

# Human Dignity, First-Order Factor of Human Personality

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**ABSTRACT:** The most complex being, man, is defined by an understanding of his dignity. Nothing is more important to humanity than ensuring that dignity is respected. It is dignity that makes man 'truly human', allowing him to manifest himself in complete freedom and express, unhindered, all the capacities and abilities with which he has been endowed or which he has developed. This paper explores various trends in the definition of human dignity and personality, while also examining the concerns of both ancient Greco-Roman and contemporary societies regarding the implementation of guarantees for human dignity in the social sphere, legal system, and interpersonal relationships. Although the exploration is limited, it aims to keep the concept of respect for human dignity at the forefront. This focus is essential, as the world can only be envisioned as a better place when human dignity is respected.

**KEYWORDS:** human dignity, human being, laws, Christian theology, existence

## **Introduction**

Any discussion of human dignity starts from the idea of existing as a human being, even if some analysts believe that this was a principle enunciated and established somewhere in history. Outside human existence, one cannot talk about the dignity of being. Human dignity (Rotaru 2016, 29-43) is a datum of being, of creation from the Christian perspective, and its enunciation and placement in certain orders does not bring something new, but is rather a realization of human functionality. The human being is inherently dependent on what we call dignity, outside of which every human manifestation bears the mark of the restriction of freedoms (Rotaru 2019, 214-215).

In various forms and attempts, mankind, through various philosophers (Rotaru 2005, 45-205), thinkers, sociologists or even theologians, has tried to establish its understanding of what human dignity is, but the attempts have been influenced by social, racial or other segregations. Eventually, however, humanity came to understand that every human being possesses dignity by virtue of their very existence, and that it cannot be separated from their being. As a result, the great struggle of those who thought about it was how to define human dignity in such a way that the human being retained his dignity, but also came under the legislative systems created by those in control. The human personality lacks integrity outside the recognition of its dignity, but is profoundly emancipated and free in the context of recognizing dignity.

## **Defining human dignity and human personality**

There have been numerous attempts to define human dignity, often leading to complex dilemmas. Questions about where human dignity originates, what it encompasses and how it manifest are, are just some of the tangles to be resolved in the process of definition. Over time, dignity has been interpreted in terms of qualities, actions, contexts, and the personal opinions of those who directed the social order or in other contexts. Surprisingly, but logically at the same time, each definition has loopholes or can undergo conceptual remodeling.

In a broad analysis by Turuianu (1974, 18-21) the notion "dignity" expresses the honor, prestige, consideration, honesty, esteem, good faith, probity, fairness, honesty, respect, esteem enjoyed by a person, that is, his moral integrity, the moral side of his personality. Man's freedom, his bodily integrity and even his life have absolute value only to the extent that dignity is present in relation to one's own person and the surrounding social environment. Dignity can

be understood both subjectively and objectively. The subjective aspect is reflected in a person's self-esteem, while the objective aspect has to do with the reputation, esteem, consideration and appreciation they receive from others within their social environment (Loghin 1994, 201). Thus, human dignity is not a lost attribute in the spectrum of human being, but it is a state that is manifested, observed and produces reactions.

In a more profound dimension, the American philosopher and jurist Dworkin (1993, 238-240) has advocated understanding human dignity as the sanctity of life. The idea of sanctity can be understood as something inviolable or something holy. For Dworkin, both are valuable; the dignity of the human being is something unassailable, something that is only of value if it is preserved as it was conceived. However, what Dworkin should have mentioned is that human dignity has an intuitable aspect regardless of how it is perceived, valued or recognized. Not respecting human dignity does not make it less valuable.

Other philosophers and scholars go along with the idea that human dignity should be defined within the perimeter of the fulfillment of basic needs (Gewirth 1992, 25-32). The concept of basic needs is a broad one and meant to cover everything that is human being and personality. Starting from basic needs, those related to existence or the emotional nature of being human, everything is shaped by dignity. But we cannot limit dignity only to the fulfillment of basic needs, as it is well known that a human being, independent of himself, can lose his health. Therefore, the loss of health or the non-fulfilment of any basic needs is not equivalent to the loss of dignity.

There is not a limited explanation of the concept of dignity. As noted by Lebech, the linguistic aspects explain that the idea of dignity used in the expression "human dignity", has a multitude of meanings and interpretations. Among these is the meaning of a basic value or importance to be observed (Lebech 2009, 30-32). The discussion of human dignity is not a play on words or a literary matrix set in a subtle language or a secret code, but is precisely the experience of 'being' of being human, regardless of historical, political, social or other contexts. Human dignity transcends any social or particular manifestation, placing the human being in the place established by creation. Dignity is inherent to being human. Thus, even if there is no standard definition of human dignity, the concept of human dignity is the firm belief that humans have a special value that is uniquely linked to their humanity and existence. It has nothing to do with class, race, gender, sex, religion, abilities, or any other factor other than the fact that they are human (Huberty 2024).

From a Christian theological perspective, human dignity is implicit in the act of Creation. It exists through creation or creation presupposes dignity. In other words, dignity is present in the human being from the first day of conception (Barilan 2012, 30). Man's likeness to God "causes an affinity to exist between the Creator and himself, [...] man has the duty to prove himself worthy of God. If he has been bestowed the honor of having been created in His image, there follows the obligation to live a life capable of obtaining the approval of the One who created him" (Cohen 2005, 127-130).

Broadly speaking, human dignity refers to the value of the self as a human being (intrinsic dimension). Then comes the duty of the state to ensure concrete provisions for the protection and promotion of human dignity and well-being (external dimension) (Nimesh 2020). Definition involves both the human being and the context in which he or she lives. Man comes with an existential given, dignity, while the context has a duty to identify and protect this state of affairs. To all this is added the mention that man is created, creation automatically presupposes dignity.

Most specialists who analyze and define the notion of "human personality" view it as a product of biological, psychological and social factors (Mărgineanu 1973, 32). In this approach, the biological factor is nothing more than the genetic endowment that one has from birth. Here man seems to be powerless, having no ability to modify his genetics. The psychological element is associated with human character, temperament, but also with specific aptitudes and

inclinations. From this perspective, human personality can be shaped and redirected. Finally, the social part is ultimately shaped by the environment in which the individual has developed, which shows that the social environment is very important for the development of the human being.

Human personality, as the sum total of all traits of character, ethics, behavior and other traits, is fully and freely manifested only in the context of guaranteeing personal dignity. The denial of dignity creates social divisions, conceptual disagreements and the suppression of freedoms. Although in a democratic society social dissensions and conceptual disagreements arise which require to be resolved through dialog, the lack of dignity leads all these social dialogues to failure, war and mutual annihilation. The present analysis reveals society's concern to guarantee human dignity, through the prism of various normative acts or through the enunciation of different concepts related to human dignity.

### **Human dignity in the Greek and Latin world**

The Latin term used to express human dignity is "dignitas hominis". This term cannot be applied to a limited argument, but rather encompasses all that human honor means. Whether it is the reflections of conscience, the inner feelings or the outward aspect of man's social role, honor claims respect and embodies human charisma and esteem. The Roman world, like Greek thought, was deeply preoccupied with the idea of human dignity and the protection of human rights, one of the aspects of which is emphasized in the writings of the New Testament itself. In the book of Acts 22:29, the holy apostle Paul is persecuted and beaten, but on hearing the news that he was a Roman, the Roman soldiers were afraid. They assaulted his dignity, and Roman law did not allow the abuse of an accused person without a strong case to support his punishment. In this way, human dignity was violated.

In their writings, Cicero and Seneca often used the term dignity. They advocated the rule of law and spoke against the vanity of those who ruled the empire. Some contemporary translators argue that for the Romans, the term 'dignity' meant 'meritorious' and that in its common political sense, it meant a person's reputation or social status (Malpas 2007, 10-13). In these terms, dignity was conditional on being deserved, and merit was awarded following the decision of higher social forums. However, in his work *De Officiis*, Cicero talks about the idea of dignity:

It is important for any distinction between proper measures to distinguish the human nature which precedes cattle and other savages; those feel only pleasure [...] thus bodily pleasure appears not worthy enough for the preeminence of man. [...] The nourishment of the body should, therefore, be measured by considering health and strength, not pleasure. At the same time, if we consider what excellence and dignity mean in human nature, we will recognize how shameful it is to luxuriate and live in a luxurious way, and how virtuous in a moderate, abstinent, severe, and conscientious way (Kretzmer & Eckart 2002, 19-21).

Cicero continues his argument, and his ideas about law, implicitly about human rights, have an exceptional moral depth. Above all, honor must find a place of honor in law (Popa 2010, 58). This is the dignity of which Cicero speaks, by which he makes an absolute difference, of essence, between humans and animals, not placing human dignity and animal manifestation on the same pedestal of equality. Human health and strength are not identical to animal pleasure. Cicero observes that human dignity brings together aspects of man's internal capacity expressed in bodily health and aspects of having control over one's environment. Cicero was to pay dearly for his views and proclamations and was assassinated.

Nor was Greek thought far from defining human dignity. Their thinkers and philosophers expressed human dignity through antitheses. There was always right and wrong, something acceptable and something repugnant, something dignified and something undignified. Any

public degradation, any form of verbal or other humiliation to which any human being was subjected was undignified or even undignified. Even if at first sight the idea seems extraordinary, its applicability turns out to be biased.

From the perspective of Greco-Roman space, Ober suggested that the understanding of the concept of human dignity can best be expressed by what the Greco-Romans understood to be in contradistinction to humiliating and infantilizing a person. This understanding gave birth to two conceptions related to the concept itself: meritocratic dignity and civic dignity, applicable to the human being but conditioned by certain contexts. Meritocratic dignity was derived from a person's position in a hierarchical society and was characterized by the possession of a set of personal characteristics and attitudes, such as courage, virtue and uprightness, but also by the position of the individual and his or her family in that society (Dobrin 2019, 159).

However, Ober suggests that this kind of meritocratic dignity was characteristic of archaic societies (Ober 2014, 53-65), but civic dignity had no better background either, as it tore and fractured society by dividing it between the top and the bottom. The empire's dignitaries, those who led the military and public institutions were counted as dignified, while the common people did not receive the same social treatment. It went so far that the mere holding of a post in the administration or the army was considered public dignity.

From the perspective of Greek culture, "in 346 B.C., Demosthenes developed the concept of civic dignity in a speech before the court and asserted that in Athenian law all citizens, men, women, children, free men or slaves, have dignity and are protected from any form of denigration of personal dignity" (Dobrin 2019, 160). The background against which Demosthenes was arguing was most likely provided by the speeches of Solon some 300 years before him. Human beings could not be subjected to any form of public opprobrium; dignity was superior to any form of coercion.

Solon the Athenian also belongs to the category of those concerned with human virtues and liberties. He lived before Demosthenes, and it was said of him that he "surpassed all the men of his time in wisdom and in the learning he had received; and as for virtue, he was inclined by nature to it, and was especially eager to acquire the most varied knowledge" (Diodorus 1981, 445). Solon is especially famous for his exhortation to man to preserve his dignity and honor as a virtue. He introduced reforms concerning the abolition of slavery considering equality to be the natural state of individuals. Thus, in order to enforce this natural state of equality between people, Solon introduced the right to vote for all Greek citizens. In this context, anyone could speak and every individual was a potential judge (Montanelli 1994, 83). Solon wrote a new constitution of Athens in which he provided for all the aspects pertaining to human dignity.

### **Human dignity - 20th century perspective**

Before reaching the 20th century, I would mention Pico della Mirandola in the 15th century and Jean Jaques Rousseau in the 18th century. Pico della Mirandola, in 1486, argued that the basis of human dignity is man's freedom to choose what he wants to do and how to be, and that this is God's gift to man: 'It is given to him to have what he chooses and to be what he wills' (Mirandolla 1965, 5). But even while affirming these things, Pico della Mirandola, in discussing human dignity, concludes that in man lies both the power to develop good and the power to develop evil, his fate being determined neither by nature, nor by the cosmos, nor by the divinity.

Then, at a certain point, Rousseau's contractalist theory also made its appearance in the social environment. In discussing reason and freedom, Rousseau argues that: 'mankind has found the form of association which will defend and protect, with all the common force, the person and goods of each associate, and within which he will nevertheless obey no one but himself and remain as free as before. This is the fundamental problem, the solution of which is the social contract' (Rousseau 1957, 99). Rousseau's idea leaves an interpretative vacuum. If a

human being lacks certain rational capacities, can he manifest his freedom in their absence? I believe that a formulation should be identified that goes beyond the limitations of reason and freedom, especially if the latter is conditioned by the former.

Coming into the twentieth century, the definition of human dignity has become increasingly preoccupying. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly by resolution 217 A (III) of December 10, 1948, states that "dignity is inherent in all members of the human family". The first article of the document states that "all human beings are born free and equal in rights" and Article 12 makes a strong statement about human dignity: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor or reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks". As a result, all people are equal in rights irrespective of race, sex, creed, etc. Although it does not provide a definition of human dignity, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks explicitly about it, implying that any outside interference in a person's life can be interpreted as an attack on personal dignity.

As a global system, the world woke up late. The human rights documents, especially those on human dignity, adopted after World War II were the first to use the concept of human dignity as a general argument for the struggle against intolerance, inequality, terror, poverty and all kinds of abuses against human beings (Ciuca 2011, 138). At times there were tendencies to define human dignity and categorize it as a human right, but only for certain categories of people. The attempts resulted in riots and legislative changes that only benefited certain groups and their interests. But the 20th century brought this declaration which, while bringing many positive clarifications, is still being applied differentially. For example, in areas where there is armed conflict one cannot talk about human dignity. One of the UN's most profound statements is that human dignity is inherent to human beings. This is not to be neglected because it links dignity to human existence. It is not known whether the idea of inherentness was taken from Christianity or from other sources, but it expresses in the most profound way the human right to dignity.

At the level of the European Union, the notion of 'dignity' is first encountered in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, adopted in 2000 in Nice, in the draft Constitutional Treaty and in the Lisbon Treaty (Ciuca 2011, 138). Late again, but useful for everything that the European community stands for. Thus, Bădescu observes, the interest and struggle for human rights found its culmination in the contemporary period, a period in which respect for them becomes an indispensable condition that humanity must fulfill (Bădescu 2001, 103-104).

In another vein, the literature developed in the 20th century deals with the issue of human dignity, recognizing it, in various ways, as something specific to the human being. Whether by philosophers or simple thinkers, the idea of human dignity has captured the thoughts and preoccupations of the last century. Günter Dürig, a former professor of constitutional law at Tübingen, perceives human dignity as "the foremost principle of objective law" (Dürig 1958, 6). He spoke of fundamental rights, and built his theorem of the doctrine of fundamental rights on three poles: human dignity, personal liberty and equality.

Matthias Herdegen, another legal scholar at the University of Bonn, defines human dignity as "the highest value of the Constitution" (Herdegen 2009, 7). In his analysis of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany of 1949, in Article 1, which states that it guarantees the inviolability of human dignity, Herdegen adds that respect for and protection of human dignity is the obligation of the entire state power. Subsequently, due to verbal disagreements, Herdegen nuanced the statement, and the new theorem argues that the claim to human dignity is based on an evaluative overview.

Udo di Fabio, another German jurist, sees human dignity as "the fixed point of the order of law" (Fabio 2004, 20), thus suggesting that this is the point from which the discussion must begin. Stern comes up with two other defining statements of human dignity. For him, human

dignity is "the most valuable constitutional principle" (Stern 2006, 23) and "the fundamental principle of the constitutional value system" (Stern 2006, 23). All these philosophers, even if they did not accord human dignity the same right, considered human dignity as something existing by itself and something that should occupy the central place in social discussions and legislation. Even from the perspective of the sciences, the question of dignity has been analyzed in the 20th century and continues in the current century. For example, from the point of view of bioethics we are dealing with a new approach to the concept of human dignity. The European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, adopted in 1997 in Oviedo, was the first regional treaty establishing limits and principles regarding respect for the dignity of the human being and human rights in the face of the progress of biology and biomedicine. This convention declares:

Conscious of the accelerating advances in biology and medicine, convinced of the need to respect the human being, both as an individual person and as a member of the human species, and recognizing the importance of ensuring the dignity of the human being, Conscious that the misuse of biology and medicine may lead to acts which endanger human dignity, Resolves to take such measures in the field of applications of biology and medicine as are necessary to protect human dignity and fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals (Oviedo Convention 1997).

The initiative is commendable, especially since Adam Schulman has issued a warning that scientific progress, through which man will acquire the power to manipulate human nature, will force society to take a stand on human dignity. The need for such a position is urgent because human dignity must be understood as the essential and inviolable core of our humanity, and if it is not understood and appreciated now, the time will surely come when it will be. The hope is given that this recognition will not come too late (Schulman 2008, 15-17). The issue of human dignity is not only reduced to bioethics, but in the present period, as part of the shift towards rights-based humanitarianism, human dignity has also gained prominence in the humanitarian sector (Slim 2015) and in other social segments.

### **Human dignity - a Christian theological perspective**

Christian theology, regardless of orientation, proposes a unique understanding and approach to human dignity. Every Christian theologian clearly and emphatically affirms that human dignity is a natural consequence of creation, of the fact that man is understood as created by God. Thus, human dignity is not "an outburst of vanity, but a natural component of an existence troubled by deep and dark spirits" (Bâlc 2002, 74-85). From the perspective of Christian theologians, human dignity is not to be sought and placed in a particular social space, but wherever a person is, dignity is present.

Human dignity presupposes submission to God's will and continues with doing good, because "this requirement defines the identity of the truly Christian. It is not a question here of a sporadic action, but of a continuous, daily striving to help one's neighbor, to return evil with good, to be of service always and to everyone" (Petercă 1997, 171). The good to be done involves both the attitude towards oneself and towards others. The one who makes use of evil, both towards himself and towards others, is unworthy, while the worthy man is the one who practices virtue, not only for himself, but also for others, which is a difficult thing (Munteanu 2009, 124-126). Thus, Christian theology affirms human equality before the divinity and social solidarity based on the ethical principles (Rotaru 2015, 318-322) set out in the Bible.

By virtue of being a free being, human beings are inclined towards relationships, culture, knowledge, aesthetics and much more, which makes them unique among all creatures. Wolfhart Pannenberg presents certain characteristics of the human being which, in his opinion, define human dignity and distinguish man from animal beings. Man is open in his search and questioning to new experiences, be they spiritual, cultural or other. The human being is oriented

and open to the world and to the metaphysical spiritual dimension, beyond earthly experience. Man has, through creation, the creative power to transform nature, to give birth to and promote cultural values and to seek new forms of culture to replace previous ones. Human beings will always tend to seek a transcendent partner on whom they depend in their striving, whom they call God (Pannenberg 2012, 12-17).

From the perspective of Christian theology, human dignity is based on the concept of "Imago Dei", which holds that man is like his Creator, but not identical with him. The Judeo-Christian tradition holds that man is not in an existence independent of the Creator, but is dependent on Him, while the image of the Creator is imprinted in the human being. In the book of Genesis, the author states that God decided to make man in "his own image and likeness" (Genesis 1:27). Thus, the image is something proper to man, an image derived from the Creator and which cannot exist apart from the original. On the other hand, the value of the image is given by this connection to the original (Blocher 2009, 7). In every aspect in which man resembles God, Grudem argues, such as wisdom, love, mercy, the likeness to the Creator can be identified. every aspect in which man resembles God, in mercy, in love, in wisdom, we can identify his image and likeness to God (Grudem 2004, 470). However, Christian theologians have not arrived at a final form of the definition of the Imago Dei, but have emphasized it in human structure, social relations, and even in the authority to rule over creation (Erickson 1998, 50).

Human dignity does not stop only at the relationship with the Creator to whom man must show reverence, but also includes the relationship with other people, to whom understanding, respect, altruism and love must be shown. The divine image implies the ethical and moral living of man, a living "Coram Deo", with responsibility towards God and towards other people (Dyrness 2010, 90). In all the articles of the Decalogue human dignity can be identified. The prohibition of lying, murder, defamation of one's neighbor, protection of property, and all other aspects stipulated in the Decalogue reinforce the idea of human dignity. In the Judeo-Christian conception, even the dignity of slaves, strangers, the elderly, and any other person was recognized and to be respected. For example, respect for the elderly was to be shown publicly. "Thou shalt rise before the white pearls and honor the elderly", says Leviticus 19:32, and interestingly, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in Article 25, states that "The Union recognizes and respects the right of the elderly to lead a dignified and independent life and to participate in social and cultural life" (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Elderly 2024). Parallel to the Decalogue can be placed the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ, in all that he says, does nothing but reinforce the idea of respect for human dignity.

All these and many other aspects specific to Christian theology and to the Christian conception of man and of life only go to show that a deep concern to define and respect human dignity has also developed within Christian thought. The main sources are the writings of the Old and New Testaments, with a particular emphasis on God's recommendations in the Old Testament and the words of Christ in the New Testament. Thus Christian theology, with its Jewish background, is pro-human dignity. Man cannot be treated in any way and cannot treat his fellow man badly; he cannot use dignity as a means of gaining benefits, but as a means of relating. Kant captures the idea in the following words: "Act in such a way that you use humanity both in your own person and in the person of anyone else, each time, at the same time as an end, never only as a means" (Kant 2006, 75). These words point to the great need to respect human dignity, regardless of the social position in which a person finds himself.

## Conclusions

Respect for human dignity will always be on society's agenda. Whether it is only in its definition or actually in the way it is applied, human dignity is a reality enjoyed by a part of contemporary society, while for others, respect for human dignity remains a dream and a constant worry. This paper has shown that there have been concerns about the definition of human dignity since antiquity, but that

this concern has continued to be at the top of the human agenda. Contemporary society has also been and still is deeply concerned with the idea of human dignity, an aspect highlighted in specialized literature, in social dialogues and in democratic legislation.

Christian theology does not shrink from respect for human dignity either. Taking the discussion up to the point of creation, Christian theology comes with the claim of the presence of human dignity from the very beginning of human existence and in close connection with the Creator. Every discourse of Christian theology questions the question of human dignity in relation to God and other persons. There is nothing in Christian theology that incriminates human dignity, but everything is proclaimed and affirmed in such a way that man is protected, defended and taught how to preserve and actively maintain the dignity of being.

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