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Dignity of the Human Person and the Problem of Institutional Violence in the Context of the Papal Teaching

Abstract: The dignity of the human person is a fundamental value and source of ethical principles. Its theoretical basis is derived from the Gospel and is inscribed in the Western culture and the ideas of human rights. At the axiological-ethical level, the human person is an autotelic value, which means a person deserves respect and is free from instrumental treatment. This postulate also applies to the organization with which persons are associated. In this article, the main subject of analysis is the issue of dignity of the human person in relation to what denies it, namely institutional violence. The context for the analysis undertaken is: a) John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*, b) Francis's encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, and c) the declaration *Dignitas infinita* on human dignity. The latter document was prepared by the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and signed by Prefect Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández. In this article I intend to analyze the content of the above-mentioned documents from the philosophical-critical perspective. Here I refer to the clarification of mechanisms that lead to violence related to the functioning of institutions and, at the same time, the indication of attitudes and behaviours that consist of informing and revealing situations of violence when the victims experiencing it are its passive witnesses and are sometimes involuntary perpetrators.

Keywords: personal dignity, infinite dignity, institutional violence, total institutions, John Paul II, Francis

Introduction: What is institutional violence?

In all societies we know, situations of violence occur. Although the perpetrators of violence are often people with certain psychological predispositions, institutions enable their environmental development. Within the structures where intimidation and violence are present, an atmosphere of constant threat and helplessness is created for the victims, who are incapable of actually opposing the causes of violence.¹ As a result, community members feel unwell and unable to develop and, as a result, adopt a passive attitude. They are oriented towards the realization of immediate and short-term goals in an institution where members' and organization's goals diverge. The institution intensifies violent activities in such situations to secure its members' loyalty and prevent the organization's internal breakdown. Most often, institutional violence involves the relationship of a superior (manager, supervisor) to subordinates, but it can also include relationships between employees or members of a social, including religious community. Condoned violence leads to an intensification of activities based on the instrumental treatment of individuals and their subordination to the idealized common good of the organization. However, it is a misunderstanding of this good since a proper understanding of the common good presupposes the good of those who participate in and benefit from it. Usually, the issue of institutional violence is analyzed in the context of pathological situations within a family, school system or social care.² The author of this article looks into this matter in view of problems associated with institutions' functioning and social relations within these institutions.

However, let us start with the definition of violence. These are any non-accidental acts harming an individual's freedom, contributing to physical and psychological harm to the victim. In case of violence, the primary motivation is to influence the victim, to coerce people into the behaviour expected by the perpetrator. Violence differs from aggression as in case of aggression, we deal with an action to the victim's detriment. In contrast, in case of violence, the perpetrator may have the particular good of the person in mind. He or she seeks it by choosing inappropriate means to attain the good. Institutional violence, on the other hand, encompasses intentional

¹ J. FILEK: "Dopytywanie się o przemoc." *Psychoterapia* 2 (2010), pp. 5–14.

² I. POSPISZYL: *Patologie społeczne i problemy społeczne*. Warszawa 2021, p. 190.

actions of an institution that negatively affect the health, physical, or psychosocial development of a subject functioning within the organization.³

Institutional violence is a phenomenon that has not been sufficiently studied.⁴ This type of violence results from the internal conditions of an institution, its internal organization, the working methods used, and the psychological inclinations of those with sufficient power over others to use appropriate coercive measures. Organizational conditions reinforce their pathogenic tendencies in decision makers. Most often, institutional violence is justified pragmatically and results from the orientation of superiors to optimize the institution's performance. The object of violence, in addition to a person's body, can also be their will (the idea is to break it), mind, and ability to feel.⁵ Social psychology theorists list several aspects of violence, such as: physical, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual. All of the aforementioned aspects of violence can manifest themselves in the context of institutional violence. Physical violence is the basis for other forms of violence. It represents the threat of reducing a person to the body. Relevant to the means used, one may speak of violence of the "sword" and the violence of words.⁶ The threat of violence is effective when it operates through the imagination of potential victims; they anticipate what can happen when the perpetrator fulfils his or her predictions. The victim determines the level of their resilience, considers what they risk if they resist violence, and anticipate their chances of survival in pathogenic structures. Regardless of the level of response, their perception of the world narrows down, their self-esteem decreases, and feelings of fear emerge. As a result, the person becomes what long-term violence has reduced them to.⁷ Violence here is adjacent to mobbing (workplace bullying), which refers to gestures of disregard shown by a superior to a subordinate. It is combined with a lack of recognition, restriction of access to information, isolation, and verbal or non-verbal means of sidelining, for example, in access to goods, such as career advancement.

³ J. BRĄGIEL: *Pedagogika rodziny. Obszary i panorama problematyki*. Toruń 2005, p. 296.

⁴ M. WOJEWODA: "Violence." In: *Political ethics*. Ed. P. ŚWIERCZ. Kraków 2021, pp. 257–275, <https://opus.us.edu.pl/info/article/USL7ed011505ce4472399285973144dc53b/>.

⁵ H. J. SCHNEIDER: "Przemoc w instytucjach." In: *Przemoc w życiu codziennym*. Ed. B. HOŁYST. Warszawa 1997, pp. 130–132.

⁶ J. FILEK: "Dopytywanie się o przemoc." *Psychoterapia* 2 (2010), p. 13.

⁷ J. P. REEMTSMA: *Vertrauen und Gewalt. Versuch über eine besondere Konstellation der Moderne*. Hamburg 2008, pp. 121–122.

It is difficult to clearly differentiate between violence and coercion. The latter is related to the functioning of the community within the legal order resulting from the established political system. State coercion is applied by law, but similar relationships apply to institutional coercion. Coercing individuals to obey the law can lead to violence.

Violence can be understood as: a) radicalized coercion, inadequate to the situation and attitude of individuals carrying out superiors' orders, and b) legal coercion to comply with the values and principles that justify social order. The latter aspect of coercion is not addressed in this article. The fundamental difference between violence and coercion concerns the question of the social acceptability of both forms of social interaction. Coercion, at least to some extent, is considered a necessary condition for maintaining order; it is violence that is something unacceptable, especially at the normative level.⁸ The exceptions in this regard are required defence in a life-threatening situation and defensive warfare, which can also be understood as a variant of necessary defence, an adequate response in a threatening situation.

Institutional violence can manifest itself in laws and social norms and, in modern times, in algorithmic models that establish rules of behaviour for members of a hierarchical organization. They are usually based on negating the principle of equality before the law, exploitation, discrimination, and marginalization of people judged unfit for the organization. The purpose of such actions is to increase the effectiveness of the leadership and supervision of the institution, and the exploitation of specific individuals is only an indirect element of such actions. The consequence, however, is the instrumental treatment of individuals and the violation of the value of the dignity of the human person.

Violence is associated with the actions of specific individuals regardless of the fact that the perpetrator of violence represents institutions. This makes it difficult to grasp the non-personal nature of violence. In organizations, the actions of individuals are often the result of the opportunities provided by the institution and the conditioning of the governing rules. An essential characteristic of institutional violence is the asymmetry of power distribution within the organization's structure. Violence involves exploiting the institutional advantage of the perpetrator. It is carried out by violating the personal rights of those lower in the hierarchy and also through

⁸ T. BEKRYCHT: "Prawo pozytywne – faktyczność i obowiązywanie – przemoc i przymus." *Pryncypia* LXI–LXII (2015), pp. 177–203, doi: 10.4467/20843887PI.15.010.5539.

coercion to perform activities that are unpleasant to the individual. For example, being forced to incur onerous work or long working hours without additional compensation. In a situation of violence, the perpetrator is the stronger party, and his or her advantage may be due to his/her function, social recognition, credibility, or economic circumstances.⁹

An institution that uses violence has the characteristics of a “total institution.” This term was coined by the sociologist Erving Goffman. A total institution is the one characterized by a tendency to control the time and interests of its members. Such an institution attempts to fundamentally influence the behaviour of its members. According to Goffman, various institutions in society have varying degrees of involvement of their members and subordination to the goals they pursue. Each institution is a social hybrid, part of a residential and formal community. A total institution creates for those associated with it a model of a separate world distinct from the rest of society and governed by its laws. It is characterized by a hierarchical structure, formalism of behaviour, division into staff and subordinates, dehumanization, attention to the observance of procedures, not acknowledging individuals’ subjectivity, and focus on task completion rather than on specific people.¹⁰

We refer to some organizations as total institutions *sensu stricto*, while others have some characteristics of total institutions. In the latter case researchers use the term “totality of organizations.” In reference to the phenomenon of violence, the totalism apart from inflicting violence, encompasses its concealment. The phenomenon of violence, totality, in addition to the use of violence, also involves concealing it. Here, we are dealing with the repression of the experience of violence on the part of those who were subjected to it, but also with the repression of violent action by the perpetrators and, importantly, by involuntary witnesses of violence. They, too, tend to remain silent and forget, or possibly talk about it, but often, after breaking ties with the violent institution.¹¹

Axiologically, violence is a negative value, and learning about it involves opposing this value in concrete behaviour. Moral action based on a sensitive conscience is a sign of opposition to situations in which violence is

⁹ J. HELIOS, W. JEDLECKA: *Przemoc instytucjonalna wobec dzieci. Kulturowe uzasadnienie przemocy instytucjonalnej*. Warszawa 2020, pp. 10–11.

¹⁰ E. GOFFMAN: *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York 1961, pp. 32–34.

¹¹ M. WOJEWODA: “Violence.” In: *Political ethics*. Ed. P. ŚWIERCZ. Kraków 2021, pp. 257–275, <https://opus.us.edu.pl/info/article/USL7ed011505ce4472399285973144dc53b/>.

revealed. It is not only about not inflicting violence on others but also about reacting actively and responsibly when we witness actual or alleged violence. We have in mind violence in the workplace, domestic violence that we observe as neighbours of families or colleagues but also verbal violence in the public sphere. The phenomenon of passive acquiescence to violence is based on the lack of response to violence and is characterized by three aspects:

1. Social proof of rightness – in the behaviour of another, we seek justification for the rightness of our behaviour. Since other victims or witnesses of violence take a passive stance, should “I” as an observer react and report violent actions to superiors higher up in the hierarchy or report it publicly?
2. Intimidation resulting from the seriousness of the institution we work/function in. Here, there are doubts that my, individual recognition of the situation is wrong.
3. Inner “compulsion” to keep violent events secret, for example, for fear of losing one’s job or lowering one’s lifestyle, “good” job, or essential function.

Passive observers often unwittingly condone violence because they are not directly affected by it. People who watch violence from a safe distance or witness violence believe that it is someone else, not them, who should react and actively oppose it. Passivity and withdrawal from responding to manifestations of social evil very often leads to its involuntary acceptance and subsequent social escalation of violence.

Here, praise is needed for the attitude of the “whistleblower” who courageously reports the violence he or she observes. This is pointed out, among others, by the social psychologist Philip Zimbardo in his book *The Lucifer Effect: How good people turn evil*. The book is a commentary on the 1970s’ “prison experiment” conducted by him and his colleagues and contemporary forms of prison violence. The author writes about Abu Ghraib prison in central Iraq, where U.S. soldiers held and tortured Iraqi prisoners. Zimbardo, in the final part of his extensive study of the phenomenon of institutional violence, reversed Hannah Arendt’s earlier thesis on “the banality of evil” (Banality of Evil) and delivered praise for “the banality of heroism.” It shows appreciation for individuals who dared to oppose the mechanisms of institutional evil in the organizations in which they functioned to report the issue to superiors and the public.¹²

¹² P. ZIMBARDO: *The Lucifer Effect: How good people turn evil*. London 2008, pp. 456–458.

Dignity of the human person as an autotelic value

The Christian conception of the human person emerges from the conceptual structure of Greek philosophy, and the personal encounter between man and God, derived from Hebrew thought. Early theological disputes about the relationship of persons in the Holy Trinity and the definition of the person as “individual rational nature” adopted by Boethius made it possible to distinguish such characteristics of the person as substantiality, distinct existence, and reasonableness.¹³ When the concept of person was applied to man, freedom, responsibility, self-awareness, capacity for self-improvement, and cooperation with others in realizing the common good were also added to the earlier set of ontic qualities. Rationality is associated with the ability to know, feel desire, love, want, and make choices. The separateness of existence and action makes a person not the sum of qualities possessed but an autotelic value that is a value in itself. In other words, it is an inviolable value that cannot be reduced to the sum of its life activities or social roles.

Let us now turn to an analysis of papal documents. In his exhortation *Christifideles laici*, John Paul II points out that discovering a person's dignity as a fundamental value is essential to the evolution of humanity's moral consciousness. The document states that: “The sense of the dignity of the human person must be pondered and reaffirmed in stronger terms. A beneficial trend is advancing and permeating all peoples of the earth, making them ever more aware of the dignity of the individual: the person is not at all a ‘thing’ or an ‘object’ to be used, but primarily a responsible ‘subject’, one endowed with conscience and freedom, called to live responsibly in society and history, and oriented towards spiritual and religious values.”¹⁴

The Pope recognized the dignity of the human person as an inalienable, even the most precious good for human beings, superior to any other material goods or the sum of these goods. In *Christifideles laici*, the Pope prefers to use the term “good.” In his view, a good means the substantive value ascribed to human beings, human qualities, relationships, and certain

¹³ J. HERBUT: “Osoba.” In: *Leksykon filozofii klasycznej*. Ed. J. HERBUT. Lublin 1997, pp. 417–419.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II: *Christifideles laici* (hereinafter: ChL), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html, p. 5 [accessed 15.05.2025].

things. The term “value” as a reference point for axiological considerations is characteristic of the philosophy of value in the 20th century, including Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, and Polish philosophers Roman Ingarden, Tadeusz Czeżowski, and Henryk Elzenberg.¹⁵

The value of dignity is the basis for human relations and points to the value of equality involving all people. Dignity is the basis of fraternities between people and, at the same time, the mystery and power of the apostolic and missionary dynamism of the laity. It is an obliging dignity, the dignity of labourers called by God to work in the vineyard of the Lord.¹⁶ The human person is valuable thanks to the dignity attributed to him-/herself, so he or she cannot be treated as an object. Respect for the other person’s dignity means disagreement with any form of exploitation and discrimination – social, racial, economic, or political.

Recognizing dignity as a core value should set the canon of inviolable values in the modern moral and legal consciousness. In this sense, personal dignity, no matter how it is concretized, ought to be valued higher than any social interest or set of institutional benefits. This is especially true of violations of dignity which, under some circumstances, is being justified by the general good or the imagined good of institutions.¹⁷

John Paul II pointed out that opposing various forms of violations of dignity, including physical and psychological violence, is a fundamental task of the Church and lay Catholics. In contemporary terms, the value of dignity is linked to human rights. The task of the laity is to change human culture in general and individual local cultures to lay the foundation for authentic humanism. If the victim proves their dignity has been violated, the perpetrator’s action should be met with social condemnation. This is obvious at the axiological and normative level; yet its implementation is more difficult.

In *Christifideles laici*’s document, the Pope focused on personal dignity in affirming human life from conception to natural death and the need for lay Catholics to remain active. He writes about the issue of engagement in social, professional, and media activity involving the promotion of values linked to dignity, such as social solidarity, truth, and sensitivity

¹⁵ J. HERBUT: “Dobro.” In: *Leksykon filozofii klasycznej*. Ed. J. HERBUT. Lublin 1997, pp. 116–117. We will continue to use the term “value.”

¹⁶ ChL, p. 3.

¹⁷ E. PICKER, among others, applies a similar argument to John Paul II in his book: *Menschenwürde und Menschenleben. Das Auseinanderfallen Relativierung des Menschen, mit einem Vortwort von Robert Spaemann*. Stuttgart 2002, p. 9.

to the needs of the old, the sick, and the socially excluded. John Paul II pointed to the multiple forms of violence that affect human beings today. They consist in the objectification of “weaker” persons by “stronger” ones. The predominance of the “stronger” can result from ideology, economic power, an inhumane political system, unjust laws, technocracy, or media aggression.¹⁸

Pope Francis wrote in a similar vein. He argued that any discrimination is an unacceptable injustice, not so much because of the tensions and conflicts it can lead to in society, but because of the dishonour it brings to the dignity of the human person.¹⁹ Not only to the dignity of the one who becomes a victim of violence but also the dignity of the one who perpetrates the injustice. The human person cannot be reduced to what could destroy and annihilate him or her in the anonymity of a collective, institution, structure, or system. The human person in their individuality is not a number, a link in a chain, or a mere cog in a system and organizational life. In this sense, any violence used against a person is a wound on the body of humanity. Any violent death or conscious infliction of suffering on victims diminishes the perpetrator as a person. Violence begets violence, hatred begets another hatred, and death begets further death. In this sense, the truth lies in courageously recognizing the situation of the suffering of those who have been victims of violence and social exploitation.²⁰

We can talk about violence on three levels: 1) it involves the victim of violence, that is, the person who directly suffers it; 2) it involves the perpetrator or perpetrators, sometimes involuntary perpetrators. Although specific people are always behind the violence, they are often included in the activities of an institution focused on achieving pragmatic goals justified by the good of the organization. In the case of latent violence, the institution demands loyalty from its members; 3) violence involves bystanders, that is, people who are neither its perpetrators nor victims but individuals who adopt a passive or an active attitude. The passive attitude involves “turning a blind eye” to the incident or seeking justification for the perpetrator’s actions. This is often justified by loyalty to the institution itself. This mechanism has a psychological basis – it is based on fear of losing one’s job, position, privileges, deterioration of quality of life, or simply

¹⁸ ChL, p. 5.

¹⁹ FRANCIS – J. M. BERGOGLIO: *Fratelli tutti. Encyclical letter on fraternity a social friendship*. New York 2020, p. 10.

²⁰ FRANCIS – J. M. BERGOGLIO: *Fratelli tutti...*, p. 42.

indifference to the fate of other people. If this kind of behaviour becomes the norm, it leads, as a consequence, to the habitual sanctioning of rules based on violence in the organization.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, writing about the social aspects of violence, pointed to the issue of social exclusion. In economic relations, the term “neighbours” loses its meaning and is replaced by the words “partner” and “associate.” Human relations, described in the language of economic exchange, lead to the commodification of attitudes and behaviour. One of the consequences of viewing the other person from the perspective of interest, namely, pleasure or benefit, is a violent attitude based on emotional distance. The perpetrator of violence does not necessarily have unfriendly feelings toward the victim; rather, their actions stem from the need to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization itself rather than directly from hatred or resentment. This kind of activity does not presuppose personal involvement. Actions perceived by victims as violence appear to be unintentional actions for the perpetrator, resulting from an algorithm of procedures rather than an individual attitude. The manifestations of such forms of violence can be primarily seen in total institutions (prisons, psychiatric hospitals, military barracks, religious congregations) but also in institutions considered open, such as universities or public administration offices, which manifest strong corporate tendencies aimed at constant improvement of work efficiency.

Let us now turn to an analysis of the document *Dignitas infinita sobre la dignidad humana*. It was officially announced on April 2, 2024. Its publication coincided with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, at the same time, on with the nineteenth anniversary of the death of Saint John Paul II. The document recalls the basic principles and theoretical assumptions associated with using the term “dignity,” above all, it defines it as infinite. The authors write: “Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter. This principle, which is fully recognizable even by reason alone, underlies the primacy of the human person and the protection of human rights.”²¹

²¹ DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH: *Declaration “Dignitas infinita” on human dignity* (hereinafter: DI), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html [accessed 15.08.2024], p. 7.

Respect for the dignity of every human being is an indispensable basis for the functioning of any society, which is based on just law and not on the power of authority. The task of individuals and communities is to affirm the dignity of the human person. The duty of states and institutions is to protect it and guarantee the conditions necessary for its development. "Infinite dignity" of the human person derives from the fact that he/she is created in the image and likeness of God.

Dignity refers to four aspects: ontological, moral, social, and existential. "Ontological dignity" means that it is attributed to a person by nature. In this sense, dignity "is indelible and remains valid beyond any circumstances in which the person may find themselves."²² It protects all people as wanted and loved by God, including people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Ontologically, we recognize that dignity does not derive from arbitrary criteria of legal recognition, nor is it identical to the psychophysical well-being of the individual. A person's dignity is based on constitutive features of human nature that do not depend on political will or social recognition. The authors write: "Were it so bestowed, it would be given in a conditional and alienable way, and then the very meaning of dignity (however worthy of great respect) would remain exposed to the risk of being abolished."²³

Moral dignity concerns the right to exercise freedom by evangelical love, which does not involve self-destruction and instrumental treatment of others. Freedom is often obscured by many psychological, historical, social, educational, and cultural conditions that hinder its proper realization. Social dignity refers to the material conditions of a person's life, such as poverty. Here, we refer to the provision of minimum conditions for human functioning. We refer to the lack of adequate means of subsistence as living an "unworthy" life. The expression "existential dignity" refers to people who lack nothing in the material sense but experience a lack of hope and joy. Individuals live with the vague belief of impending disaster resulting from the political situation, civilizational threats, wars, epidemics, and environmental destruction. In another sense, unworthy living in the existential sense refers to living in the shadow of one's own illness or those close to us, pathological addictions, and social relations characterized by violence, including institutional violence.²⁴

²² DI, p. 8.

²³ Ibidem, p. 15.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 20.

Without an objective reference the concept of “dignity” can become an element of political manipulation and subject to power interests and arbitrary political arrangements. The authors of *Dignitas infinita* point to some problematic situations in which the immense and inalienable dignity of the person is threatened or violated. Condemnation of these forms of dignity violations is a necessary condition for concern for human dignity. These include poverty, human trafficking, torture, sexual exploitation of children, slave labour, war, sexual abuse, drug and arms trafficking, terrorism, transnational crime, violence against women, social exclusion of the not self-reliant, co-dependent, and disabled, abortion, surrogacy (hiring women to bear children), euthanasia and assisted suicide, gender ideology, gender reassignment, but also digital violence, or those forms of technological progress that lead to the elimination of jobs. The authors of the document diagnose that the use of digital media can lead to social isolation, loneliness, manipulation, escalation of hate speech, loss of contact with reality, various forms of cyberbullying, digital narcissism – the need to show oneself and aspects of one’s life, linked to the need to see other people’s lives. In this perspective, respect for human dignity disappears completely.

A broader study of the recognition of threats to the dignity of persons arising from the technologization and mediatization of human activities is not covered in the analyzed document, for instance, the surveillance of internet users by large corporations and marketing companies, the artificial creation of political views, the design of consumer behaviour – user experience, involving the creation of demand for goods and services, which will then be satisfied by products offered for sale. The civilizational acceleration associated with technological change is generating new kinds of anxieties. They are related to the speed of change resulting from the development of technology, the fear of professional exclusion, the pressure to adapt to the demands of technological life, or technological oppression. All these issues affect the possible violation of the dignity of the human person, especially in the existential and social context. Companies and institutions that want to adapt to the changes of civilization often use practices of institutional violence against their members to carry out their work. These unresolved themes may be addressed in future Vatican documents.

Christian attitude towards violence

In his encyclic *Fratelli tutti*, Francis wrote about the need for “healthy” institutional policies and an attitude based on selfless hospitality. This attitude can reform traditional institutions, coordinate their activities, and formulate good practices to overcome inertia, internal habits, and isolationism. We need a model of state and institutional life geared toward the search for the common good despite the differences that divide us. Creating a culture of encounter and cooperation in which differences coexist, complement, and enrich each other, even if this involves discussions and disputes. This implies the inclusion of peripheral and marginal opinions in everyday discourse.²⁵

Recognition and clarification of the social determinants of violence are to facilitate effective action to counteract them, organize planned activities, and solve problems as they are perceived while rejecting an attitude of helplessness. Two stages of empathy can be identified – recognition and reaction; both are essential. This involves sensitivity to harm and an active attitude, that is, showing help to the wronged party. Lack of empathy means an inability to empathize with victims. It is related to the failure to imagine that the perpetrator might be in a similar situation and the inability to oppose violent behaviour. “Human dignity also encompasses the capacity, inherent in human nature, to assume obligations vis-à-vis others.”²⁶

Structures based on violence lead to economic exploitation, deepening social inequality, financial indebtedness, and instrumental treatment of human resources and natural goods. Structural violence is associated with poverty, social exclusion, professional maladjustment of the under-educated, and the inability to change a pathological environment. It leads to a loss of confidence, a sense of helplessness, and a lack of commitment to improve the organization’s performance, and, as a further consequence, a lack of hope that the individual will be able to change the pathological environment in which he or she functions. This consequently leads to a lack of commitment to institutional forms of social life and a focus on existential survival.

The response to violence should address the issue of Christian forgiveness. Francis also draws attention to the attitude of generosity of victims. Here, we refer to the ability to forgive demonstrated by those who have

²⁵ FRANCIS – J. M. BERGOGLIO: *Fratelli tutti*..., p. 142.

²⁶ DI, p. 27.

experienced violence and were able to rise above the harm suffered. It is essential to understand such victims of violence who are unable to do so. This does not mean praising the attitude of forgetting inflicted violence. One should not justify or promote actions based on revenge or retaliation. The Christian duty is to respond to violence as victims, active bystanders, or unwitting perpetrators. One should protest loudly, demanding a change in the behaviour of the perpetrator of violence and the pathological conditions of the institution. Here, we return to Philip Zimbardo's praise of the whistleblower attitude. It is a moral wrong to remain silent or to tolerate observed manifestations of violence. Living with dignity is also a commitment to care for and develop one's dignity, but also to develop one's sensitivity to respect others who differ from us in skin colour, religion, and political preferences. "Consequently, each person must also strive to live up to the full measure of their dignity."²⁷

The rejection of violence provokes an attitude of openness to those who come to our world from outside (emigrants) and can be an enrichment and an impetus for our development. Francis recognizes that only a social and political culture open to the value of selflessness has a future and that a culture rejecting universal values in favour of monocultural ones does not affirm the person's dignity. By analogy, open institutions have the potential to grow and can count on the commitment of their members. In contrast, closed institutions based on exploitation and violence are incapable of development and functioning as long as they derive their energy from economic profits and fear of their members.

In summary, institutional violence poses a major problem for the functioning of modern companies and corporations. Organizations exert pressure on their members to improve work efficiency and optimize organizational structure. Coercion very often turns into violence, which violates human dignity. Violent behaviour can be observed in corporations, state institutions, and church organizations. The teachings of Popes John Paul II and Francis, as well as those of the authors of *Dignitas infinita*, highlight the need to oppose institutional violence in its various forms and to speak out loudly about its manifestations. While forgiveness on the part of victims is possible, one should not expect them to remain silent about the harm they have suffered. The affirmation of human dignity means it must be respected by all people, including in relationships between subordinates and superiors within organizations. The need to talk about violence

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 20.

also applies to those who have witnessed it passively. It is hard to imagine an institution free from violence, but the courage of whistleblowers and the establishment of appropriate procedures can help to reduce it.

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