

# **The Integral Dignity of the Human Person in the Face of Current Adversities: Religion and Philosophy**

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**“ From Doctrine to Action: Upholding Human Dignity Amidst Global Adversities Against the Sacredness of Human Body through Faith and Reason”**

## **ABSTRACT**

One of the most recurring concepts in the history of intellectual exploration is the concept of the human person and human dignity. It is the case because every discourse revolves and centers on the human person. There seems to be no discussion among scholars, both secular and religious, that does not revolve around the dignity of the human person. The reign of secularism is one ideology that has given birth to following ideologies such as individualism, relativism, humanism, Marxism, and materialism. The concepts of the *integral dignity of the human person* is increasingly bastardized by those contemporary ideologies which are fast gaining momentum; thus, altering the original idea about the nature and sacredness of human life which describes the need to preserve it.

Despite advancements in human rights frameworks and global development goals, many individuals and communities continue to experience conditions that deny their fundamental worth and dignity. Against this backdrop, the disciplines of religion and philosophy offer profound insights and enduring resources for reaffirming the sanctity, value, and purpose of the human person.

Religion, across traditions, asserts that human dignity is not merely a sociopolitical construct, but a spiritual truth rooted in creation. In Christianity, the belief that human beings are created *imago*

*Dei*—in the image and likeness of God—grounds an understanding of dignity that is universal, inviolable, and independent of utility or status. Similarly, Islam upholds the sacredness of each soul, with the Qur’an emphasizing justice, compassion, and the inherent nobility of humanity. Buddhism, while non-theistic, teaches that all sentient beings possess *Buddha-nature* and the potential for enlightenment, thus affirming intrinsic value through the lens of interdependence and mindfulness. These religious frameworks do not only declare the dignity of the person but also call for concrete ethical responses such as compassion, solidarity, and the defense of the oppressed.

Philosophy, both classical and contemporary, provides complementary approaches to the question of human dignity. From the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia* to Kantian imperative that human beings should always be treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means, philosophical traditions offer rational and moral arguments for upholding the person’s inherent worth. In the modern era, thinkers like Martha Nussbaum and Charles Taylor have further enriched the discourse by highlighting the importance of capabilities, identity, and recognition in the realization of human dignity. Moreover, philosophy critically examines societal structures and ideologies that commodify, marginalize, or instrumentalize the human person, challenging contemporary systems that reduce individuals to economic agents or data points.

In the face of today’s adversities, this paper argues that religion and philosophy converge in their commitment to the common good, the protection of human life, and the cultivation of justice and peace. Their shared insights provide not only theoretical frameworks but also practical imperatives for personal transformation and social reform. While tensions exist—such as the debate between secular and religious moral foundations, these fields also offer opportunities for dialogue and collaboration in promoting a holistic and human-centered vision of development and community.

**Key Words** : Integral dignity, Human person, Contemporary ideologies, Religion, Philosophy

## **List of Abbreviations**

- **DP** : Dignitas Personae
- **DV** : Donum Vitae
- **EV** : Evangelium Vitae
- **FC** : Familiaris Consortio
- **FR** : Fides et Ratio
- **GS** : Gaudium et Spes
- **HV** : Humanae Vitae
- **LS** : Laudato Si'
- **FT** : Fratelli Tutti

## Introduction

*What are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them? You've made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur. — Psalm 8:4-5*

*Human rights are what make us human. They are the principles by which we create the sacred home for human dignity. Human rights are what reason requires and conscience commands. — Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General*

In an era of rapid technological, social, and geopolitical change, the fundamental principle of human dignity has never been more vital. As the world confronts new challenges, re – reading the Integral Dignity of the Human Person and its intrinsic value based on faith and reason has become more complex. The doctrine has traditionally been understood as the belief that human bodily life possesses intrinsic and irreducible value, and that, consequently, it is always morally impermissible to intentionally end the life of an innocent person.<sup>1</sup> Often identified as a Judeo-Christian principle, the doctrine is grounded in theological conceptions of the sanctity of life (Baranzke, 2012). Within Christian and Jewish thought, human life is considered sacred both because the Bible portrays humanity as created in the image of God (the *Imago Dei*) (Genesis 1:27) and because it presents life itself as a divine gift (Romans 6:23). This doctrine is frequently invoked by conservative Christian critics of practices such as abortion and euthanasia, which they interpret as contraventions of its moral precepts.

The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights implies that human dignity forms the fundamental basis for peace when stating that “. . . 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”. Despite the presence of such statements in official documents, the meaning of the relationship between the concept of human dignity, the fostering of peace and the mitigation of violence is complex (De Vinzenso et al., 2023). Human dignity is presented as the inherent and intrinsic foundation of all human rights, not conferred by law but recognized as an essential attribute of every person, reflecting the *Imago Dei*—the image of God in humanity. It

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<sup>1</sup> The German constitutional judge Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde pointed at the importance that faith traditions have for fostering societal values, which the state itself cannot produce with its own means. Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit*. 1976, p. 60: “The liberal (German ‘freiheitlich’), secularized state lives by prerequisites which it cannot guarantee itself.”

encompasses the totality of human rights and serves as the unifying principle that upholds individual uniqueness while embracing social, cultural, and ideological diversity. From a Christian perspective, the concept of dignity calls for a “counter-globalization” rooted in justice, compassion, and humility, as expressed in Micah 6:8. This theological vision advocates for the globalization of a culture of peace and justice that safeguards human life and rights, enabling all people to live fully and meaningfully, in accordance with the divine intention articulated in John 10:10.

In light of the above, the purpose of this study, therefore, is to critically examine the contemporary dilemmas and challenges to human dignity in both secular and theological contexts, exploring how social, political, economic, and technological developments impact its recognition and protection. By analyzing philosophical, ethical, and religious perspectives alongside global human rights frameworks, this research aims to elucidate the ways in which human dignity can be affirmed and operationalized in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. A black letter approach has been utilized to carry out the objectives of this study and an analysis of the subject matter is presented. Author intends to present a parallel study of both faith and reason oriented approach to understand the selected topic to this paper.

### **Definitional Dilemmas on Human Dignity**

Globalization, encompassing the increasing cross-border exchange of goods, services, information, and people, remains conceptually contested. Its processes of integration and interdependence manifest unevenly across regions, varying in speed, scale, and outcomes. Scholars are divided on its impact: proponents like Jagdish Bhagwati emphasize its transformative potential, while critics such as Joseph Stiglitz highlight its disruptive consequences. Debates also persist regarding the nature, origins, and scope of globalization, including whether it constitutes a form of Westernization and what it includes or excludes, particularly in relation to human dignity.

Human dignity, like globalisation, remains a contested and multifaceted concept. Ethical, philosophical, political, and legal perspectives offer competing interpretations—ranging from value-based to justice-oriented, or law- versus morality-centered approaches—complicating attempts at a unified definition. Many conceptions are also culturally specific. Nonetheless, a broad

Western consensus traces the idea to Immanuel Kant, who emphasized that human beings are ends in themselves, possessing inherent worth. Consequently, human dignity denotes the intrinsic value of every person, warranting respect, care, and the opportunity to realize one's full potential.

The Kantian concept of human dignity emphasizes the intrinsic worth of individuals, deliberately separating it from considerations of utility. However, contemporary Western trends of commodification pose a significant challenge to this principle. In international relations, Kantian ideas have been extended through Liberalism, which prioritizes individualism and the creation of conditions fostering liberty, equality, and fraternity, while simultaneously examining factors that threaten human dignity. Scholars have identified four primary conditions under which dignity can be compromised: humiliation, instrumentalization, degradation, and dehumanization.

The pursuit of unbridled material growth has often undermined human dignity by disregarding environmental sustainability, leading to widespread ecological degradation and the climate crisis (Naser, 2012). Traditional communities have been particularly affected, as market- and profit-driven models of industrialization and urbanization have marginalized their livelihoods. Multinational corporations have displaced local crafts, trades, and industries that could have coexisted sustainably. These patterns of development have contributed directly to climate change, threatening life itself. Least developed countries—responsible for minimal greenhouse gas emissions and lacking adequate capacity to respond—have emerged as the primary victims, with rising sea levels endangering small island states (Llavero-Pasquina, 2025). Promised transfers of technology and financial support from advanced industrialized nations, which bear primary responsibility for the crisis, have largely failed to materialize, creating new categories of climate refugees and internally displaced populations.

The *Dignitas Infinita* Declaration, issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, constitutes a significant articulation of human dignity within Christian anthropology. The document emphasizes the comprehensive scope of dignity and its relevance in social, political, and economic spheres. It identifies contemporary challenges that undermine human dignity, including poverty, migration, violence against women, human trafficking, and armed conflict, framing them as urgent issues requiring committed attention from both the Church and society. The Declaration also critiques the conceptual narrowing implicit in the preference for the term “*personal dignity*” over

*“human dignity”*, which restricts personhood to rational capacities. This perspective, it argues, contributes to the marginalization and devaluation of vulnerable groups, including unborn children, dependent elderly individuals, and persons with mental disabilities

It is identifiable a range of grave violations of human dignity. These encompass offences against life itself, including murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, and intentional suicide, all of which are deemed contrary to the inherent worth of the human person. It also addresses violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and psychological torture, and undue mental pressures (Bales, 1999). Furthermore, the Declaration highlights offences against human dignity in social and economic contexts, including substandard living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, trafficking of women and children, and exploitative labor practices that reduce individuals to instruments for profit rather than recognizing them as free and responsible agents (MacKinnon & Waltman, 2025). The death penalty is specifically cited as a practice that contravenes the inalienable dignity of every person, irrespective of the circumstances.

War is described as “another tragedy that denies human dignity” and consistently represents “a defeat of humanity,” to the extent that it is increasingly difficult to apply the rational criteria developed in earlier centuries to justify the notion of a ‘just war’. Attention is also given to the plight of migrants, whose lives are imperiled as they lack the means to establish a family, secure employment, or sustain themselves (Moore, 1998). Furthermore, human trafficking is highlighted as assuming “tragic dimensions” and is characterized as a “vile activity, a disgrace to societies that claim to be civilized.” The text calls upon those who exploit or engage with trafficking networks to undertake a serious examination of conscience (Shelly, 2010 ; De León, 2024).

When considering dilemmas related to human dignity in the context of sexuality and gender, contemporary debates often focus on issues such as abortion, surrogacy, reproductive technologies, and evolving gender theories (Neyra, 2021). These developments raise ethical and moral questions regarding the intrinsic worth of the human person, the integrity of the human body, and the societal understanding of personhood. From both theological and philosophical perspectives, such practices and ideologies are scrutinized for their potential to instrumentalize human life, disrupt the unity of biological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, and challenge

traditional conceptions of human dignity (Ergas, 2013). Consequently, they form a critical arena in which the protection and affirmation of human dignity must be carefully examined and defended.

### **Human Dignity in Secular Modernity**

During the transition to modernity, a number of intellectual and historical developments contributed to the growing separation between theology, law, and philosophy. Natural law theory, once grounded in theological premises, began to acquire a distinctly secular orientation. Thinkers such as Hugo Grotius advanced arguments “as if there were no God,” signifying not an outright rejection of religion but rather an effort to formulate moral and legal principles independent of explicit theological reference (Hilpert, 1992). The experience of the European confessional wars further underscored human fallibility and the limitations of moral certainty, prompting a renewed emphasis on human weakness and the need for rational governance (Westerman, 2003). Reformation theology also played a crucial role in shaping this transformation by introducing a division between the public and private spheres: in the public realm, rational action and moral responsibility became paramount, while the personal sphere was reserved for the individual’s relationship with God, in which dignity was understood as a divine gift freely bestowed (Bayer, 2014). Consequently, the concept of human dignity—initially rooted in the *imago Dei* paradigm and natural law—gradually developed an intellectual trajectory that appeared autonomous from its Christian origins.

These developments help explain why the concept of human dignity is largely absent from classical 18th-century human rights declarations and many natural law treatises, with Samuel Pufendorf being a notable exception. As Westerman observes, Pufendorf grounds human dignity in the inherent weakness of human nature, arguing that individuals can attain their true nature only through adherence to a law derived from a “higher insight.” (Westerman, 2003). Thus, dignity is not intrinsic but must be achieved by overcoming human fallibility. Pufendorf employs a dynamic model of dignity to reconcile the gap between the imperfect social reality and the ideal conception of the human being that should guide moral practice (Von der Pfordten, 2016). He characterizes human dignity through equality among humans, distinction from animals by virtue of the rational soul, the capacity for understanding and decision-making, the duty of self-respect, and the right to

be respected by others His account gained international influence, particularly through the abbreviated version of his eight-volume *De jure naturae et gentium*, which became a widely used textbook in Anglo-Saxon countries (Saastamoinen, 2010).

The concept of intrinsic human dignity emerged primarily within the domain of philosophy. In his *third formulation of the Categorical Imperative*, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) articulates the relationship between moral autonomy and human dignity, which he characterizes as an expression of an individual’s “*inner worth*.” Through this formulation, Kant establishes a philosophical foundation for human dignity that integrates its intrinsic value with both its active (moral agency) and passive (moral entitlement) dimensions (Wagner,1992). Human dignity, in Kant’s view, resides in the capacity of individuals to align their free will with objective moral principles. Consequently, Kant’s universal moral vision links moral rights and duties, asserting that the categorical imperative necessitates respect for every person as a manifestation of the moral worth inherent in humanity itself.

However, Kant’s philosophical interpretation of human dignity did not receive an immediate or widespread positive reception. Within Catholic intellectual circles, his ideas were particularly criticized and rejected, primarily because Kant sought to establish an ethical framework independent of divine authority. During Kant’s lifetime, the term *human dignity* was often invoked in public discourse to condemn the inhumane social and economic conditions experienced by the proletarian class. Moreover, the broader socio-political application of Kant’s notion of a universal human dignity was significantly undermined by the racial hierarchy inherent in his theory of race (Sanford, 2018)

These developments indicate that discussions on human dignity as a moral concept and the foundation of human rights largely occurred outside theology, within political, legal, and philosophical spheres. Owing to tensions between Church and State, Christian Churches in Europe generally did not lead efforts to modernize nations or advance human rights, instead maintaining hierarchical structures. Nonetheless, in practical contexts, many Church representatives actively promoted and upheld the principle of human dignity (Wippermann, 2017).

## **Understanding and addressing the adversities against Human Dignity through the spirit of Christ in light of *Humanae Vitae* and *Fides et Ratio***

In an era marked by rapid globalization, technological advancement, and moral relativism, the question of human dignity and the sacredness of the human body has gained renewed urgency. Contemporary societies face complex ethical challenges—from bioengineering and euthanasia to the commodification of human life—that threaten to undermine the intrinsic value of the person. Within the Catholic intellectual tradition, the encyclicals *Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI, 1968) and *Fides et Ratio* (Pope John Paul II, 1998) offer complementary frameworks for confronting these global adversities. While *Humanae Vitae* focuses on the moral theology of human life and sexuality, *Fides et Ratio* articulates a philosophical and epistemological defense of truth grounded in both faith and reason. Together, they advance a coherent vision of human dignity that affirms the sacredness of the human body as a reflection of divine truth and as the foundation for ethical action in the modern world.

*Humanae Vitae* articulates a theological anthropology rooted in the belief that human life and bodily existence are sacred gifts from God, imbued with inherent moral worth (HV, 12–14).<sup>2</sup> The encyclical emphasizes that the human body is not merely a biological instrument but an integral dimension of the person through which divine love and creative participation are expressed. This view directly challenges utilitarian perspectives that reduce human embodiment to economic or technological functions. The document insists that any action—particularly regarding sexuality and reproduction—that disregards the unity of the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of human life violates the sanctity of the person (HV, 9–12).

In the contemporary global context, where the human body is often commodified—through consumerism, reproductive technologies, or organ markets—*Humanae Vitae*'s vision serves as a prophetic defense of human integrity. It asserts that moral progress must align with natural law and divine purpose rather than with material expediency or social trends.

*Fides et Ratio* expands this theological vision by establishing the essential harmony between faith and reason in the pursuit of truth. John Paul II famously begins by stating that “faith and reason

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<sup>2</sup> GS §§12–22, 47–52, DV Introduction, §§1–5, 15–24, FC §§11–16, 32–34, EV §§1–11, 60–73, 86–89

are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth” (FR, 1). The encyclical argues that when reason operates apart from faith, it risks falling into skepticism and nihilism; conversely, when faith neglects reason, it can lapse into superstition or fundamentalism (FR, 48–50). The integration of the two therefore sustains a holistic understanding of human dignity—one that acknowledges both the rational capacity for moral discernment and the transcendent dimension of human existence.

Through this synthesis, *Fides et Ratio* provides an epistemological foundation for the moral vision of the human body, while reason articulates and defends these truths within pluralistic societies. This unity allows the Church’s moral teaching to engage meaningfully with contemporary ethical debates and scientific developments, grounding human rights and moral norms in a shared rational and spiritual anthropology.

Modern global realities—technological exploitation, socioeconomic inequality, and moral relativism—pose significant challenges to the preservation of human dignity. The rise of bioethical dilemmas such as surrogacy, abortion, euthanasia, and genetic manipulation illustrates a growing detachment from the notion of the human body as sacred. Within this climate, *Humanae Vitae* stands as a moral critique of utilitarian and hedonistic ideologies that treat human life as a means to an end.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, *Fides et Ratio* diagnoses a philosophical crisis underpinning these issues: the fragmentation of truth and the rejection of objective moral norms (FR, 81–83). When truth is relativized, human dignity becomes negotiable, subject to the demands of power, economy, or convenience. Thus, the encyclical calls for a “renewed trust in reason” that seeks truth as an expression of the divine logos—the rational order that grounds all creation (FR, 36). By restoring the harmony of faith and reason, humanity can reclaim a vision of dignity that transcends cultural and political divisions and resists the dehumanizing effects of globalization.

Taken together, *Humanae Vitae* and *Fides et Ratio* articulate a form of theological humanism—a vision that places the sacredness of the human body at the center of moral and intellectual life. This approach does not reject modern progress but seeks to orient it toward authentic human

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<sup>3</sup> DP §§1–15, 20–30, LS §§66–67, 128–131, FT §§95–101, 121–123

flourishing. Through faith, humanity recognizes its divine origin and moral responsibility; through reason, it discerns how to apply these truths within complex social and technological realities.

The integration of faith and reason thus becomes essential for addressing global adversities that threaten human dignity. It provides an ethical framework capable of engaging with secular institutions, scientific innovation, and pluralist dialogue without compromising on the intrinsic value of life. Such a synthesis affirms that true globalization must not be the spread of economic systems or technologies alone, but the universal recognition of the sacred worth of every human person.

In conclusion, the defense of human dignity amidst global adversities requires the integration of faith and reason as mutually reinforcing dimensions of truth. *Humanae Vitae* offers a moral theology of the body that safeguards its sacredness, while *Fides et Ratio* provides the philosophical grounding that affirms the rational coherence of this vision. Both encyclicals converge on the conviction that the human person—created in the image of God—embodies a unity of body, mind, and spirit that must be respected and protected in all social, technological, and political contexts. Against the backdrop of modern challenges, they invite humanity to rediscover a culture that upholds the sanctity of life, the integrity of the body, and the pursuit of truth through the harmonious dialogue of faith and reason.

## **Conclusion**

Human life in all its dimensions, both physical and spiritual, is a gift from God. This gift is to be accepted with gratitude and placed at the service of the good. Desiring personal self-determination, as gender theory prescribes, amounts to a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God. In seeking to redefine fundamental aspects of human nature according to individual preference, there is a risk of undermining the intrinsic dignity and purpose bestowed upon each person. Therefore, true human flourishing arises not from asserting autonomy over the divine order, but from embracing the responsibilities and moral guidance inherent in the gift of life. Recognizing life as sacred, in all its complexity, calls for a balance of freedom with ethical responsibility, ensuring that human actions honor both the Creator and the shared good of humanity.

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