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HUMAN DIGNITY: A PARADIGM FOR PEACE AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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Abstract:

Christianity and Islam have a long history of incessant tensions and inter-religious conflicts. The hostile relationship between these two major world religions often erupts in bloody unrests and disrupt peaceful coexistence and human flourishing. Though there have been attempts to attenuate the bitter relationship between Christianity and Islam through dialogue, the culture of violence and suspicions has not abated. Consequently, the task of putting an end to religious violence remains a challenge for the two major religions. This paper argues that the concept of human dignity, which is a core teaching in Christianity and Islam, has the potential to offer a valuable contribution to the pursuance of peace and the discourse on interreligious dialogue.

Introduction.

Human dignity which expresses the inherent worth of all human persons finds home with almost all cultures. Pawel Lukow asserts, "No other set of norms has ever been that widely accepted."¹ Mattson and Clark have argued that how people view themselves and others is largely influenced by how they

¹ Paweł Łuków, "A Difficult Legacy: Human Dignity as the Founding Value of Human Rights," *Human Rights Review*, Vol. 3, No.19 (2018): 312.

understood the concept of human dignity.² By inference, how members of one religious group treat members of the other religious group is influenced by their understanding of human dignity. It is, therefore, my contention that religious understandings of human dignity could play a crucial role in promoting peace and interpersonal relationships among different religious adherents. I argue in particular that Christian and Muslim view on human dignity is crucial in addressing the issue of religious violence and promoting religious dialogue. The first part of this paper provides a general background of the concept of human dignity. It explains the formulation of human dignity as a norm and mentions some factors that led to the adoption of human dignity as a legal code by many countries and institutions. The second part explains ways in which human dignity is understood in Christianity and Islam. It argues that the notion of human dignity is an integral part of Christian and Muslim principles. It also highlights some foundational tenets of human dignity in the Bible and the Qur'an, as well as the teachings of some important figures in Islam and Christianity that undoubtedly affirm the inherent worth of human person. The third part discusses the points of convergence in Christian and Muslim perspectives on human dignity and how the synergies between their views could be used to advance Christian and Muslim dialogue. Finally, it proposes that for human dignity to influence the behavior of people, it should be made part of religious education. Also, Christian and Islamic Religious leaders should use the commonalities in the understandings of human dignity to promote interreligious dialogue in communities.

² David Mattson and Susan Clark, "Human Dignity in Concept and Practice," *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2011): 314.

Understanding Human Dignity

Human dignity as is generally understood today developed within the context of the struggle for political freedom and equality, which resulted in the formulation of universal human right. It was only after the Second World War that the concept was included in the legal and constitutional documents such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) of 1949.³ The UDHR document, which was formulated by people from different religious and philosophical backgrounds, establishes human dignity as the foundation of all rights. The preamble of UDHR puts it succinctly that the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”⁴ Put differently, each individual human being has an intrinsic value and the right to life. This formulation has been used in religious, health, and political and ethical discourse.⁵

Several factors are responsible for safeguarding the inherent worth of human beings regardless of their creed or race. These include the horrific experience of Jews and Christians in Nazi Germany, the bombing of cities in Japan, the persecution of religious missionaries and the brutalities of Maoism, Leninism,

³ John Loughlin, *Human Dignity in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition: Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant Perspectives*. (London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019), 38.

⁴ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” October 6, 2015, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>, accessed December 16, 2020.

⁵ Loughlin, *Human Dignity in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, 38.

Stalinism, the variations of communism and socialism in Russia and China and other forms of cruelties meted out to humans, which disregarded their dignity.⁶

Christian Concept of Human Dignity

The concept of human dignity is a central teaching in Christianity. Pope John XXIII states that the teaching of the Church is shaped “by one basic theme – an unshakable affirmation and defense of the dignity and rights of the human person.”⁷ David P. Gushee also affirms the importance of the concept of human dignity in the Christian tradition and describes it as a kernel of the Church.⁸ Gushee explains that the concept of human dignity finds its root in the Hebrew Bible and the teaching of the Church. The Hebrew Bible holds that something essential is amiss when human worth is threatened. The killing of Abel in Genesis 4 and Uriah in 2 Samuel 11 reveals God’s anger against the destruction of life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* pointedly states:

In the account of Abel’s murder by his brother Cain, Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from the beginning of

⁶ John Witte and Johan David Van der Vyver, *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives*. (The Hague ; Boston: MNijhoff Publishers, 1996), xxxi.

⁷ John XXIII, ‘*Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth),’ in D. J. O’Brien and T. A. Shannon (eds.), *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 233.

⁸ Matthew R. Petrussek and Jonathan Rothchild, *Value and Vulnerability: An Interfaith Dialogue on Human Dignity*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 173.

human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man. God declares the wickedness of this fratricide: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand."⁹

The concern for the threat to human life is further expressed in the following Biblical quotation, "And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Genesis 9:5-6). Exodus 20:13 puts it more succinctly, "Thou shall not kill." This statement asserts a universal truth, namely, "Human life is sacred." J.I Packer affirms that human life is not only the most precious and sacred thing in the world, but also, to end it or direct its end is God's prerogative alone.¹⁰

One of the verses that speaks directly to the concept of human dignity in the Hebrew Bible is Genesis 1:27: "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them." Pope Benedict XVI explains that the creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God means that human beings possess inviolable

⁹ "Catechism of the Catholic Church - The Fifth Commandment," 2259,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a5.htm, accessed December 19, 2020.

¹⁰ J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 259.

worth. He states, "As one created in the image of God, each individual human being has the dignity of a person; he or she is not just something but someone, free, self-giving and entering into communion with others."¹¹ Benedict XVI adds that human dignity is not based on individual achievement or effort. Rather, it is an inalienable and irreplaceable part of the human person. Schwobel Cristoph affirms this by noting that a person's dignity "is not dependent on the existence of a quality which humans possess. Rather, it is the presupposition for all the qualities humans possess and the criterion of their exercise."¹² In pointing to the theological implication of the human dignity, Gushee notes, "the conviction that each and every human being is sacred comes to humanity from beyond humanity."¹³

John Paul II in *Evangelium vitae* explicates that the dignity bestowed by God on human beings is not only an irrevocable revered status, but also a status that cannot be detracted by sin.¹⁴ Pope John Paul further states that, "Society as a whole must respect, defend, and promote the dignity of every human person,

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2007," 2006, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace.html, accessed July 14, 2020.

¹² Schwobel Cristoph, "Recovering Human Dignity" in *God and Human Dignity*, eds. Kendall Soulen R. and Woodhead Linda. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 51.

¹³ Petrussek and Rothchild, *Value and Vulnerability*, 176.

¹⁴ "Evangelium Vitae (25 March 1995) | John Paul II," http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html, accessed December 21, 2020.

at every moment and in every condition of that person's life. The dignity of life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact that it comes from God, but also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God in knowledge of love of him."¹⁵ Thus, human life is not only sacred but also the most central and clearest reflection of God on earth.¹⁶ Consequently, "Each human being must therefore be viewed with reverence and treated with due respect and care, with special attention to preventing any desecration or violation of a human being"¹⁷

Another Old Testament verse that points to the notion of human dignity is Exodus 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." The deliverance of the Israelite from slavery shows God's compassion and a witness to the respect for life.¹⁸ McCrudden asserts that this verse reveals that God does not only create human beings in his image but also deeply cared about their suffering.¹⁹ The character of God as caring is impressed deeply on every generation of Jews as expressed in the founding narrative of God's compassionate deliverance in Deuteronomy 15:15,

¹⁵ John Paul II, "Evangelium Vitae" (Vatican II, 1995), 38, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html>., accessed December 17, 2020.

¹⁶ "Recognizing Every Person's God-given Dignity," <http://d38hr0jzr0onlo.cloudfront.net/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/torture/torture-is-a-moral-issue-study-guide-chapter-one.cfm>., accessed September 5, 2020.

¹⁷ Petrussek and Rothchild, *Value and Vulnerability*, 176.

¹⁸ Christopher McCrudden, *Understanding Human Dignity*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.

¹⁹ McCrudden, 9.

“Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you.” God’s expression of the sacredness of human life is also expressed in God’s compassionate response to the suffering and deliverance of the people of Israel in Egypt (Ex. 1–19).²⁰

The New Testament builds upon and extends the concept of human dignity in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus in his ministry reveals the sacredness of life in his compassionate approach to the suffering and conditions that deprived human beings of their God-given dignity. He healed the sick, rescued the downtrodden, raised the dead, and cleansed lepers (Matthew 10:8). Also, in his encounter with the Gerasene demoniac, Jesus recognized the dignity in a man society regarded as worthless (Luke 8: 26-39). Jesus also showed profound respect for the dignity that is in all human beings irrespective of religious backgrounds. He disconnects from the political and religious status quo to honor the dignity of the SyroPhoenician/Canaanite woman, the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well and the centurion.

In the discussion above, I have explained the Christian foundations of human dignity. In order to show how Christian and Islamic notion of human dignity can be used to foster peace and promote dialogue, I now explain the Islamic concept of human dignity.

Islamic Concept of Human Dignity

The importance of Islamic concept of human dignity (*al-karamah al-muta’asilah*) is outlined in the Qur’an and the hadiths. The

²⁰ McCrudden, 80.

Qur'an describes humans as beings of inestimable worth. Every person has an inherent worth; destroying one is like destroying the whole world. The Qur'an states, "If anyone slays a person, it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people" (Qur'an 5:32). In another chapter, the Qur'an states, "Do not kill the soul which Allah made sacred..." (Qur'an 17:33). Islam equates killing of one person to the killing of all human beings because it is believed that the Prophet said, "Every human being is a universe."²¹ The Qur'an also portrays humans as the most important beings. As the popular Islamic axiom holds: "If the universe is a tree, human beings are the fruits."²² In discussing the sacredness of human beings, Zeki Saritoprak explains that certain attributes of God used in the Quran such as Most-Beloved, Most-Merciful, and Vice-Regent (*Khalifa*) point to the inherent dignity of all human beings.²³ He states that Islam teaches that all humans possess dignifying status as children of God.²⁴

Additionally, Islam teaches that humanity is dignified because God made human being exceptionally beautiful. The Qur'an states, "Surely We have created human beings in the most beautiful form" (Qur'an 95:4). Human beings are not only beautiful, but are also honored. Quran 17:70 states: "And We have certainly honored [*wa-laqad karram-na*] the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them [*wa-faddalna-hum*] over

²¹ Petrusek and Rothchild, *Value and Vulnerability*, 242.

²² Petrusek and Rothchild, 228.

²³ Petrusek and Rothchild, 227.

²⁴ Petrusek and Rothchild, 227.

much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.” Sayyid Mohammad Hasan Lavasani and Seyed Mohammad Kalantarkousheh explain that the most explicit affirmation of human dignity (*Karamah*) in the Qur’an is found in Qur’an 17:70. The phrase “children of Adam,” according to Lavasani and Kalantarkousheh, refers to all human beings as God’s creation. The Qur’an does not make a distinction between the life of a Muslim and a non-Muslim nor does it make allusion to a special group of individuals.²⁵ All human persons are considered dignified by God on account of simply being human.²⁶ Similarly, humans are dignified because their nature is derived from divine nature irrespective of religion or race (Qur’an 30:30). It is a principle as well as a command in Islam to treat all humans with respect without limitation.²⁷

Furthermore, the Qur’an views life as the greatest divine endowment bestowed on all human beings.²⁸ Behrouz Yadollahpour stresses that all human beings, “are endowed with dignity, nobility and honor, which cannot be made exclusive to any particular group or class of people.”²⁹ Yadollahpour also notes that dignity is not earned by meritorious conduct; rather, it

²⁵ Sayyid Mohammad Hasan Lavasani and Seyed Mohammad Kalantarkousheh, “The Roots of Human Dignity According to Qur’anic Verses,” *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, Vol.7, No.10 (2013):394.

²⁶ Petrusek and Rothchild, *Value and Vulnerability*, 248.

²⁷ Lavasani and Kalantarkousheh, “The Roots of Human Dignity According to Quranic Verses,” 396.

²⁸ Behrouz Yadollahpour, “Human Dignity and Its Consequences in the Holy Qur’an,” *International Conference on Sociality and Economics Development*, Vol.10 (2011): 396.

²⁹ Yadollahpour, 396.

is an expression of God's favor and grace.³⁰ Islamic scholars point to the discourse on the concept of *Khalifa* in the Qur'an as the recognition of the dignity of human beings. The Qur'an states, "And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority [*khalifa*].' They said, 'Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?' Allah said, 'Indeed, I know that which you do not know'" (Q 2:30). Saritoprak explains that these verses indicate that human beings are considered above all other creatures, even angels. The Qur'an also speaks of the devil bowing before Adam as a sign of Adam's superiority to all creatures.³¹

Like the Qur'an, the hadith also teaches the inherent human dignity and the notion of the sacredness of human beings. The Prophet points out in one of the hadiths that "people are God's children and those dearest to God are the ones who treat His children kindly."³² Thus, the hadith argues that to discriminate against a person in terms of race and religion compromises the notion of human dignity. In other words, Islam's teachings on human dignity would have little or no meaning if people were subjected to acts of oppression and injustice.

The hadith teaches that human beings are essentially important across religious traditions. There was an incident when the

³⁰ Yadollahpour, 396.

³¹ Petrusek and Rothchild, *Value and Vulnerability*, 234.

³² Hamid Andishan, "Honour or Dignity? An Oversimplification in Islamic Human Rights," *Human Rights Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2019): 474.

Prophet saw a funeral procession; upon seeing it, he rose in respect and remained standing. One of his companions informed him that the deceased person was a Jew. The prophet rebuked such utterance and said, "Was he not a human being?"³³ The Prophet, therefore, calls for an unqualified respect for all people irrespective of religious backgrounds. Shihab al-Din al-Alusi affirms the teaching of the Prophet. He states that every human race, including the pious and the sinner all possess inestimable worth before God.³⁴ Aboul Hassan Kharaghani, a Sufi Muslim stretches the concept of the inestimable worth of human beings further. He has the following inscription at the entrance of his monastery, "Whoever enters my place, feed them without asking about their faiths. Because if they were favored by God almighty who saw them worthy of the gift of life, then they are certainly worthy of being fed at my house."³⁵

Despite the clarity of religious tolerance in the Qur'an and the hadith, some critics argue that there are elements in Islamic texts that suggest intolerance to religious freedom. For example, the Qur'an says, "For the devil has seduced them away from the true faith" (Qur'an 67:25). Islamic scholars seem to maintain different interpretations on the concept of religious freedom. Conservative

³³ Sahih Bukhari, "Book 23: Funerals (Al-Janaa'iz)," Volume 2, Book 23, Number 399, https://www.iium.edu.my/deed/hadith/bukhari/023_sbt.html, accessed December 30, 2020.

³⁴ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Human Dignity in Islam and Its Impact on Society," NST Online, October 25, 2017, <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2017/10/294803/human-dignity-islam-and-its-impact-society>, accessed December 27, 2020.

³⁵ Andishan, "Honour or Dignity?," 474.

and fundamentalist Islamic theologians argue that religious obligations should take precedence over human freedom. They explain that the freedom of people can only be ascertained as an expression of human dignity only after they have performed their religious obligations. Consequently, society should force people to fulfill their religious duty. On the other hand, contemporary Islamic theologians assert that human freedom should precede religious obligation and that it only makes sense to fulfill them when one is free.³⁶ Though Islamic theologians hold different interpretations on religious freedom, human dignity remains the core teaching in Islam. The major concern of this paper is not to discuss the intra-Muslim debates on religious freedom but rather to assert that human dignity discourse is reinforced as key tenets in Christianity and Islamic teachings.

Points of Convergence

From the discussion of Christianity and Islam on the concept of human dignity, it is possible to discern three basic assertions common to both traditions, namely the sacredness of life, the impermissible destruction of life, and religious freedom.

Sacredness of Life

The Qur'an gives many reasons why human beings are sacred. First, among all creatures, human beings are the most dignified (Qur'an 17:70). The Qur'an so honored human beings that even angels are commanded to bow in reverence to Adam. The sacredness of human beings according to the teachings of the

³⁶ Juan Antonio Macías and Gonzalo Villagrán Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space for Islamic-Catholic Dialogue On Human Rights," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, Vol.26, No.1 (2016): 85.

Qur'an cuts across religions and races. It is a trait that each human person possesses simply by being created by God. In addition, the ascribed responsibility of human as a vice-regent (*khalifa*) is indicative of the sacredness of human beings. Similarly, Christian scripture is replete with the notion of the sacredness of human life. Human beings are sacred because they are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Also, human beings are a dwelling place of God. Christianity teaches that human beings are sacred because God dwells in each person. The Bible states, "Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?" (Corinthians 3:16).

Impermissible Destruction of Life

Christian and Islamic discourse on human dignity emphasizes the impermissibility of the destruction of life. The Qur'an frowns at any threat to sacredness of life (Qur'an 17:33). It regards the destruction of life as the most heinous crime. The life of an innocent person cannot be destroyed (Qur'an 5:32). This assertion is based on the Islamic teaching that everything belongs to God and life is a gift and a loan, which has been entrusted by God to human beings. Thus, no one except God has the absolute right to grant and take away life.³⁷ Like Islam, Christianity stands against the destruction of life. The Commandment, "Thou shall not kill" (Exodus 20:1-2), places emphasis on the impermissibility of the destruction of life. Thomas Aquinas notes that human beings are keepers of life and are called to love and nurture its growth. Only God has absolute authority to take away

³⁷ Ramizah Wan Muhammad et al., "The Doctrine of Sanctity of Life from the Islamic Perspective," *Al-Shajarah*, Vol. 21, No.1 (2016): 48.

life.³⁸ Similarly, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “Human life is sacred... no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.”³⁹ Thus, any attempt to destroy life is a violation against charity and the supremacy of God.

Religious Freedom

Another important point to note in the discussion of Christian and Muslim perspectives on human dignity is the concept of religious freedom. The Qur’an encourages religious freedom. It states, “The truth [has now come] from your Sustainer: Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it, it says” (Qur’an 18:29). The Qur’an stresses religious belief as a personal choice, “Whoever chooses to follow the right path follows it but of his own good; and whoever goes astray but astray to his own hurt” (Qur’an 17:15). These verses indicate non-compulsive approach in religious belief. The Qur’an, rather, encourages the use of persuasion to promote religious conversion and not coercion. Abdulaziz Sachedina states that there are several affirmations in the Qur’an that suggest that true religious belief is a personal choice rather than the use of coercion.⁴⁰ Qur’an 109

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologiae: Murder (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 64),” <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3064.htm>, accessed December 19, 2020.

³⁹ “Catechism of the Catholic Church - The Fifth Commandment,” No 2258. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a5.htm, accessed December 19, 2020.

⁴⁰ David Little, *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures: Western and Islamic Perspectives on Religious Liberty*, Studies in Comparative

states: "Say, O unbelievers, I serve not what you serve, and you are not serving what I serve, nor am I serving what you have served, neither are you serving what I serve. To you your religions, and to me my religion." More pointedly the Qur'an states, "Had God willed, they were not idolaters; and We have not appointed a watcher over them, neither art thou their guardian" (Qur'an 6:107). These Qur'anic passages provide understanding on the idea of religious freedom in Islam.

In Luke 9:54, for example, the disciples ask Jesus whether they should rain down fire on a village that would not receive him, just as Elijah had done in 2 Kings 1:9–12, but Jesus forbids it.⁴¹ Another passage that supports religious freedom is the encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler. The young ruler in this story chose his possession over Jesus' offer of the kingdom (Matt 19:22). It is worth noting that the young ruler is not coerced to accept Jesus' message. Rather, Jesus respects the young ruler's choice to walk away. Another scriptural passage that is indicative of support for religious freedom is the parable of the wheat and the weed (Matthew 13:30). In this parable, Jesus asked that the wheat and the weed should be allowed to grow together until harvest time.⁴² Meinolf Schumacher explains that the main point of the parable is the command of the householder not to rip out the weeds but to let them grow till the harvest. Schumacher states

Religion (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 28.

⁴¹ Fred Guyette, "Scripture and the Field of Hate Studies: Traversing Biblical Landscapes," *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2011): 63.

⁴² It is intriguing that Qur'an 6:113 has similar concept of the "Wheat and weed." It states: "So leave them to their forging."

that John Chrysostom in discussing the parable of the “wheat and weed” asserts that most violent religious wars are possible consequence of the attempt to rip out the weed.⁴³

Proposals

My research has shown that Christianity and Islam believe that all people possess an inherent dignity. Both religious traditions affirm that all humans are bearers of inalienable worth. However, every day and across the globe, there is a massive violation of human dignity. On September 11, 2001, four airliners crashed into the Tower of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon killing about 260 people at the World Trade Center, 125 at the Pentagon, 256 on the four planes. 19 young Arabs acting at the behest of Islamist extremists headquartered in Afghanistan inflicted this immeasurable pain.⁴⁴ In 2011, more than 11 million Syrians were killed or forced to flee their homeland, and many who survived their journey face considerable challenge in camps or in receiving countries.⁴⁵ In April 14, 2014, Boko Haram, a group of Islamic extremists, attacked a High School in Chibok, Nigeria, and kidnapped 276 girls.⁴⁶ In 2015, the persecution of

⁴³ Meinolf Schumacher, “Weeds Among the Wheat: The Impurity of the Church Between Tolerance, Solace, and Guilt Denial,” *CrossCurrents*, Vol. 69 (2019): 258.

⁴⁴ Lawrence D. Freedman, “The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 6 (2004): 149.

⁴⁵ Petrusek and Rothchild, *Value and Vulnerability*, 31.

⁴⁶ Nana B Nti, “Silence on the Lambs: The Abducted Chibok Schoolgirls in Nigeria,” n.d., 5, <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Nana-KAIPTC-Policy-Brief-3---The-Abducted-Chibok-S.pdf>. accessed January 17, 2021.

Rohingya Muslims in Burma drew the attention of the international community. More than 5,000 Muslims were displaced from their home of origin. Whereas some found themselves in Malaysia and Indonesia, thousands died during the journey, and many others remain missing.⁴⁷ Taking into account these tragedies, some may argue that the concept of human dignity central to both Christianity and Islam has no force in fostering peace and promoting dialogue because these atrocities fly in the face of respect for human dignity. However, as Beverly Mitchell has argued, “it is precisely in the contexts of extreme dehumanization in which the dignity of individuals and groups are threatened, obscured and violated that the conversation on what it means to be human becomes most urgent.”⁴⁸ The need to promote human dignity in each other is not only imperative but also “because God requires it, and because it is the only proper response to the revealed will of God.”⁴⁹ Mattson and Clark add that, “People need some shared understanding of human dignity if the concept is to serve instrumentally and practically as common ground.”⁵⁰ I propose two areas where the concept of

⁴⁷ “Suspended-in-Time.-The-Ongoing-Persecution-of-Rohingya-Muslims-in-Burma.Pdf,” 15, accessed December 31, 2020, <https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo87922/Suspended-in-Time.-The-Ongoing-Persecution-of-Rohingya-Muslims-in-Burma.pdf>, accessed December 18, 2020.

⁴⁸ Beverly Mitchell Eileen, *Plantations and Death Camps: Religion, Ideology and Human Dignity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 26–30.

⁴⁹ Christopher McCrudden, *In Pursuit of Human Dignity: An Introduction to Current Debates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.

⁵⁰ David Mattson and Susan Clark, “Human Dignity in Concept and Practice,” *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 44. No. 4 (2011): 313.

human dignity can be used to promote peace and interreligious dialogue, namely, religious education and promotion of intra-religious accounts of human dignity by religious leaders. Both should aim at dislodging how lack of respect of the dignity of others results in religious intolerance and breaks down dialogue at the community level.

Human Dignity and the Role of Religious Education

Human dignity should be an intrinsic part of religious education. Formation of students in basic understanding of human dignity is important because “Nobody is born believing in religious intolerance. They have to be taught it.”⁵¹ According to Betty A. Reardon, it is important to intentionally promote respect and appreciation for human dignity in students as early as possible.⁵² Young people should be trained to respect dignity across religious beliefs. This would prepare Christian and Muslim youths to recognize human dignity not only in their religion but also in other religions. The exposure to the idea that all people possess intrinsic human worth irrespective of religious affiliation will guard against indoctrination and intolerance. Also, David Basinger points out that the formation of religiously tolerant individuals with differing religious perspectives can foster

⁵¹ “Teaching Muslims Religious Intolerance,” Mohammed Amin’s website - Serious writing for serious readers, https://www.mohammedamin.com/Community_issues/Teaching-Muslims-religious-intolerance.html, accessed December 31, 2020.

⁵² Betty A. Reardon, “The Early Grades: Laying the Foundation for an Appreciation of Human Dignity—Kindergarten to Grade Three,” in *Educating for Human Dignity, Learning About Rights and Responsibilities*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 23.

unencumbered religious practices.⁵³ Additionally, the formation of individuals with a deep sense of respect for human dignity can contribute towards the building of a humane society. Furthermore, "The value of respect for human dignity has a basic status for the values such as tolerance, diversity... honesty, and justice."⁵⁴ Therefore, when students are taught the concept of human dignity with its corresponding virtues and values, they are more likely to demonstrate the values that promote peace.

Human Dignity and the Role of Religious Leaders

While education in human dignity is important, it is also significant for religious leaders to project a cross-religious and cross-cultural understanding of human dignity. During the Fourth Christian-Muslim Summit of Religious Leaders in Iran, 2007, representatives of Shia and Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church and Anglican/Episcopal leaders gathered to reflect and share ideas around the theme: "Respect for Human Dignity: the Foundation for Peace and Security." The group found the concept of human dignity a crucial point of discussion given the rise in religious violence across the globe. Participants at the Summit

⁵³ David Basinger, "Religious Diversity (Pluralism)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2020 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/religious-pluralism/>, accessed January 2, 2021.

⁵⁴ Mediha Sari and Ahmet Doğanay, "Hidden Curriculum on Gaining the Value of Respect for Human Dignity: A Qualitative Study in Two Elementary Schools in Adana," Vol. 9, No. 2 (2009): 927.

agreed that the most urgent task was to promote human dignity and mutual respect, not only in words but also in practice.⁵⁵

Similarly, the World Council of Churches (Geneva, Switzerland) and Center for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Tehran, Iran) issued a joint communiqué in 2008 in which they affirmed the inherent dignity of all human beings.⁵⁶ They also pledged to recognize and respect one another's religious and civil rights and guard against their violations.⁵⁷ Furthermore, they affirm that dialogue becomes more meaningful when members of both traditions are treated as persons with value. Also, during the Justice and Peace Conference in Rome 2016, which brought together Christians and Muslims from all walks of life, the concept of respect for life was highlighted while the doctrine of just war was criticized and condemned. The Conference proposed a "just peace" framework as opposed to just war theory.⁵⁸ The conference proposed that the

⁵⁵ "Christian and Muslim Leaders Discuss Respect for Human Dignity," <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2016/11/christian-and-muslim-leaders-discuss-respect-for-human-dignity.aspx?bw=low>., accessed January 17, 2021.

⁵⁶ "In Tehran, a Christian-Muslim Symposium Affirms Dialogue, Criticizes Media — World Council of Churches," <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/in-tehran-a-christian-muslim-symposium-affirms-dialogue-criticizes-media>., accessed September 10, 2020.

⁵⁷ "In Tehran, a Christian-Muslim Symposium Affirms Dialogue, Criticizes Media — World Council of Churches," <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/in-tehran-a-christian-muslim-symposium-affirms-dialogue-criticizes-media>., accessed September 10, 2020.

⁵⁸ Ken Butigan, "The Gospel of Nonviolence," *U.S. Catholic Magazine* - *Faith in Real Life* (blog), February 27, 2017,

ways to renew commitment to promote human dignity include the need to denounce violence that threatens the sacredness of life in the past and present. In 2019, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in United Arab issued a joint document, "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," in which they invite all people to recognize the dignity in each person.⁵⁹ The document encourages all people who have faith in God to work together to promote the fraternity and integrity of all people.⁶⁰ These joint declarations by religious leaders show that human dignity is an important concept in interreligious dialogue. They are also step in the right direction towards promoting human dignity respect and fostering peace. However, efforts should be made that these statements get the needed attention at the communal level where religious intolerance and lack of respect for the dignity of people of different religious backgrounds are often ignored.

Conclusion

This article has argued that a common understanding of human dignity from Christian and Muslim perspectives will enhance the

<https://uscatholic.org/articles/201702/the-gospel-of-nonviolence/>, accessed September 3, 2020.

⁵⁹ "Document on 'Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together' Signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad al-Tayyib (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019) | Francis," accessed December 26, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html.

⁶⁰ "Document on 'Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together' Signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad al-Tayyib (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019) | Francis."

relationship between Christians and Muslims and ameliorate the rate of religious violence. The article highlighted the concept of human dignity in Christian and Muslim teachings. By so doing, it pointed out that Christians and Muslims underscore the inviolable worth of human beings in their religious teachings. Based on this understanding, the article discerned the sacredness of life, the impermissible destruction of life, and religious freedom as similarities between Christian and Muslim perspectives on human dignity. The article proposes inculcation of interfaith understanding of human dignity into daily life. The common understanding of human dignity from Christian and Muslim perspectives should be articulated in Christian and Muslim education and teachings. When Christians and Muslims have a common understanding of human dignity, they would foster empathy and compassion for persons regardless of their religious beliefs. They would also nurture peace and have a common platform to engage in dialogue.