

# Human Dignity in Islam and Catholicism

## Welcome

## Opening Prayer

God of all people, open our hearts to understanding other faith traditions. We are all made in your image and seek to know and follow your ways, to praise you, and to be instruments of your Holy presence. May we respect those who are different from us, who follow a different faith tradition than us. May we seek to know the truth of your Word and find common ground among the many faith traditions and recognize that we share a common humanity. Help us to be people of compassion and understanding, creating a path to a peaceful coexistence among all people. Amen.

## Introduction

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- Afghan-American Philosopher
- Born in Afghanistan
- Immigrated to Iran at age four
- Earned advanced degrees in Islamic theology and philosophy and Western philosophy in Iran
- His publications include five books focused on comparative philosophy, four in Farsi and one in English
- He has worked as an academic advisor for the Afghanistan Academy of Sciences in 2010, and was dean of Gharjistan University's Farah campus in 2011
- In the United States, he has been a guest lecturer and instructor at Boston University, George Washington University, The Catholic University of America, and Coppin State University, among other institutions
- He has lived at a Catholic seminary
- "If the true nature of being religious is to celebrate God's love and blessings everywhere, should not Muslims and Christians worship, adore, and celebrate God with and through each other?" [*Easter Hope: Imam in a Catholic Seminary*]
- We met last year at the Idara-e-Jaferia Islamic Center as participants in a discussion titled, "Savior Day: The Birth of the Awaited One"

## Catholic Perspective

- First Principles (reason, revelation, rights)
- Communion
- Image
- Species
- Development
- Social
- Body
- Law and Sin
- Morality, Subsidiarity, Solidarity
- Questions
- Sources

## First Principles

- Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter. This principle, which is fully recognizable even by reason alone, underlies the primacy of the human person and the protection of human rights. In the light of Revelation, the Church resolutely reiterates and confirms the ontological dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed in Jesus Christ.” [ID 1]

## Communion

- “The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being.” [CCC 27; GS 19 § 1]
- “The divine image is present in every man. It shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the union of the divine persons among themselves.” [CCC 1701]
- “Of all visible creatures only man is ‘able to know and love his creator.’ He is ‘the only creature on earth that God has willed for himself,’ and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity[.]” [CCC 356]

## Image

- “For sacred scripture teaches that man was created ‘to the image of God,’ is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and was appointed by him as master of all earthly creatures that he might subdue them and use them to God’s glory.” [GS 12]
- “Then God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.’ God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.” [Genesis 1:26-27]
- “In the ancient world, ‘image’ was used to refer to a statue of the king that was sent to a the distant corners of the kingdom where the king could not be present in person. This ‘image’ was to be the representative of the king in that area. If we apply this to Genesis, to be created in the image of God is to be God’s representative on earth....As God is ruler of the heavenly realm, so humanity, as God’s representative, is ruler of the earthly realm. This is a very exalted view of humanity.” [CBC p. 40]

## Species

- “The recognition of this dignity cannot be contingent upon a judgment about the person’s ability to understand and act freely; otherwise, it would not be inherent in the person, independent of the individual’s situation, and thus deserving unconditional respect.” [ID 24]
- “The only prerequisite for speaking about the dignity inherent in the person is their membership in the human species, whereby ‘the rights of the person are the rights of man.’”[ID 24]

## Development

- "The Church's Magisterium progressively developed an ever-greater understanding of the meaning of human dignity, along with its demands and consequences, until it arrived at the recognition that the dignity of every human being prevails beyond all circumstances." [ID 16]
- "The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection "in seeking and loving what is true and good." [CCC 1704]
- "By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an 'outstanding manifestation of the divine image.'" [CCC 1705]

## Social

- "But God did not create man as a solitary. For from the beginning 'male and female he created them' (Gen. 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential." [GS 12]
- "All men are called to the same end: God himself. There is a certain resemblance between the union of the divine persons and the fraternity that men are to establish among themselves in truth and love. Love of neighbor is inseparable from love for God." [CCC 1878]

## Body

- "The human body shares in the dignity of 'the image of God': it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit"[.] [CCC 364]
- "Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honour since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day[.]" [CCC 364]

## Law and Sin

- "In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience can when necessary speak to his heart more specifically: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged." [GS 16]
- "Man, enticed by the Evil One, abused his freedom at the very beginning of history." He succumbed to temptation and did what was evil. He still desires the good, but his nature bears the wound of original sin. He is now inclined to evil and subject to error: 'Man is divided in himself. As a result, the whole life of men, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness.'" [CCC 1707]

## Morality, Subsidiarity, Solidarity

- “Every individual possesses an inalienable and intrinsic dignity from the beginning of his or her existence as an irrevocable gift. However, the choice to express that dignity and manifest it to the full or to obscure it depends on each person’s free and responsible decision.” [ID 22]
- “Now a man can scarcely arrive at the needed sense of responsibility unless his living conditions allow him to become conscious of his dignity, and to rise to his destiny by spending himself for God and for others.” [GS 31]
- “Reason attests that there are objects of the human act which are by their nature ‘incapable of being ordered’ to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image.” [VS 80]
- “The Second Vatican Council itself, in discussing the respect due to the human person, gives a number of examples of such acts: ‘Whatever is hostile to life itself, such as any kind of homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide; whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture and attempts to coerce the spirit; whatever is offensive to human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children; degrading conditions of work which treat labourers as mere instruments of profit, and not as free responsible persons: all these and the like are a disgrace, and so long as they infect human civilization they contaminate those who inflict them more than those who suffer injustice, and they are a negation of the honour due to the Creator.’” [VS 80]
- “The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation[.]” [CCC 2273]
- “Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation.” [CCC 2314]
- “It is our clear duty, therefore, to strain every muscle in working for the time when all war can be completely outlawed by international consent. This goal undoubtedly requires the establishment of some universal public authority acknowledged as such by all and endowed with the power to safeguard on the behalf of all, security, regard for justice, and respect for rights.” [GS 81]
- “At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace.” [USCCB]
- “Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... Solidarity, understood in its most profound

meaning, is a way of making history, and this is what popular movements are doing.” (FT 116)

## Questions

- What are the religious sources for understanding human dignity from the Islamic perspective?
- What role does reason play in the Islamic understanding of human dignity?
- In the Islamic understanding of human dignity, is there anything a human being can do to lose their dignity?
- In the Islamic understanding of human dignity, how is the non-human part of creation understood?
- In the Islamic understanding of human dignity, what role do political institutions play?
- In the Islamic understanding of human dignity, does Jesus have anything to add?
- What, if anything, are you hearing among fellow Muslims regarding the Christian reaction to the war in Gaza?

## Sources

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC]

*The Collegeville Bible Commentary* [CBC]

*Fratelli Tutti, On Fraternity and Social Friendship* [Pope Francis] [FT]

*Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith “Dignitas Infinita” On Human Dignity* [ID]

*Gaudium et spes, The Church in the Modern World* (Second Vatican Council) [GS]

*New American Bible*

*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* [USCCB]

*Veritatis Splendor, The Splendor of Truth: Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church’s Moral Teaching* [Saint John Paul II] [VS]