not only to other human beings but to the same divine economy.

102. Life understood as a vocation is revealed existentially in prayer. Augustine was well aware of how much vocation implies the call that precedes human beings, questions them and gives

¹⁰⁰Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 252. There is no shortage of contemporary authors who propose a phenomenology of calling and response, of gift, as a path to a renewed anthropology that also takes into account the intrinsic religious dimension of the human: J.-L. Chrétien, *L’appel et la réponse*, Paris 1992; J.-L. Marion, *Étant donné*, Paris 1998, Id., *À vrai dire: une conversation*, Paris 2021.

¹⁰¹Cf. Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, *New Vocations for a New Europe*, 8 December 1997, 13.

¹⁰²Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 253.

¹⁰³Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 273.

them a future: ‘Do not forsake my invocation now, you who anticipated me before I invoked you, insisting with increasing and manifold appeals that I hear you from afar and turn back, calling on you who called me (*vocantem me invocarem te*).’¹⁰⁴ Prayer is an attitude that qualifies humanity. In its various forms of praise, intercession, recognition of goodness and thanksgiving, prayer is rooted in a profound gesture of trust and constant supplication to God, who brings us into being and accompanies and guides us on our journey through life. Especially in the religions which trace their histories back to Abraham, it expresses a personal relationship with God, who is addressed as ‘You’: ‘a popular prayer, directed like an arrow towards the heart of Christ, says simply: “Jesus, I trust in you.”’¹⁰⁵ In Christian prayer, this relationship is realised as participation in the relationship of the Son Jesus with his Father in the Holy Spirit. This is the expression of a human attitude that entrusts itself beyond itself, without having to dissolve or project itself. It is no coincidence that there is no easy reference to prayer in the various *transhumanist* and even less so in *posthumanist* manifestos.

103. Today, especially in the West, there is often favoured a ‘culture of non-vocation’, which in fact also underlies contemporary anthropological challenges. In particular, with regard to the education of young people, it is not difficult to see how their understanding of life often lacks openness to an ultimate meaning, both in terms of orientation and in terms of constitutive

¹⁰⁴Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII, I, 1.

¹⁰⁵Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, 24 October 2024, 90.

relationships. They do not know or recognise that they are called. Their plans for the future are limited to a logic that reduces the future, at best, to the choice of a profession, economic security or the satisfaction of certain needs: 'These are chosen with no reference to the mystery or the transcendent, and perhaps, too, with little responsibility in relation to life, one's own and that of others, of life received as a gift to be generated in others.'¹⁰⁶ The prevailing anthropological model seems to be that of the 'person without a vocation', whose impact on the perception of life is to feel lost in the drama of an existence that finds no meaning and is without hope for the future. It is the invitation to a 'life as a vocation' that can open up a horizon that goes beyond any claim to find an ephemeral 'life project' that is entirely self-founded and planned by the individual, which paradoxically reflects conformity with the dominant mentality.

104. The proposal of life as a vocation can and must give rise to a positive 'culture of vocation' as an adequate understanding of the process of maturation of the identity of individuals and peoples. Precisely for the youngest, the culture of vocation opens up the realistic possibility, because it is rooted in God's call, of following a path 'born of freedom, enthusiasm, creativity and new horizons, while at the same time cultivating the roots that nourish and sustain us.'¹⁰⁷ In contexts favourable to a vocational upbringing, it is easier for an attitude of gratitude for the gifts

¹⁰⁶Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, *New Vocations for a New Europe*, 8 December 1997, 11c; cf. also 12–13.

¹⁰⁷Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 184.

received to emerge, which gives rise to a sense of responsibility and gratuitous self-giving in favour of others, especially those most in need.

105. In these thoughts we find Mary's inner attitude: grateful for God's gaze upon her, faithful amid fear and turmoil, she courageously embraced her vocation and made of her life an eternal song of praise to the Lord.¹⁰⁸ In the figure of Mary, we see an eminent realisation of life as a vocation, understood as a process, typical of unique and free people, to be lived in gratitude and trust rather than as a project of self-realisation. Mary lived this process herself, facing her questions and difficulties when she was very young. She knew how to look with her heart and dialogue with the things she experienced, meditating on them over time.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸Cf. Francis, *Message for the 2020 World Day of Vocations*, 3 May 2020.

¹⁰⁹Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, 24 October 2024, 19.

Chapter 3: The Gift of Life and Communion in the Face of Scenarios for the Future of Humanity

106. Rediscovering life as a vocation means responding to a gift that calls us to shape our own identity, taking on the task of becoming ourselves and transforming society and the world according to God's plan. It is not simply a matter of making plans, preparing for the future, finding a job to earn a living and improving the world. The serious question in life, understood as a vocation, is to realise one's personal identity as a gift for others.

107. Let us now focus on the category of human 'identity'. It has been classically defined through the categories of 'substance/nature' and 'person', to indicate what remains identical to itself over time and ensures the basis of the ontological and moral dignity of every human being.¹¹⁰ On this basis, we shall be guided

¹¹⁰By exercising the freedom to cultivate the riches of our nature, we grow over time. Even if a person is unable to exercise these capabilities due to various limitations or conditions, nevertheless the person always subsists as an "individual substance" with a complete and inalienable dignity.' Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 9. The text specifies the ontological foundation of the dignity of the human person by

more specifically by the concern to offer discernment of current phenomena and their impact on the future of humanity. How can we succeed in discerning an ‘authentic human identity’ in this cultural and social age? What are the criteria for this discernment? We wish to emphasise in particular the twofold characteristic of human identity, in that it implies both a gift and a task, which requires us to hold together various dimensions in order to highlight the unique position of human beings in the cosmos.

1. Personal identity: a gift and a task

108. The challenges arising from advances in biotechnology, robotics and artificial intelligence, but also from the widespread cultural imaginary, call into question the basic experience that human beings have of themselves in concrete terms, that is, the experience in which they shape their identity.¹¹¹ Yet the answer to questions such as ‘Who am I and who are we? Who do I want to be and who do we want to be? What do I want to do with myself and what do we want to do with ourselves as a human family?’ is constitutive of the experience of all persons who are committed to giving themselves an identity in a dynamic, unique and concrete history, and in a set of constitutive relationships to which they correspond.

taking up the classical definition of the person as an individual substance of a rational nature. On the human person, its uniqueness, freedom, dignity and openness to transcendence, see further: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 124–148; International Theological Commission, *Religious Freedom for the Good of All*, 2019, 29–42.

¹¹¹ Among the authors most knowledgeable on this contemporary issue are E. Morin, *Il metodo 5: l'identità umana*, Milano 2002; Z. Bauman, *Intervista sull'identità*, Roma-Bari 2007.

1.1. *The task of becoming oneself: gift, love, freedom*

109. At the origin of this journey is a gift that ignites in the heart the search for happiness, that is, for life in its fullness. The gift, once recognised and accepted, becomes the task in which each person discovers that they are entrusted to themselves. Human beings cannot be happy without knowledge of who they are. One cannot desire anything, not even happiness, unless one discovers that one is authorised to desire oneself unconditionally by virtue of a given recognition: 'Our dignity is bestowed upon us by God; it is neither claimed nor deserved. Every human being is loved and willed by God and, thus, has an inviolable dignity.'¹¹² Therefore, when human persons seek to shape their identity, they must be aware of the 'exalted dignity proper to human persons, since they stand above all things, and their rights and duties are universal and inviolable.'¹¹³ This dignity is based on creation in the image and likeness of God, which is ultimately in the image of the Son, who, in his incarnation, shared our nature and elevated it to union with the divine life, and in his resurrection inserted our nature into a destiny of eternal life in communion with the Trinity.¹¹⁴

110. The most fitting atmosphere in which to develop one's identity is that of love, beginning with the family, which is the origin of our existence. In fact, many forms of poverty, including

¹¹²Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 11.

¹¹³Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 26.

¹¹⁴Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 17–21.

material poverty, arise from the root of 'isolation, from not being loved or from difficulties in being able to love'.¹¹⁵ According to the dynamic of asymmetrical reciprocity between gift and response that shapes our identity, taking responsibility for one's life means recognising that one is entrusted to oneself (self-possession) by an unsolicited gift that must be recognised, accepted and desired as a good for oneself (assent). This recognition of the gift that precedes us is not just a matter of pure reason. It involves an affective dynamic: we love ourselves because we are wanted and loved, and we feel wanted and loved. This process is possible when we find ourselves in relation to a reality with meaning and promise, full of positive significance to be discovered in wonder. This is recognition, just as necessary as when often sought after in other ways in the infosphere. The world is not a collection of things to be exploited and objects to be manipulated, but a dwelling place in which one can find one's own place.¹¹⁶ Not infrequently, the rejection of God's love, determined by various factors (psychological, relational, cultural) that make it difficult to perceive the original gift, also compromises the processes of forming personal identity. The love received and accepted is the driving force behind any process of self-acceptance and growth, and finds its origin in God himself, eternal love.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 53.

¹¹⁶On the value of intergenerational relationships, see Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, 19 March 2016, 193. The freedom of young people is more fragile if it is empty, devoid of affective memory: Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 181.

¹¹⁷Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 1.

111. The realisation of this identity, in its ontological consistency, is entrusted to freedom: ‘Every individual possesses an inalienable and intrinsic dignity from the beginning of his or her existence as an irrevocable gift. However, the choice to express that dignity and manifest it to the full or to obscure it depends on each person’s free and responsible decision. [...] the image of God is entrusted to human freedom’.¹¹⁸ A person who renounces the search for truth and goodness may come to think that he or she has no identity to preserve and build through truly free and conscious choices. If we then consider all the individual and social dimensions of human beings situated in history, it follows that ‘the proper exercise of personal freedom requires specific conditions of an economic, social, juridical, political and cultural order. [...] Real and historical freedom always needs to be “liberated”’.¹¹⁹ St Paul’s teaching challenges us in this regard: ‘Christ has set us free for freedom! Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened once again by a yoke of slavery [...] For you, brothers and sisters, have been called to freedom.’ (*Gal* 5:1, 13)

1.2. *The complexity of identity*

112. However, this is not a simple process. Identity is complex, consisting of various dimensions. Human beings are aware that their identities, while individual and non-transferable, are also relational, shaped by the communities to which they belong and

¹¹⁸Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 22.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 31.

by the circumstances of their lives.¹²⁰ Therefore, identity is always something received and, at the same time, something realised and developed by each person. No human creature enters into existence already fully defined and perfect: we must learn who and what we are, both as children and as adults. We learn to accept the gift of ourselves, above all by taking on the task of forming our identity, which is implied in this gift, and rediscovering it at every new stage of life.

113. The process of developing one's identity takes place at different levels, both natural and cultural, so that the more complex a society is in terms of classes, professions, common interests or religions, the more complex it will be to form an identity from the overlapping of different sources of identity. Throughout history, human beings have developed and enhanced their identities by establishing new relationships, especially through marriage (cf. *Gen* 2:24), forming new families, migrating from their homeland to other places, learning new languages and modes of expression, or adopting new customs and ways of life. Our nature, precisely because it is human, enables us to realise a great variety of ways of thinking, feeling, living and identifying ourselves. But this also implies the possibility of making mistakes, so that our ability to give ourselves an identity or to re-imagine our identity is not infallible; on the contrary, it remains exposed to the danger of confusion in identifying our own reality.

¹²⁰Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Oeconomicae et pecuniariae quaestiones*, 6 January 2018, 10.

114. The various factors that make up identity must be considered in their unity. The search for identity is always accompanied by the need for unity, completeness and synthesis that harmonises the various elements, avoiding dispersal and fragmentation. In this sense, the search for one's identity takes place in the 'heart', that is, in the centre of the person that knows how to unite the pieces. The word 'heart' cannot be explained exhaustively by biology, psychology, anthropology or other sciences. It is one of those original words that indicate the reality that belongs to the whole human being, as a corporeal and spiritual person. As it leads us to the intimate centre of our person, the heart allows us to recognise ourselves in our entirety and not just in some isolated aspect. Therefore, it is also capable of unifying and harmonising our personal history, which may seem fragmented into a thousand pieces, but where everything can have meaning. In the heart we find the right relationship with the world, and that is why it is said that when we grasp reality with our heart, we can know it better and more fully. Finally, the heart makes it possible to build authentic bonds, because a relationship that is not lived with the heart is incapable of overcoming the fragmentation of individualism. If relationships do not involve the heart, we arrive at a 'loss of desire', because the other disappears from the horizon and we close ourselves off in our own ego with its needs, without the capacity for healthy relationships. As a result, we also become incapable of welcoming God.¹²¹

¹²¹Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, 24 October 2024, 15–19.

115. For us Christians, among the many elements that constitute human identity, one stands out as a true formal principle, capable of ordering the other aspects. It is the gift of being not only creatures or servants of God, but of being called to be sons and daughters of the Father, to the praise of his glory and for the benefit of the whole of creation (cf. *Rom* 8:20-23). This is attested to by the Spirit of God who cries out in us, 'Abba/Father' (cf. *Gal* 4:6; *Rom* 8:15) and conforms us to Christ, so that we are made participants in his divine identity as Son of the Father (cf. *2 Pet* 1:4).¹²² Filial identity is the ultimate and radical determination of our identity, and those who are marked in their hearts by the Holy Spirit find in this identity as sons and daughters the point of reference for every other aspect of their identity.¹²³ This identity, entrusted to our freedom, appears as an all-encompassing reality that enters into the depths of the heart, so that the person reaches a definitive awareness of his or her own uniqueness in distinction from everyone else. It is also an integrative act, capable of harmonising the different dimensions in the gift of self. The response to the divine call appears unique, irreplaceable, personal and therefore new each time.¹²⁴ Let us consider some constitutive dimensions of identity in this light.

¹²²Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 110, a. 3; q. 112, a. 1.

¹²³Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 21 November 1964, 13.

¹²⁴In Edith Stein's philosophical-theological reflection, the divine 'calling' (*Berufung*) is the deepest criterion for the individuation of the personal human being; cf. *Endliches Sein und Ewiges Sein*, Freiburg-Basel-Vienna 2025 (chap. VIII). P. Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris 1990, highlights the dynamics of the narrative identity of the person, which implies the capacity to understand and express the image of oneself received in one's relationships and appropriated in a story.

2. The gift of life and communion in the face of transhumanism and posthumanism

116. The complexity of the processes involved in forming one's identity makes possible the misunderstandings in which the dreams and illusions of *transhumanism* and *posthumanism* proliferate. In fact, the path towards each person's identity is not achieved in the manner of a guaranteed mechanism or as a natural evolution. People discover that they are called to answer for themselves and their actions, in which they express who they are and who they want to be. They realise themselves in a unique and irreducible history, which cannot be dissolved into an anonymous mass that lacks originality. The search for and formation of one's identity always brings something new, both in relation to natural conditions and to the culture in which one lives. Such identity cannot be played out in an arbitrary, absolute affirmation of oneself, without a heritage to appropriate or natural conditions to interpret; but neither can it be reduced to correspondence to the expectations of others, to cultural forms and pre-established social roles. It is not a question of wearing a ready-made uniform, but of sewing a tailor-made suit that expresses one's originality and the unique name that God knows and has entrusted to us, because each of us is an original and unrepeatable being, called to make a unique contribution.¹²⁵

2.1. Shaping one's identity starting from the body given

¹²⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 68.

117. At the beginning stands the relationship with one's own body: we must recognise that 'the human body shares in the dignity of "the image of God." [...] It is in the body that each person recognizes himself or herself as generated by others.'¹²⁶ We understand the urgency of the warning to respect the order of elementary human experience: 'We are called to safeguard our humanity, and this means first of all accepting and respecting it as it was created.'¹²⁷ This is a truly 'ecological' choice: 'Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology.'¹²⁸ In particular, one of the greatest challenges facing culture today, at the level of personal identity, is the acceptance of one's own body as sexed, seen as a gift and not as a prison that prevents us from truly being ourselves, or as biological material to be modified.¹²⁹

118. In this context, theological reflection on disability can also take on significant value in defending the infinite dignity of every person by embracing this particular state. The voice of people with disabilities is a radical challenge to the 'culture of waste' that resonates in certain *transhumanist* or *posthumanist* arguments. We are on very delicate ground, yet significant for the question of

¹²⁶Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 60.

¹²⁷Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, 19 March 2016, 56.

¹²⁸Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 155.

¹²⁹As *Dignitas infinita* emphasizes: 'It follows that any sex-change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception. This is not to exclude the possibility that a person with genital abnormalities that are already evident at birth or that develop later may choose to receive the assistance of healthcare professionals to resolve these abnormalities. However, in this case, such a medical procedure would not constitute a sex change in the sense intended here.' Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 60.

biological-natural identity, which deserves much more in-depth consideration. In general, it is necessary to recall the decisive significance of dependence and vulnerability as integral elements of every human experience.¹³⁰ While congenital disabilities are not as such willed by God directly, disability should be explored – with all its specific particularities – as a manifestation of those dimensions of finitude and contingency that should be seen and experienced not merely as something negative in regard to the formation of identity. In fact, the condition of disability keeps personal identity firmly anchored to given bodily-spiritual reality, to the point of appearing as an inescapable element of the identity of the disabled person. In the context of the whole person and his or her history, disability can also be an opportunity for good, wisdom and beauty. We are far from *transhumanism's* and *posthumanism's* dreams of escaping from the natural basis of existence, and especially from the limitations of one's own body, in order to achieve one's identity.

2.2. *Being a gift to others*

119. The identity that is affirmed in the gift of self is at the centre of those interpersonal relationships in which the person is realised: 'As a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures. It is not by isolation that human beings establish their worth, but by placing themselves in relation with others and with

¹³⁰Cf. A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals. Why Human Beings need the Virtues*, Chicago 1999 (chap. 1).

God.’¹³¹ These relationships become significant for identity if they are not lived in a selfish and closed manner, since human beings come to themselves through others and in relation to others.

120. The mystery of the human person includes his or her call to social communion. *Gaudium et spes* reiterated that human beings, which are ‘the only creatures on earth which God willed for themselves (*Deus propter seipsam voluerit*), cannot fully find themselves except through a sincere gift of themselves (*nisi per sincerum sui ipsius donum*)’.¹³² The papal magisterium insists on the importance of persons realising themselves in a dynamism of transcendence, a sort of ‘ecstasy’ in the gift of self: human beings cannot ‘fully know themselves apart from an encounter with other persons [...] No one can experience the true beauty of life without relating to others, without having real faces to love.’¹³³ No person can achieve fulfilment in isolation, but only in love realised in openness, in the capacity to welcome others and establish solid bonds.¹³⁴

121. Authentic identity requires a real experience of otherness. Following this direction, it is necessary to build solid bonds through social dialogue, understood as the ability to listen to the other as other, that is, for the reasons that make them irreducible and different: ‘All this calls for the ability to recognize other

¹³¹Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 53.

¹³²Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 24.

¹³³Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 87.

¹³⁴Cf. *ibid.*, 111; also 95.

people's right to be themselves and to be different. This recognition, as it becomes a culture, makes possible the creation of a social covenant. Without it, subtle ways can be found to make others insignificant, irrelevant, of no value to society.¹³⁵ It is in the context of this dialogue that an identity is achieved which is not exclusive, but consistent and capable of recognising and proposing the elementary human experience to all.

2.3. The transcendence of God's gift that opens us to an infinite horizon

122. Religion, understood as a relationship with the sacred and, above all, with the Mystery of God, recalls the transcendence of the gift of life, keeping open, above all, the horizon of the mystery of origin and end, and allowing us to overcome the temptation to plan human life according to our own measure and criteria: '*God is the guarantor of the true development of human beings*, inasmuch as, having created them in his image, he also establishes the transcendent dignity of men and women and feeds their innate yearning to "be more". The human being is not a lost atom in a random universe, but is rather God's creature, whom God chose to endow with an immortal soul and whom he has always loved.'¹³⁶ *Only He can decide who is born and who dies.* This view of our origin opens up an infinite horizon on the destiny of the person, created in the image and likeness of God, destined to share in His own fullness of life. A transcendent vision of the person and his or

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹³⁶ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 29.

her destiny is necessary to sustain, with the right motivations, the full value of every human life in its overall dynamism.¹³⁷

123. Faith in Jesus Christ offers a perspective that broadens our view of the contingent facts of history, with the concrete question about the origin of everything and the ultimate end: ‘Precisely because God gives a resounding “yes” to human beings, they cannot fail to open themselves to the divine vocation to pursue their own development. The truth of development consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole human being and every human being, it is not true development.’¹³⁸ Faced with this powerful ‘Yes’ from the Creator Lord, who could arrogate to themselves the right to say ‘no’ to a human life and stop this personal story that has begun?

124. We find a paradigmatic correspondence between God’s ‘Yes’ and the cooperation of the human creature in the Annunciation to Mary (cf. *Lk* 1:26-38). The Gospel narrative reveals a personal and intimate relationship in which God and Mary (representing all creatures) are free interlocutors. In her response to God, Mary shows herself to be a ‘theological person’ in an original dialogue with God. She responds to God’s word addressed to her with a likewise total and unreserved ‘Yes’ in which she dispossesses herself for God, and thus realises the true possession of herself.¹³⁹ Thus, Mary exemplifies openness to the transcendent fulfilment offered by God in Jesus Christ, to which

¹³⁷Cf. *ibid.*, 11. See also *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 130.

¹³⁸Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 18.

¹³⁹Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987, 30–31.

the dignity of the person is itself inclined.¹⁴⁰ This destiny is not a gift extrinsic to human experience. On the contrary, it corresponds in an excessive way to the dynamism inscribed in the development of the human being and the cosmos and thus perfects the very natural reality in which we live.¹⁴¹

3. The unique position of human beings in the cosmos

125. The personal identity of the human being also implies a unique position in the cosmos, in relation to all other creatures: ‘Now human beings are not wrong when they regard themselves as superior to bodily concerns, and as more than a speck of nature or a nameless constituent of the human city. For by their interior qualities they outstrip the whole sum of mere things. They plunge into the depths of reality whenever they enter into his own hearts; God, who probes the heart, awaits them there.’¹⁴² Moreover, recent attempts to downplay human nature, with materialistic or biologically inspired reductions, are still paradoxically human behaviour: even when dreaming of transcending their human nature, or lowering themselves to the merely animal level, the person inevitably acts as a human being. The human person, as a spiritual being called to a direct and immediate relationship with God, can never legitimately be reduced to the category of an

¹⁴⁰Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 20.

¹⁴¹Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 79, 83.

¹⁴²Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 14.

object, nor can he or she reduce others to objects of possession.¹⁴³ It is essential, on the journey towards one's own identity, that each person recognise this unique position in the cosmos and in the human family.

126. This does not imply that other living beings should be considered mere objects of domination or exploitation, which would lead to a logic with serious consequences for society: reinforcing the idolatry of the strongest and producing inequalities, injustices and violence for humanity and the planet as a whole.¹⁴⁴ According to Sacred Scripture, other creatures deserve a positive view, worthy of care and respect, especially animals as living and sentient beings. Human beings, although at the centre of creation, cannot understand themselves unless they discover themselves situated in the context of other creatures and united with them.¹⁴⁵ However, we must avoid the excesses of certain advanced societies, especially in the West, which tend to consider some animals, especially domestic animals, almost as persons.¹⁴⁶ We must avoid the reciprocal temptations of humanising animals and reducing the human to the animal.

¹⁴³Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 81. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 9. See also International Theological Commission, *Religious Freedom for the Good of All*, 2019, 42.

¹⁴⁴Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 82.

¹⁴⁵Cf. Id., Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, 4 October 2023, 67.

¹⁴⁶On the relationship between animals and human beings from a biblical perspective, cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Che cosa è l'uomo? (Sal 8,5). Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, 2019, 139 ff.

127. From a theological perspective, the doctrine of creation as the action of a personal and transcendent God and the understanding of human beings as in the image of God teach us that the existing universe is ‘the setting for a *radically personal* drama’ in which the Creator acts. We are therefore invited to recognise ‘the sacred character of visible creation’,¹⁴⁷ where human beings assume the role of responsible stewards of the physical universe. They are part of created reality and have the capacity to give new form to the natural order, becoming agents in the evolution of the universe itself, but always in accordance with its own laws.¹⁴⁸ They must give an account of this stewardship of the world, received as a gift, to the One who entrusted it to them.

¹⁴⁷International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004, 66.

¹⁴⁸Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, 4 October 2023, 26–27.

Chapter 4: Humanity Affirmed, Saved and Elevated

128. What the human family needs, and within it every person seeking their true identity, is not an evolutionary leap beyond the present condition, but rather a saving relationship that makes the adventure of realising oneself fully meaningful and beautiful. In this sense, we speak of humanity saved, that is, respected as a gift from God and not replaced. Salvation in Christ involves a ‘full surpassing’ of our humanity only in the sense that it brings about the process of taking up, purifying and recreating the human. It is therefore not primarily a question of accelerating development towards new forms of life, but rather of sustaining the journey of peoples and individuals, offering a purpose and meaning that allows each and every one to fulfil their vocation, shaping the identity of daughters and sons of God in a universal fraternity. The dreams of *transhumanism* and *posthumanism* presume to oversimplify the tensions that run through the human experience. But this project, on closer inspection, proves to be dehumanising.

129. The adventure of personal and social human identity has an unavoidable ‘dramatic’ character. By this we mean to emphasise the free nature of the process of becoming oneself,

through concrete historical circumstances – with all the sufferings, sins and failures it involves – which is never definitively concluded in history until its eschatological fulfilment. This dynamism, positive in itself, is recognised above all in certain ‘tensions’ or ‘polar oppositions’ (following Romano Guardini’s expression) proper to our creaturely condition but which, given original sin, are also experienced in a disordered way and in need of redemption. The Christian proclamation of salvation offers a completely human way, by grace, of living these polarities which is both healing and elevating. It is a matter of living them as a place of encounter with the event of Christ’s death and resurrection and thus verifying the anthropological credibility of the Christian proclamation of the new creature.

1. The ‘polar tensions’ of our creaturely condition

130. The human condition appears to be marked by irreducible tensions or polarities, the meaning of which each person and the whole of humanity is called to discover, in order to bring them together in a harmony that allows life to grow in all its potentialities.¹⁴⁹ These ‘polar tensions’ are constitutive of common human experience, and in them the person discovers his or her being as a mystery open to the Mystery of God. If we want to understand the resources and difficulties of the journey to

¹⁴⁹See the classic account, R. Guardini, *Der Gegensatz: Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten* (Romano Guardini Werke), Mainz 2025.

becoming ourselves, we need to become aware of these characteristic polarities of the human condition.

131. Polar opposites give form to concrete life in every human being and in the community. Human life itself is structured in an ‘oppositional’ form.¹⁵⁰ These tensions run through all levels of reality and take on different expressions in the search for unity in concrete living. In polarity, opposition is referred to a higher plane which maintains the tension. Limits are integrated, not denied. Oppositions help us to understand that it is only in the concrete that complete reality is realised, which brings about a synthesis in growth, uniting opposing determinations and realising harmony between them.

132. Such polarities should not be interpreted in a dualistic logic, but as a ‘unity of the two’, nor can they be oversimplified by reducing one term in a monistic logic of identity or in a dualistic logic of the dialectic of opposites. Polarities therefore transcend dualisms and monisms, which claim to capture the mystery of the human being, and show the right and indispensable value of difference. The opposite poles are not cancelled out; one pole does not destroy the other. Neither contradiction nor absolute identity dominates. To live them well, another logic is needed, one that allows us to grasp the inner rhythm of reality in a form that is more consistent with the data and more harmonious. We are

¹⁵⁰Cf. J. Bergoglio – Pope Francis, *Nei tuoi occhi è la mia parola. Omelie e discorsi di Buenos Aires 1999–2013*, Milano 2016, XIX. This gives rise to the principle that ‘unity is greater than conflict’ (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 228): the resolution of conflicts is referred to a higher plane that preserves within itself the positive potentialities of polarities in tension.

ultimately referred to the very rhythm of Trinitarian life, which is reflected in creation, by virtue of which the relationship between two does not close in on itself, nor does it reabsorb otherness into the one, but opens up to completion in the third, always excessive and inexhaustible.

133. Through polar oppositions, the original gift that precedes and gives foundation remains intact. They must therefore be understood in the light of the character of promise that springs from the gift itself. Rather than as mere ‘facts’, polarities should be interpreted as ‘gifts’. It is precisely in Christ that the complete taking up of polarities into a unity that maintains differences and harmonises them in a higher synthesis comes about. This capacity for unifying integration, which respects reality in its concreteness and therefore in its polar opposites, is characteristic of the ‘*et/et*’ way of thinking typical of the Catholic *forma mentis*. And this is what happens in the Church: in her, human beings acquire by grace a sense of total reality, since in her the horizon of experience of the person and his or her mystery is broadened. Let us then briefly examine these creaturely polarities in an order that goes from the most immediate human experience to the deepest root, specifying that there is a ‘circular progression’ among them rather than a simple succession.¹⁵¹

134. a) With regard to the tension between *the material and the spiritual*, it should be remembered that human beings, created in

¹⁵¹For the description of these anthropological polarities, we take inspiration from the International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004, 25–51.

the image of God, are physical beings who share the world with other living beings. This implies, first of all, that corporeality is essential to the identity of the person, but it also means that the material world creates the conditions for human beings to engage with one another and so integrates interpersonal relationships: in the family, in peoples and in humanity. Biblical anthropology excludes mind-body dualism, avoiding both spiritualistic and materialistic reductions of the human being: the person is a ‘unity of body and soul’.¹⁵² This unity, which does not remove polarity but unifies it at a higher level, can be grasped in the symbol of the ‘heart’, as already indicated: ‘This profound core, present in every man and woman, is not that of the soul, but of the entire person in his or her unique psychosomatic identity. Everything finds its unity in the heart, which can be the dwelling-place of love in all its spiritual, psychic and even physical dimensions.’¹⁵³

135. Regarding the relationship between the spiritual nature of human beings and evolving matter, it is important to emphasise that human beings cannot be explained solely as the result of the

¹⁵²Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 14; cf. International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004, 26–30. While there has been a long and dominant tradition in theology that interprets this ‘unity of body and soul’ along the lines of Aristotelian hylomorphism, revised in the light of revelation (e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 76) and also reflected in the Magisterium (from the Council of Vienne to the Second Vatican Council), there is also an older tripartite account—body, soul, spirit—which also has solid foundations. See H. de Lubac, *Théologie dans l’histoire: I. Lumière du Christ*, Paris 1990, 113–199. The two accounts are in reality not mutually exclusive but complement each other, enriching Christian anthropology with different accents, thanks to their constitutive reference to the relationship with God (to which both concepts of soul and spirit refer), which suggests that the material/spiritual polarity finds harmony at a third and higher level, namely, that of relationship with God (cf. as specified in n. 132).

¹⁵³Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, 24 October 2024, 21.

evolution of matter: ‘Each of us has a personal identity capable of entering into dialogue with others and with God himself. [...] The qualitative novelty implied by the emergence of a personal being within the material universe presupposes a direct action of God, a unique call to life and to the relationship of a You to another you.’¹⁵⁴ We therefore reiterate that human beings ‘must not be subordinated as a mere means or instrument to either the species or society.’¹⁵⁵ As created in the image of God, human beings are capable of weaving relationships of communion with the Triune God and with other human persons, but they are also capable of exercising a service to the created universe with their work.¹⁵⁶

136. b) Let us now consider the tension between *male and female*. The most beautiful fruit of *sexual difference* is the recognition of the other and the mirroring in reciprocity that springs from the encounter between *man and woman* in Adam and Eve, with the wonder that accompanies it: ‘When finally God presents the woman, the man exultantly recognizes that this creature, and this creature alone, is a part of him: “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (*Gen 2:23*). Finally, there is a reflection, a reciprocity. [...] This was how the man was, he lacked

¹⁵⁴Id., Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 81. Every human being is a person who integrates and transcends his or her biological, genetic and bodily dimensions: ‘When a new person is born of the conjugal union of the two, he or she brings with him or her into the world a particular image and likeness of God himself: *the genealogy of the person is inscribed in the very biology of generation*.’ John Paul II, Letter to Families “*Gratissimam sane*”, 2 February 1994, 9.

¹⁵⁵John Paul II, *Messaggio ai partecipanti alla Plenaria della Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze*, 22 October 1996, 5.

¹⁵⁶Cf. International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004, 64.

something to reach his fullness; reciprocity was lacking.’¹⁵⁷ In seeking to shape their own identities, each is in some way referred to the other and vice versa: ‘The difference between man and woman is not meant to stand in opposition, or to subordinate, but is for the sake of communion and generation [...]. In order to know themselves well and develop harmoniously, human beings needs the reciprocity of man and woman.’¹⁵⁸ The identity of man and woman is not a contingent variable that can be shaped independently or even in contrast to its original and permanent meaning; it is not a property to be managed according to subjective perception, but a gift to be received as a blessing from God who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8) in a dynamic that does not close in on itself, but opens up to a dimension of the ‘unity of the two’ (according to the teaching of John Paul II).¹⁵⁹ This is the challenge of being ‘generative’, that is, capable of giving oneself to another, which opens up to a third and thus to new life. The current tendency to deny or ignore this natural difference, received as a gift, and to replace it with any possibility that the human mind can imagine, becomes a dangerous way of erasing real bodily identity and closing oneself off in an endogamous self-contemplation.

¹⁵⁷Francis, *General Audience*, 22 April 2015. Adam’s amazement at the woman means that the recognition of Eve as ‘part of him’ does not imply possession or simple dependence, but is an unexpected and gratuitous gift that comes only from God, even if it touches the identity of the man deeply. This is the meaning of otherness in reciprocity.

¹⁵⁸Francis, *General Audience*, 15 April 2015.

¹⁵⁹Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, 15 August 1988, 6. Id., *Letter to Families “Gratissimam sane”*, 2 February 1994, 8.

137. c) Furthermore, the tension between *the individual and the community* should not be forgotten. Every human being created in the image of God is a person, capable of knowledge and love, who expresses himself or herself both as *an individual and as a member of the community*. Human beings are relational and social, included in the human family. Human beings are therefore called to realise their social dimension within family, religious, civil, professional and other groups, which together form the society to which each belongs.¹⁶⁰ The fundamentally social character of human existence must be balanced with recognition of the inalienable value of the person, with his or her individuality and originality, as well as the importance of individual rights and cultural diversity.

138. d) Finally, we must remember the tension between *the finite and the infinite*. People feel called to affirm their identity in a tensivity towards a fullness (*the infinite*) that is called into question by contingency and limitation (*the finite*). No person can live without some openness to the totality of reality and its meaning, even if it is in the form of rejection.¹⁶¹ By virtue of their spiritual (incarnate) nature, every person is *capax omnia*, open in some way to being present to all things, and also *capax Dei*. This reference should not be thought of as an infinite goal to be achieved starting from individual experiences of finite and limited reality or from the accumulation of different experiences. Rather, the wisdom of Israel teaches us that openness to totality is the necessary

¹⁶⁰This polarity translates, in its exercise, into other important 'tensions' inherent in social phenomena, cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 221–237.

¹⁶¹Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 130.

dramatic horizon from which the finite can be grasped as such (cf. *Qo* 3:9-11; *Sir* 43:26-28). Therefore, in their historical journey of searching for and developing their identity, persons are called to insert the meaning of the fragment into the whole and to grasp the unity of meaning in its various articulations. Reality is not grasped separately as either finite or infinite, but as a unity of identity-difference of finite-infinite. This is the tension reflected in St Augustine's famous exclamation: 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you',¹⁶² which will be taken up again in medieval culture, achieving a marvellous literary synthesis between the Augustinian *cor inquietum* and the restless adventure of Ulysses in the *Divine Comedy*. On this need for totality in knowing and living, Dante's Ulysses indeed urges his companions: 'Consider your seed, / You were not made to live like brutes, / But to follow virtue and knowledge.'¹⁶³

2. The human experience in the drama of sin and grace

139. We now turn to a point of view that is specifically Christian and theological. The 'polar tensions' are a spur to the dynamic development of the human being. Human freedom, however, always situated in a history made up of encounters and clashes with other freedoms, is marked by original sin, which finds confirmation in personal sins, and is therefore experienced as a fallen condition and as wounded freedom, exposing itself to a

¹⁶²Augustine, *Confessions* I, 1.1.

¹⁶³D. Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Inferno*, Canto XXVI, 118-120.

partial and disordered fulfilment. History attests, nevertheless, to the experience of the possibility of living the human condition ever again redeemed, sustained and elevated by grace.¹⁶⁴ From this point of view, the category of ‘the dramatic’ implies both the risk to which freedom is exposed in its path of personal realisation, because it can contradict its original condition in sin, and the dramatic aspect of redemption insofar as it is realised through the encounter between the freedom of the Son of God and the freedom of every person situated in history.

2.1. *The rupture of the relationships constitutive of human identity*

140. Let us pause for a moment on the text of Genesis, where we find a mythico-symbolic description of a concrete reality that has wounded human existence. At the root of the fallen condition, which leads us to misunderstand the authentic meaning of polarities and to lose sight of the promising character of difference or limitation, there is a rupture in the relationships that constitute authentic identity (cf. *Gen* 3-11): ‘Since, through sin, human beings refuse to submit to God, their inner balance is also broken, and contradictions and conflicts erupt within them. Thus torn apart, human beings almost inevitably produce a tear in the fabric of their relationships with other human beings and with the created world.’¹⁶⁵ This is a rejection of God’s gift and therefore of relationship with the Creator: ‘This is the first and fundamental

¹⁶⁴On the historical nature of redemption, see Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Che cosa è l’uomo?* (*Sal* 8,5). *Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, 2019, 11 and chap. IV.

¹⁶⁵John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 2 December 1984, 15. Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Che cosa è l’uomo?* (*Sal* 8,5). *Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, 2019, 295ff.

“relationship”, which gives value both to the fact that human beings are made of “dust” and to their being alive through the divine “breath”.¹⁶⁶ In the transition from gift to command, which identifies and proposes a task, suspicion creeps in (cf. *Gen* 3), communicated by the serpent, and this changes the view of God and reality and leads to transgression, compromising the relationship with the Creator.¹⁶⁷

141. The first consequence of this rupture is disorder within the human being between the material/corporeal and spiritual dimensions.¹⁶⁸ This disorder implies a loss of harmony between the two dimensions and requires a special vigilance in order to recognise the spiritual and immortal soul within oneself and not allow oneself to be deceived by ‘a fantasy born only of physical or social influences’, but rather lay hold ‘of the proper truth of the matter.’¹⁶⁹ Disorder in our relationship with matter also affects our corporeality, the place where we experience our limitations and fragility, as can be seen in ‘nakedness’ when it loses its original innocence and integrity and so becomes hostage to the other. More broadly, it is precisely the loss of the symbolic value of all things,

¹⁶⁶Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Che cosa è l'uomo?* (*Sal* 8,5). *Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, 2019, 12.

¹⁶⁷From God's perspective, the commandment is a ‘gift’ (*Deut* 5:22; 9:20; 10:4; *Neh* 9:14), while for human beings it mostly takes on the aspect of a ‘test’ (*Gen* 22:1; *Ex* 15:25; 16:4). In concrete terms, it is rare that individuals immediately understand the ‘goodness’ of what is prescribed; hence, they manifest their faith if they obey even though they do not (fully) understand the goodness of what is prescribed (cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Che cosa è l'uomo?* (*Sal* 8,5). *Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, 2019, 273).

¹⁶⁸Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita*, 2 April 2024, 18.

¹⁶⁹Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 14.

reduced to material to be arbitrarily manipulated for profit alone, rather than seeing them as signs of a greater mystery, that is at the root of the current ecological crisis.¹⁷⁰

142. As a result of this, interpersonal relationships are also compromised. First of all the relationship between man and woman, then the relationship between siblings, and finally the relationships between peoples. We are witnessing an expansion of human conflict: ‘The rupture with Yahweh simultaneously breaks the bond of friendship that had united the human family. Thus the subsequent pages of Genesis show us the man and the woman as it were pointing an accusing finger at each other. Later we have the brother hating his brother and finally taking his life. [...] The result of sin is the shattering of the human family, already begun with the first sin and now reaching its most extreme form on the social level.’¹⁷¹ Universal fraternity, inscribed in our common origin, is not adequately recognised; indeed, it is constantly offended by the manifestation of so many social particularities and differences, which provide a pretext for the arrogance that dwells in the human heart and is consolidated in the affirmation of one’s own identity in polemical opposition to others. History, since its beginnings, has therefore been marked by rivalry and war, and peoples have had to rise from the rubble each time, attempting to

¹⁷⁰Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 451–452.

¹⁷¹John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 2 December 1984, 15. On the ‘proliferation of evil’ following the transgression in Eden, see Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Che cosa è l’uomo? (Sal 8,5). Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, 2019, 302ff.; on the consequences of the transgression, see *ibid.*, 319–324.

heal the fractures and redraw the outlines of peace and solidarity.¹⁷²

2.2. *Salvation through the humanity of Christ*

143. God's free initiative, which comes to the aid of every person and every people on the path of forming their identity, finds its gratuitous and concrete form of realisation in the history of salvation. In it, God revealed himself to human beings by identifying himself in his relationship with them. He revealed his identity to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. *Ex* 3 and 6). Jesus fully reveals to us the mystery of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and who gives us the gift of becoming children in the Son, brothers and sisters, able to call God Father and Our Father. In the mysteries of Christ's life, the filial resolve of Jesus' freedom is manifested according to the measure of a relationship of reciprocity with the Father, which He lives in the Spirit. In the light of Jesus' prayer to the Father (cf. *Mt* 11:27), we come to know the elements that are fundamental to a complete understanding of our relationship with God. First comes the initiative of God, known and recognised as the Father who gives everything of himself to the Son. Secondly, Jesus teaches that only the Son knows the Father (cf. *Jn* 10:15): only He who recognises himself as the Son knows and recognises the Father as Father. The third element is the dynamic reciprocity between Father and Son, where the asymmetry of origin (only the Father is the beginning without beginning) is given in the symmetry of gratuitousness and

¹⁷²Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Che cosa è l'uomo? (Sal 8,5). Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, 2019, 240–241.

totality of mutual gift. This mutual love between Father and Son is disclosed and offered to the disciples in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as Person-Gift. He also makes it possible for the disciples to cry out from their hearts: “Abba Father!” (cf. *Rom* 8:15; *Gal* 4:6).¹⁷³ The God who reveals himself as Father and Son and Spirit thus reveals himself as ‘our’ Father (cf. *Mt* 6:9-13), Father of all human creatures immersed in time and space. Every human being is called to recognise and welcome the gift of his or her creaturely identity within the wider family of creation.¹⁷⁴ But the full revelation of who we are and who we are called to become is given to us by the incarnation of the One who is the Father’s Image, in whose image and likeness we were created and divinised (cf. *Col* 1:15) and who redeemed us from sin.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³On the Holy Spirit as ‘Person-Love’ and ‘Person-Gift’, see John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 18 May 1986, 10; cf. also Augustine, *De Trinitate* V, 11.12; VI, 5.7; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 38 a. 2.

¹⁷⁴Cf. *Dei Filius*, chap. II: DH 3004 ff.

¹⁷⁵Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII, 6. 12: ‘*Let us make human beings in our image and likeness* (Gen 1:26) [...] This is not to be understood in the sense that it was gods that made human beings or that they made them in the image and likeness of gods, but in the sense that it was the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who made human beings and therefore *in the image* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, so that human beings might exist as the *image* of God. Now God is Trinity. But since this *image* of God was not made at all equal to its model, since it was not born of God but was created by Him, to signify this it is said to be an *image* that is “*in the image of...*”, that is, an image that does not reach the model in terms of equality, but approaches it in terms of a certain resemblance. In fact, one does not approach God by overcoming spatial distance, but by resemblance, and it is by dissimilarity that one distances oneself from Him [...] It is because of an imperfect resemblance, as we have said, that human beings are said to be *in the image* and indeed in *our image*, that the human being might be the image of the Trinity; not equal to the Trinity, as the Son is to the Father, but approaching the Trinity, as we have said, through a certain resemblance in the way that distant beings are close not through spatial contact but through imitation. For this reason, it is said: “*Be transformed by the renewal of your mind*” (*Rom* 12:2), and to his audience the Apostle also says, “*Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children.*” (*Eph* 5:1) For it is to the new human being that it is said: “*which is being renewed in the knowledge of God, conforming to the image of its Creator.*” (*Col* 3:10); cf. also *De civitate Dei* XI, 2; XXI, 15–16.

144. Jesus Christ identifies with every aspect of what it means to be truly human. He does so by becoming part of a specific people, with its own history and traditions, namely, the Jewish people, chosen and called by God to be a blessing for all nations. He does so by receiving his earthly existence from Mary, the wife of Joseph, of the tribe of Judah, and by learning the family trade of carpentry. He receives the fullness of the gift of the Spirit from the moment of his conception, and at his baptism in the Jordan he is sent to fulfil the mission entrusted to him. From the moment of his conception, the Holy Spirit pervades and shapes his humanity in accordance with his filial identity, given him by the Father. In this way, the Son expresses his personal and relational eternal identity, which he receives from the Father, in our true humanity and thus fully reveals human beings to themselves.¹⁷⁶ In a concrete story and as a member of the human family he becomes our brother, and so he opens the way for us to receive a new identity as his brothers and sisters and he nourishes this identity within us.

145. His complete self-giving for us is manifested in his pierced body and in his blood shed on the cross for our salvation, and he becomes even more 'ours' in his resurrection for us. Christ, who saves us on the cross, presents himself to us risen, full of life, and from his wounded and transfigured heart there comes to us the gift of the Holy Spirit. This mystery of Easter has opened up for us the real possibility of reaching human fulfilment, which we begin to taste in our daily lives. As Pope Leo XIV says: '*Christ is risen. He*

¹⁷⁶ 'God's plan for the human being was fully manifest in Jesus alone. He is the definitive human being according to God's will.' Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 9 January 2013.

is truly risen! [...] We must ask, then, for the grace to see the certainty of Easter in every trial of life.¹⁷⁷ *The mystery of Christ's Easter reaches our human life in all its dimensions, in all its stages and in all its moments.* We need to be aware that we are in need of salvation: Christ saves us today!

146. The encounter with the humanity of Jesus Christ illumines our humanity and reveals us to ourselves. First of all, it restores our sense of freedom in the face of the Creator's call, precisely as it realises our vocation to participate in the eschatological fullness of His risen life. This realisation of the fullness of the human condition (cf. *Eph* 4:13) and 'the perfection of humanity in Christ challenge the absolute autonomy that sinners have chosen for themselves. This means that the proclamation of the Gospel cannot be separated from a proclamation of judgment and a call to conversion.'¹⁷⁸ Following Christ includes the way of the Cross, a path that does not destroy the person's being, but eliminates the many forms alienation takes, illumining that critical judgement regarding human behaviour which, according to the measure of Christ, offers a service to human dignity and the common good in society, bringing justice to fulfilment with charity.

147. The 'mystery of charity' of Jesus Christ offers a global vision of reality that is new and, 'while it subjects the desire of modern humanity to critical examination, it nevertheless affirms its importance, purifies it and surpasses it.'¹⁷⁹ This desire, which

¹⁷⁷Leo XIV, *Address to participants in the Jubilee of Oriental Churches*, 14 May 2025.

¹⁷⁸International Theological Commission, *Theology, Christology, Anthropology*, 1981, I, D, 2.3.

¹⁷⁹*Ibid.*, I, D, 3.

can also be glimpsed in the dreams expressed by various forms of *transhumanism* and *posthumanism*, is illumined in the light of its fulfilment in Christ: 'What all human beings seek, desire and hope for, at least implicitly, is transcendent, infinite to the point that it can only be found in God. Humanity's true humanisation reaches its pinnacle in its gratuitous divinisation, that is, in friendship and communion with God. [...] The grace of Jesus Christ abundantly fulfils the deepest desires of human beings, even those that exceed the limits of human strength.'¹⁸⁰ The fulfilment of human beings in God neither absorbs nor diminishes the human, just as it does not impoverish the divine that is communicated. It is, in fact, an encounter of freedom, where God divinises at the same time that the human being is humanised.

3. *The new humanity in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*

148. 'The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of the human being take on light.'¹⁸¹ In the event of Jesus Christ, the Father's 'pre-established plan' for creatures,

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, I, D, 2.2. The *intellectus fidei* of divinization as the full and definitive 'beyond' of human life is at the centre of modern theological reflection. Great theologians of the nineteenth century, such as A. Rosmini, *Antropologia Soprannaturale* (Opere di Antonio Rosmini 39/40), Roma 1983, and M. J. Scheeben, *Handbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik* III/4, Freiburg 1961, §§ 146–180, already treated this topic. The theme of divinization has also attracted the interest of ecumenical dialogue, with promising points of convergence, as emerge in documents from dialogue with the Orthodox Church: *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* (1982) and *Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church* (1987).

¹⁸¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 22.

and in particular for human beings, was revealed (cf. *Acts* 2:22-23; *Eph* 1:1-14).¹⁸² Christian anthropology is fully illumined when we recognise that we have been willed and created by the Father to become ‘sons and daughters in the Son’ and to participate, through the gift of the Spirit, in the communion of intra-divine love.¹⁸³

What we as Christians call ‘grace’ is first and foremost God himself who gives himself to us in Christ as a love that elevates us, purifies us, transforms us and brings our life to its fullness. Grace is first and foremost He himself who saves us on the cross; it is He himself who is the living One who gives us the Holy Spirit and consequently brings about a new dynamism of salvation, of renewal in our very being and in our lives.

149. The realisation of this divine plan, revealed in the Covenant, began with creation, and its fulfilment is precisely the Christological event that will reach its climax when everything is recapitulated in the Father and God will be all in all (cf. *1 Cor* 15:20-28).¹⁸⁴ Christ is the second Adam, in whose image the first

¹⁸²Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* IV, 38, 3-4: ‘Thus, through this order, these rhythms and this movement, the human being, created and formed, becomes the image and likeness of the uncreated God, the Father benevolently deciding and commanding (*Gen* 1:26), the Son executing and forming (*Gen* 2:7), the Spirit nourishing and giving increase (*Gen* 1:28), and human beings gradually make progress and rise to perfection, that is, they approach the Uncreated; for only the Uncreated is perfect, namely, God. For it was necessary that human beings should first be created, then, having been created receive growth, having grown become adults, having become adults multiply, having multiplied be strengthened, having been strengthened be glorified, and having been glorified look upon their Lord. For God is the one who is to be seen, and the vision of God brings incorruptibility, and incorruptibility brings nearness to God (*Wis* 6:19).’ See also IV, 11, 4; 12, 3; 37, 7; 39, 1.

¹⁸³Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 460. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 43, a. 5.

¹⁸⁴Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 18 November 1965, 3-4.

was formed (cf. *Rom* 5:14). Christian anthropology, therefore, as proposed by *Gaudium et spes*, perceives the completed perfection of humanity in the light of the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, not only because He is its unsurpassable pattern, but because it is by way of the conformation of the personal history of each human being to His unique history, through the gift of the Spirit, that we become sons and daughters of the Father, and fulfil our human vocation: 'By His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every human being.'¹⁸⁵

150. Through the mysteries of Jesus' life, there comes about the consummation and transfiguration of the world and of history. We do not go beyond Jesus Christ, but we seek to come to him by entering ever more deeply into his Paschal mystery. In Christ, believers are 'transformed into his likeness, from glory to glory, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit' (2 *Cor* 3:18). Christ has, in fact, brought all newness in bringing us himself, and the Holy Spirit introduces us into this newness of Christ.¹⁸⁶ There can be no 'trans' or 'post' that the newness of Christ has not already integrated by way of anticipation. Christ is the final word of God in all his unsurpassable newness.

151. The life of the believer, which is expressed as a response to a call (cf. *Jn* 15:16), is not realised in a single moment in time, but

¹⁸⁵Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 22.

¹⁸⁶Still relevant today for reading the signs of the times 'in Christ' and for making a critical discernment of that spirit' which works in separation from Christ and which can inform the visions of *transhumanism* and *posthumanism* is H. de Lubac, *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*, Paris 2014.

is prolonged in the incorporation of the Christian into Christ, in the Holy Spirit, so that everything may be offered to the Father. Christian life as a vocation translates into the involvement of personal existence in the existence of Christ ‘until Christ be formed in you’ (*Gal* 4:19). This is the ultimate principle of human unification. It is a progressive assimilation to Christ, until we have his sentiments (cf. *Phil* 2:5), his thoughts (cf. *1 Cor* 2:16). By becoming like the Son, through the gift of his Spirit, vocational existence translates above all into a love that does not spare itself but offers everything to the Father in filial obedience (cf. *Jn* 10:17-18; *Heb* 10:8-10) for the salvation and happiness of our brothers and sisters.

152. The totality of existence always remains a mystery, but it is no longer an alien enigma. Rather, it becomes a space in which we begin to understand and experience something of the Mystery of God’s love, inasmuch as we adhere freely to it (cf. *1 Jn* 2:3-6). Within this existence ‘in Christ’, anthropological polarities find their gratuitous fulfilment in concrete terms. The tension *finite/infinite* is resolved in the recognition that we are loved in our limited existence, but at the same time oriented, in hope, towards a fullness that we cannot even imagine.

153. The *material/spiritual* tension (body/soul) finds its full meaning in the resurrection from the dead. On account of this, human beings are saved completely, inasmuch as the resurrected body becomes, in a certain sense, the transparent visible sign of the whole human being, the dimension that reveals the human being’s spiritual nature, which remains the unifying summit of the

self and attests to the difference between the human being and other animals.

154. The tension *man/woman* finds its proper perspective in the Christian proclamation about man and woman as persons created in the image of a personal God with the calling to the 'unity of the two' (cf. *Gen* 1:27) with an identical dignity. Thus, we can recognise the originality of sexual difference, an expression of the mystery of God, by virtue of the loving unity between the two, its procreative purpose and its openness to interpersonal communion and communion with God.¹⁸⁷ This polarity is not abolished in the resurrection of Christ nor in the transfiguration of the human being that follows: 'It is sown a living body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a living (*psychikôn*) body, there is also a spiritual (*pneumatikôn*) body.' (*1 Cor* 15:44-45) Scripture teaches that in the resurrection people will be like angels and will neither marry nor be given in marriage (cf. *Mt* 22:30), yet the resurrected body retains the sex of the physical body. Jesus in his resurrected body remains a man, and Mary, the Mother of God, in her body assumed into heaven, remains a woman. What is true of Jesus and Mary is also true of all humanity.

155. Finally, the tension *individual/community*, which also implies tension between cultures, finds its point of convergence in Eucharistic and ecclesial communion until its fulfilment in the communion of saints. Christian experience is expressed as belonging to the people of God who journey through history

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 12; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, 15 August 1988, 7.

towards their destiny. This belonging does not detract from personal identity, but rather makes it possible and promotes it: 'In this regard, reason finds inspiration and direction in Christian revelation, according to which the human community does not absorb the individual, annihilating his or her autonomy, as happens in the various forms of totalitarianism, but rather values the individual all the more because the relation between individual and community is a relation between one whole and another.'¹⁸⁸ This is a form of belonging that is never exclusive or closed in on itself, one that does not establish an 'us' against a 'you'. Instead, it is an inclusive belonging committed to the affirmation of universal fraternity, in harmony with other religious experience.¹⁸⁹ If in the created order there remains a certain ongoing tension between the individual person and the demands of social existence, in the life of grace we participate *in via* in the perfect harmony between the Persons of the Trinity who share the communion of a single divine life.¹⁹⁰

156. Incorporation into Christ takes place through the concrete flow of life that springs from him, within the sign of the unity of Christians who proclaim the Word of God and celebrate the sacraments. The Church makes the divine gift tangible so that all may effectively experience the proclamation of salvation and

¹⁸⁸Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 29 June 2009, 53.

¹⁸⁹Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 3 October 2020, 272.

¹⁹⁰Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 24; International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004, 40–42.

participate in new life in Christ.¹⁹¹

The culminating expression in the Church and in the history of the new reality of human life given in Christ is the Eucharist. Through communion with the body and blood of Jesus, which is, for that very reason, communion with God, disciples become the people of God. Such communion cannot be explained in purely sociological terms, because it is born of the Holy Spirit (cf. *2 Cor* 13:13)¹⁹² The Eucharistic celebration takes up and regenerates human relationships and opens them to the communion of the Trinity. It should be emphasised that ecclesial communion fulfils, albeit imperfectly, that profound need for the unity of the individual and of humanity, which has driven so many social and revolutionary utopias throughout history without ever being achieved. In fact, in Eucharistic communion, individual and community are not opposed to each other to the detriment of the other, but are drawn to each other in a circularity that finds adequate expression only from within the Trinitarian Mystery. The Eucharist illumines not only social life and history, but also our relationship with creation, according to the Lord's promise: 'We are waiting for *new heavens and a new earth*, where righteousness dwells.' (*2 Pt* 3:13; cf. *Rev* 21:1)¹⁹³ The rhythm of life in creation, in its various seasons, is taken up by sacramental

¹⁹¹Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 21 November 1964, 3; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 774–776.

¹⁹²Cf. Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 22 February 2007, 12.

¹⁹³Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 39. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 236.

celebrations, opened up for the communication of God's grace and inserted into the Paschal mystery of Christ. In particular, the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist takes on a cosmic significance.¹⁹⁴

157. Forgiveness and mercy also contribute decisively to the bonds of communion that bring about reconciliation, capable of destroying the walls of separation between individuals and between peoples (cf. *Eph* 2:13-14; *Col* 1:20). In the sacrament of reconciliation, God renews our hearts wounded by evil and sin, as well as our fraternal relationships, allowing us to start afresh, not from the experience of evil done or suffered, but from the fullness of God's love.¹⁹⁵ In this way, processes of reconciliation are also fostered at the social level.

158. The theological reflection we have sought to make regarding human experience and the process of the maturing of one's identity is based on the sacramental economy of salvation. In order to (re)elaborate and propose a fully human culture, capable of looking to the future and also confronting the challenges and fundamental misunderstandings conveyed here by *transhumanism* and *posthumanism*, theological reflection must be accompanied by the contribution of other sciences and the arts. For this reason, it is appropriate to invite people and institutions involved in the socio-economic, academic, artistic, cultural and political spheres to collaborate in this goal. Starting from exchanges already

¹⁹⁴Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 237.

¹⁹⁵Cf. Ambrose, *Hexameron* IX, 76; *Explanatio Ps.* 39, 24; *De institutione virginis*, 104.

underway, the aim is to develop new ways of thinking and acting, in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary form. In this way, theological anthropology can be translated into lived and concrete experience, both on a personal and social level, especially in the educational and cultural fields. Today more than ever, in the face of the challenges of a humanity that looks to the future with hope and uncertainty, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary dialogue and cooperation are needed. Our purpose must be to give expression to the inexhaustible richness of human experience according to the good design of God our Father.

Conclusion

The Gift of Divinisation as True Humanisation

159. At the beginning of our journey, a question resounded, shared with our brothers and sisters in humanity: *Quo vadis, humanitas?* At this juncture of the twenty-first century, the human family is faced with questions so radical that they threaten its very existence as we have known it until now. The unprecedented scientific and technological development in the history of the planet must be accompanied by a corresponding growth in responsibility that directs progress towards the good of human beings, because today they are exposed to risks never before imagined. The impact of technoscientific development, particularly the digital revolution, on human experience is profound, both in terms of our relationship with the environment and our relationship with others in society, with ourselves and with God. New technologies may usher in an era of real change in the human condition, reflected in the fears of the social imaginary of mass culture and in the disturbing optimism or pessimism of *transhumanist* and *posthumanist* movements. Today more than ever, the anthropological and cultural proposal that Christianity offers involves the conception of life as a vocation, which makes possible a human way of inhabiting time and space and of

conceiving intersubjective relationships, while at the same time becoming a prophetic judgement on the more disturbing aspects we cannot fail to recognise in *transhumanism* and *posthumanism*.

160. The concept of life as a vocation is the perspective in which the decisive and complex process of forming identity at a personal and social level can/must be placed. The Christian view of life articulates identity with the recognition of an original free gift that goes before and the acceptance of a task that follows, entrusted by God's love to the freedom of individuals and peoples. All human beings are called to receive themselves as a gift, to share the gift of difference, to become a gift for others, to recognise the transcendence of the gift as something divine.

This process, which affects personal and social identity, is never static or defined once and for all, but has an intrinsic dramatic dimension, which is revealed in the 'polar tensions' typical of human experience throughout history, which become radicalised in the face of the challenge of evil, as it seeks to alter their original meaning. The dialogue between human and divine freedom, in accepting or rejecting the gift of divinisation by grace, cannot fail to have a dramatic character: 'See what great love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is we are! That is why the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' (1 Jn 3:1-2).

161. In our societies, driven by pressing dreams of unlimited enhancement or even replacement of the human, the Christian faith makes this theological, pastoral and cultural proposal. It is a theoretical and practical understanding of the human that the ecclesial community always wants to put before its members and wishes to present to everyone. The Christian proclamation identifies the appropriate way to go beyond (*trans*) the limits of human experience, with the deification (*theiosis*) possible only to God,¹⁹⁶ which is the exact opposite of *transhumanist* self-deification. It is concretely realised by way of vocation in Christ (cf. *Rom* 8:1; *2 Cor* 5:17; *Gal* 3:26-28; *2 Tim* 3:12). The Son of Man is the One in whom the tensions constitutive of the human being find dynamic balance. Through the gift of his Holy Spirit, the baptised participate in this fullness, not yet perfectly within the course of history, but awaiting the definitive recapitulation, when God will be all in all (cf. *1 Cor* 15:28). Thus, in the face of the various reductions we have described, where certain aspects of the human are put to death, the Catholic *forma mentis* seeks a dynamic synthesis in which no dimension of common experience is lost, while respecting its constitutive tensions.

162. We must emphasise once again that the fact that these tensions can find convergence in faith does not mean some kind of premature elimination of the drama of life. The gift of the Spirit of the Risen One is freely offered to human freedom, which cooperates with divine grace. In Christian life, the drama of creation is neither eliminated nor ignored. Natural tensions are, in

¹⁹⁶Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1.

a certain sense, experienced with greater radicality, because of the emergence of a new awareness: Christians know in Christ their condition as beings who owe everything to the initiative of God the Father and who, at the same time, are called by Him to the most authentic development and full gift of themselves. For this reason, their proclamation of salvation does not insist so much on their own ability to overcome natural or cultural limitations for themselves (even technologically), but rather on the affective and grateful acceptance of the gift of a love that makes possible the development of personal and social identity, inasmuch as it works through charity (cf. *Gal* 5:6), taking on a creative task for a better service to the common good.¹⁹⁷ In this way, it contributes to the fulfilment of the divine plan according to an asymmetrical reciprocity of gifts.

1. The fully human Mother

163. In light of this theological-pastoral perspective, Mary, Immaculate and Assumed into the bosom of God the Father with Jesus, appears as the admirable figure of a human being in whom the tensions between soul and body, man and woman, and individual and community express their fullness according to a unity that does not destroy but enhances each integral element. Mary's obedience to the Lord's call is attested to as perfect availability in her entire personal being, spirit and body; it is

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965, 39, 45. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit nos*, 24 October 2024, 209.

attested to as a virginal and maternal fruitfulness for the building of a new people in human history; it is also attested to as a paradigm of personalising integration into the community of disciples (cf. *Jn* 19:25-26). In fact, in Mary, the Church contemplates what we all hope to be: the image of a human being in her fullness.¹⁹⁸ In the circumstances of her life, Mary achieves a synthesis that unites the call of love and free response; personal vocation and social mission; filial identity and fraternal communion; the proclamation of God and service to other human beings; responsible obedience and generous service; the acceptance of the gift and the free giving of oneself; the joy of song and serene meditation on life; belonging to her own people and openness to all generations; acceptance of her own limits and the happiness of faith; the 'yes' to the fulfilment of God's will (cf. *Lk* 1:26-38) and the concern that all may do what Jesus will tell them (cf. *Jn* 2:5). Mary accepted her life as a vocation and thus realised her personal identity in the fulfilment of the mission entrusted to her, so that the loving plan of the Triune God for all humanity might be accomplished.

2. The challenge of the poor

164. The relentless technological development that we consider in this text, which favours above all those who already have much power, challenges us to turn our gaze to the poorest. If this

¹⁹⁸Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 4 December 1963, 103.

development, together with the ideologies that accompany it, involves serious risks, as we have seen, these will be even greater for the weakest and most defenceless, that is, for those who count for nothing because they are of no use to the workings of the more powerful. They run the risk of becoming waste material, ‘collateral damage’, swept away without mercy. As Christians, however, we are called to see them through the eyes of Christ, who says to each of them: ‘I have loved you.’ (Rev 3:9) As Pope Leo XIV explains, Christ ‘by his love given to the end, shows the dignity of every human being.’¹⁹⁹ This encourages us to ‘perceive the strong connection that exists between Christ’s love and his call to be close to the poor.’²⁰⁰ From this arises the duty to be particularly attentive—as humble sentinels—to the consequences that new developments in society may have on the lives of the least among us. We must respond with a prophetic word and with generous involvement. The authenticity of our faith and the human value of our lives are at stake.

¹⁹⁹Leo XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexit te*, 4 October 2025, 2.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 3.