

The Catholic Church's perspective of human dignity as the basis of dialogue with the secular world

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Abstract

The Catholic Church maintains that the *Imago Dei* is the ground for human dignity. The secular world, too, endorses human dignity as the foundation for human rights without referring to *Imago Dei*. The Catholic Church and the secular world both agree on the importance of human dignity, even though they differ on their views about the source of human dignity. In this paper, we shall examine if human dignity can be the basis of a fruitful dialogue between the Catholic Church and the secular world in order to make our world a better place to live. The primary resources for our study are the Church documents on human dignity, and the opinions of distinguished thinkers on the need to promote a culture of dialogue between religions and secular world.

Key words

Catholic Church; Imago Dei; secular world; human dignity

1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN) in its charter of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) gave a pivotal role to the concept of human dignity.¹ Even though the charter does not refer to the transcendental nature of human person or *Imago Dei* (image of God) as the basis of human dignity, it maintains that all persons are born with equal and inherent dignity, irrespective of their class, caste, creed, religion, sex, and economical, political or social conditions. Glenn notes that the concept of dignity affirmed by the charter has universal appeal because it does not refer to

1 United Nations (1948), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Available at <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html> (accessed November 7, 2016).

any metaphysical or theological thought.² Most of the nations note in their constitutions, either directly or indirectly, the significant role of human dignity.³ Moreover, most of the advocates of human dignity and rights are secular nations.⁴ The Christian faith holds that God created humans. Further, all humans are bearers of *Imago Dei* (see Gen 1:27).⁵ Even though the reason to uphold human dignity differs, most of the people in the modern world would agree that humans have equal and inherent dignity.⁶

The Catholic Church advocates that all humans have inherent dignity. It promotes the right to life and peaceful coexistence. In spite of the doctrinal differences, the Catholic Church can play a great role to initiate a fruitful dialogue with other faiths and the secular world to promote human dignity. The rise of jingoism and fundamentalism is a threat to peaceful coexistence in the contemporary society. Conflicts and wars are forcing people to leave their homelands and seek refuge in other places. Immigrants and refugees often become soft targets in the hands of traffickers, who trample their human dignity. In such a situation, the Catholic Church needs to collaborate with all like-minded partners to safeguard the dignity of humans. A fruitful dialogue in action between the Catholic Church and the secular world has the potential to promote justice, peace and integral sustainable development in the world. Pope John Paul II noted the love of Christ as the driving force behind any genuine dialogue between the Church and the world.

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- 2 See Glenn Hughes, 'The Concept of Dignity in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' *Journal of Religious Ethics* 39, no. 1 (2011): 1–24.
 - 3 See Erin Daly, *Dignity Rights: Courts, Constitutions and the Worth of the Human Person* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 1–9.
 - 4 See Kerri Woods, *Human Rights & Environmental Sustainability* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2010), 31–32. The word secular has broad meaning. In this paper, we use the word 'secular nations' to refer to nations, which do not explicitly acknowledge God in their constitutions or subscribe to any particular religion as the state religion. Moreover, these nations do not deny the existence of God but grant freedom of religion to their citizens.
 - 5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) no. 1702. The full text of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (accessed October 26, 2016). See also Ron Highfield, 'Beyond the 'Image of God' Conundrum: A Relational View of Human Dignity,' *Christian Studies* 24 (2010): 21–32.
 - 6 See Patrick Lee & Robert George, 'The Nature & Basis of Human Dignity,' *Ratio Juris* 21, no.2 (2008): 173–193. See also Robert Osborn, 'The Great Subversion: The Scandalous Origins of Human Rights,' *The Hedgehog Review* 17, no. 2 (2015): 91–100.

Because of the radiant humanity of Christ, nothing genuinely human fails to touch the hearts of Christians. Faith in Christ does not impel us to intolerance. On the contrary, it obliges us to engage others in a respectful dialogue. Love of Christ does not distract us from interest in others, but rather invites us to responsibility for them, to the exclusion of no one and indeed, if anything, with a special concern for the weakest and the suffering.⁷

The Catholic Church needs to employ its perspective of human dignity as the basis of a meaningful dialogue with the secular world especially in the following key areas.

2. Promoting human life with dignity

The Catholic Church holds human life as sacred gift of God, which all need to protect and respect.⁸ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) notes, ‘Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.’⁹ The Catholic Church has taken a principled stand on the sanctity of life. It maintains that the human embryo is a person with dignity. The contemporary world is debating about the use of biotechnological methods like cloning and embryonic stem cell research in influencing human life. Andorno notes that scientific methods are not above human dignity and therefore, people cannot become mere instruments of technologies.¹⁰ The Catholic Church, too, opposes any biotechnological methods, which overlook the dignity of a human being. Even though there may be differences of opinion, especially with regard to abortion and euthanasia between the Catholic Church and the secular world, both the entities can come together to support and promote human life with dignity.

7 John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, no. 17. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno.html (accessed October 10, 2016).

8 CCC no. 2258.

9 CCC no. 2270.

10 See Roberto Andorno, ‘Human Dignity and Human Rights as a Common Ground for a Global Bioethics,’ *Journal of Medicine & Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (2009): 223–240.

Human trafficking is on the rise because of large-scale migration and the refugee crisis in the world.¹¹ The recent political turmoil in parts of African and Middle East nations is forcing people to leave their homelands and seek refuge in safer destinations. However, the host countries are reluctant to accept large number of migrants because it could trigger law and order problems in their societies. Thus, the migrants are vulnerable to human traffickers who take advantage of their helplessness and abuse them. The Catholic Church and the secular world need to join hands together to reach out to the migrants, who are facing innumerable difficulties and constant threats to life. The Catholic Church through its vast network of social agencies can make a great contribution by providing basic needs of living to refugees, who travel long distances to reach safer destinations. Further, Catholics and social agencies in host countries can also provide the much-needed moral and spiritual support to the refugees and migrants. The displacement from their homelands brings great sorrow to the hearts of migrants and refugees. However, when they reach their host countries, they have to face entirely new cultures and circumstances, which increase their stress and anxiety. Catholics need to make an appeal on the conscience of the host countries' local authorities and citizens to treat the migrants and refugees as humans with dignity and not look upon them as liabilities.¹² The Catholic Church through its agencies like Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has worked successfully with NGOs, governmental agencies and international agencies to rescue young girls and women from Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina from the hands of traffickers. Their efforts helped the poor and marginalized women to escape from forced prostitution to dignified human life.¹³

11 See Kevin Avruch, *Context and Pretext in Conflict Resolution: Culture, Identity, Power and Practice* (Abingdon: Paradigm Publisher, 2013), 51–62. See also Louise Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 1–35.

12 See Victorina Cueto, 'Out of Place: Exilic Existence in a HyperGlobalized World,' in *Faith on the Move: Toward a Theology of Migration in Asia*, ed. Fabio Baggio and Agnes Brazal (Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2007), pp. 1–19.

13 See Monica Mueller, 'A Case Study on Networking Against Gender Based Violence,' in *Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders*, eds. Mark Rogers, Tom Bamat & Julie Ideh (Baltimore: Catholic Relief Services, 2008), pp. 85–97.

The Catholic Church runs many hospitals and medical centres to serve those who are in need of medical attention. Even though not all the hospitals and medical centres are free, they do provide basic medical attention to the poor. However, because of lack of funds the hospitals and medical centres cannot give high quality medical treatment to the poor at no cost. Thus, these agencies need to appeal to government and business establishments to fund programs, in order to give free medical services to the poor.¹⁴ These agencies need to devise strategies to safeguard the dignity of the poor people, who are dying because of lack of proper medical care.

People with disabilities are facing innumerable problems in the society. Even in welfare states, due to economic recession, governments are cutting budgets, which finance the welfare schemes for the disabled. Often, states forget that it is their duty to protect the weakest in the society. The Catholic Church needs to stand up for the weakest in the society.¹⁵ It needs to emphasize strongly that disability does not rob a person of his or her dignity. The state governments need to rework on their budgets to finance generously the various welfare schemes for the disabled persons. The Catholic Church and other NGOs can greatly help the local authorities by creating opportunities for work for disabled persons. This can encourage the disabled persons to integrate themselves in the society.

The Catholic Church is forefront in the field of education. The Church runs schools from kindergarten to universities all over the world. Millions of people seek education in Catholic schools because of the high quality of education. One of the principal teachings of all the Catholic schools is to acknowledge and promote the dignity of every human.¹⁶ Catholic schools have a great responsibility to protect the dignity of their employees and students before it appeals to the secular world to uphold the dignity of

14 See Simon Corden, 'Autonomous Hospitals Become a Commercial Network: Hospital Rationalization in Victoria, Australia,' in eds. Alexander Preker & April Harding (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2003), pp. 345–389.

15 See Michael Hryniuk, *Theology, Disability and Spiritual Transformation: Learning from the Communities of L'Arche* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2010), pp. 1–12.

16 See Gerald Grace & Joseph O'Keefe, 'Catholic Schools Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century: An Overview,' in *International Handbook of Catholic Education: Challenges for School Systems in the 21st Century*, Part One, eds. Gerald Grace & Joseph O'Keefe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), pp. 1–11.

every person. The Catholic Church through its educational institutions has a great scope to organize programs, to highlight the plight of the people who are vulnerable to exploitation. The Catholic Church needs to join hands with the secular world to stop physical and sexual abuses done to children, women, the disabled and the weak. The Catholic Church needs to become the voice of the voiceless in the society.¹⁷

In contemporary times, some groups are attempting to spread the concept of supremacy based on race and religion. The Catholic Church, which has been instrumental in developing anthropological studies, needs to give more importance to research which point to the common origin of humanity. Scholars like Edward Evans-Pritchard, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner, Edith Turner, Michael Scanlon, Wilhelm Schmidt and others have greatly contributed in the advancement of anthropological studies. Moreover, Christian anthropology forms an ideal and strong base to promote human dignity, which is independent of race, religion, citizenship or gender differences. Christian anthropology overcomes narrow understanding of religions and points to the common origin of humans. It does not allow any individual or group to claim supremacy and consider it their legitimate right to discriminate because of their race or religion. The frightful carnages carried out against certain groups of people because of their race and religion during World War II reminds the entire humanity of the dreadful effects of xenophobia and hatred. Thus, the Catholic Church needs to enter into dialogue with all like-minded people to combat the evil influences of racism, xenophobia and discrimination. However, it also needs to introspect, to purge itself of any discrimination, which may exist within it; otherwise, all its efforts to stop discrimination would be counter-productive.¹⁸

Religious fundamentalism is on the rise in the world.¹⁹ Fundamentalists are increasingly taking recourse to violent means to push forward their

17 See Petroc Willey, 'Education as an Ethical Activity,' in *Catholic Education: Universal Principles, Locally Applied*, ed. Andrew Morris (Newcastel: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp. 3–10.

18 See Marvin Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teachings and Movements* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 119–153.

19 See Michael Emerson & David Hartman, 'The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism,' *Annual Review of Sociology* 32 (2006): 127–144.

ideologies. The rise in the number of terror attacks carried out by people who have connections with certain religions is shocking the entire world. Fundamentalists are abusing religion by causing divisions, conflicts and wars. Therefore, adherents of different religions and their leaders need to come together to condemn the wrong done by the fundamentalists. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has made efforts to initiate dialogue at theological and practical levels with people of different faiths.²⁰ The central part of all inter-religious dialogue is to accept the person belonging to other faith as a human being with dignity. Inter-religious dialogue does not mean uniformity of opinions but unity in diversity. It helps all the people involved in the dialogue to express one's belief and learn from another. At a practical level, inter-religious dialogue could also help to diffuse crisis and conflicts, and lead all the parties concerned to find an amicable solution to the various problems.²¹

In the contemporary world, there are some regimes which are still suppressing the right to practice and propagate religion of one's own choice. In some other places, fundamentalists are forcing people to convert to their religion. For instance, members of Boko Haram in Nigeria are kidnapping Christian girls and forcefully converting them to Islam.²² In India, too, some Hindu fundamentalists are pressuring Christians to leave Christianity and embrace Hinduism. They call it *ghar vapsi* (return of the prodigal) and take pride in forcefully coercing people to stop practicing Christianity.²³ The Catholic Church, since the Second Vatican Council, strongly advocates freedom of religion.²⁴ Catholic Church officials need to work with all secular

20 See Conciliar Document *Nostra Aetate* no. 1, 2,3,4,5. Available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed November 7, 2016).

21 See S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, 'Inter-Religious Dialogue & Peacebuilding,' in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cronille, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, A John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Publication, 2013), 149–167. See also John D'Arcy May, 'Human Dignity, Human Rights and Religious Pluralism: Buddhist and Christian Perspectives,' *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26 (2006): 51–60.

22 See Caroline Varin, *Boko Haram and the War on Terror* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2016), 77–96.

23 See Nivedita Menon & Aditya Nigam, *Power & Contestation: India since 1989* (Halifax: Fernhood Publishing, 2007), pp. 36–82.

24 Conciliar Document *Declaration on Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae* no. 1, 2. Available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651210_dh_en.html

nations to stop spreading the poison of fundamentalism. It also needs to raise this issue at the UN to influence the world community to take prompt action to stop every act of religious persecution and forceful conversions. Pope John Paul II urged the world community to respect diverse cultures and promote freedom of religion. He noted,

Our respect for the culture of others is therefore rooted in our respect for each community's attempt to answer the question of human life. And here we can see how important it is to safeguard the fundamental right to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, as the cornerstones of the structure of human rights and the foundation of every truly free society. No one is permitted to suppress those rights by using coercive power to impose an answer to the mystery of man.²⁵

Thus, the Catholic Church and the secular world can come together to discuss, debate and find concrete solutions to the various life-threatening problems, which are dehumanizing the weak, the poor and the disabled in the contemporary world.

3. Promoting justice and peace

Justice and peace are important factors in the society so that people can live with dignity and security. Horton notes the importance of a 'theory of justice' in a society, which wants to promote dignity as an important social objective.²⁶ However, the contemporary situation is increasingly becoming hostile for maintaining justice and peace in the society. Hence, there is an urgent need for all peace-loving agencies and people, to work together to stop growing hatred, discord and conflicts in the world.

ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html (accessed November 8, 2016). See also Robert George & William Saunders, 'Dignitatis Humanae: The Freedom of the Church & the Responsibility of the State,' in *Catholicism & Religious Freedom: Contemporary Reflections on Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Liberty*, eds. Kenneth Grasso & Robert Hunt (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), pp. 1–17.

25 John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, no. 10.

26 Richard Horton, 'Rediscovering Human Dignity,' *The Lancet* 364, no. 9439 (2004): 1011–1098.

The Holy See, which enjoys the observer status at UN, can influence the member states to take action against violence in their respective countries and in the world.²⁷ Moreover, the Holy See could also work with governmental and non-governmental agencies to stop nuclear, chemical and biological weapon proliferation. The world community needs to learn the horrific effects of the atomic explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²⁸ Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons can wipe out the human race entirely from the face of the earth. Thus, all the world leaders need to collaborate to prevent warring nations and groups from escalating their rivalry into full-fledged war. War brings nothing but destruction. It brings suffering and pain, which are very difficult to heal. In times of war, the warring groups or nations, trample upon the dignity of humans without any remorse. The Catholic Church needs to be alert to the prevailing unstable condition in various parts of the world. It needs to facilitate dialogue between world leaders, peace organizations and warring groups and nations to solve amicably the complex problems, without resorting to violence. For instance, the Catholic Church, which has a powerful presence in Latin America and Africa, uses its good offices to bring warring factions to the negotiation table.²⁹ Even though in the past, at times the hierarchy of the Catholic Church erred by supporting the rich, powerful and elite, it needs to rectify its course and stand for justice and peace alone.

Political, social and economic stability are essential for promoting justice and peace in the society.³⁰ Countries, which have dictatorships or repressive regimes tend to curtail the freedom of their citizens. Human development is impossible without genuine freedom. The Catholic Church maintains, ‘Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness.’³¹

27 See Alan Chong & Jodok Troy, ‘A Universal Sacred Mission & the Universal Secular Organization: The Holy See & the United Nations’ *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 3 (2011): 335–354.

28 See Frank Barnaby, ‘The Effects of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima & Nagasaki,’ in *Hiroshima & Nagasaki: Retrospect & Prospect*, eds. Douglas Holdstock & Frank Barnaby (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 1–9.

29 See David Steele, ‘An Introductory Overview to Faith-Based Peacebuilding,’ in *Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders*, pp. 5–41.

30 See Minu Hemmati, ed., *Participatory Dialogue: Towards a Stable, Safe & Just Society for All* (New York: United Nations, 2007), 51–123.

31 CCC no. 1731.

It supports the cause of human dignity and rights. The UN agencies, NGOs and other international agencies consider the Catholic Church as credible because of its tireless efforts to serve the weakest in the society. Catholic pastoral and relief personnel work in the remotest villages of the poorest countries to serve the weakest and the marginalized.³² Their good work has given immense hope and encouragement to millions of poor people, especially in the various nations of Africa. Their rapport with the local people and authorities has put them in a suitable position to initiate the process of bringing political and social stability in the places, inflicted with civil wars and upheaval in the society. Following are the reports of the three case studies of the Catholic Church's role in promoting justice and peace in Rwanda, Togo and Colombia. CRS published these reports in *Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders*.

Muyango and Dills note the work done by the Catholic Church through its CRS network in Rwanda.³³ They note the internal war and genocide created chaos in the Rwandan society. Political instability, social disparity, large-scale unemployment, alcohol-drug menace, crime and violence disrupted the day-to-day life of Rwandans. The CRS workers worked with local Church and governmental authorities to find solution to the desperate situation in Rwanda. They focused on educating and training the youth, to live in peace and seek reconciliation. Their focus on youth empowerment reaped salutary fruits of creating peace and harmony in the society. Thus, the CRS trained the youth to take leadership at different levels for the overall progress and prosperity of Rwanda.

Badonte and Lambon note the case study of Catholic Church's agencies in Togo.³⁴ Togo faced persistent socio-political tensions because of the quasi-dictatorship of the ruling political party. Further, the country witnessed many conflicts because of ethnic and regional differences. The bishops of the Catholic Church worked with religious leaders of other denominations

32 See Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), pp. 1–16.

33 See Joseph Muyango & Laura Dills, 'Rwanda: Church Action in Promoting a Culture of Peace,' in *Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders*, pp. 45–57.

34 See Theodore Badonte & Eloi Yog Lambon, 'Togo: Catholic Church Contributions to Overcoming the Socio-political Crisis,' in *Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders*, pp. 59–70.

to create awareness among the people about the concept of human dignity. They emphasized that all Togolese, irrespective of their ethnic or regional differences, possess equal dignity as humans. They also facilitated the organization of meetings of prominent political leaders to diffuse tensions among political parties. They also made prudent use of media to spread the message of unity and solidarity among Togolese. In addition, they also asked the international community to put pressure on the Togolese government to conduct free and fair legislative elections. However, the Catholic Church never sided with any political party. Further, it never used the pulpit to coax the Catholics to vote for a particular candidate. The neutral position of the Catholic Church gave it a lot of credibility in the eyes of all Togolese. Thus, the Catholic Church through its agencies succeeded in initiating the peace process in Togo.

Paez notes the work done by School for Peace and Coexistence for restoring normalcy and peace in conflict-ridden society of Colombia.³⁵ The School for Peace and Coexistence is a program organized by Caritas Colombia and Jesuit Program for Peace. Colombia has a long history of war between the government and guerrillas. The long going conflict gave rise to poverty, inequality, unemployment, alcohol-drug addiction, child abuse, forced prostitution, domestic violence and many other evils in the Colombian society. The aim of School for Peace and Coexistence is to educate and train people to know the importance of promoting justice and peace in the society. This program links spirituality with social commitment. It makes people realize that they have the capacity to contribute to the peace-making process as individuals and members of the society. This program helped in bringing peace in disturbed families and neighbourhood. Further, the various social welfare projects are helping the Colombians to return to normalcy and respect each other as humans with dignity.

The above three case studies note the concrete work done by Catholic Church's agencies in collaboration with local governments, NGOs and international agencies in countries which faced internal turmoil due to various reasons. The Catholic Church, which is primarily a spiritual entity, has the potential to take a neutral position in places of conflict. Thus, it

35 See Maria Victoria Rivera Paez, 'Colombia: School for Peace and Coexistence in the Archdiocese of Manizales', in *Pursuing Just Peace: An Overview and Case Studies for Faith-Based Peacebuilders*, pp. 71–81.

can bring all the warring factions together for finding solutions to the problems. This can greatly contribute in establishing justice and peace in the conflict-ridden societies.

The Catholic Church's programs for promoting justice and peace are not mere social action programs. Church leaders and pastoral workers focus not only on the surface level problems but also on the deeper issues, like conversion of heart and transformation.³⁶ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (formerly known as Joseph Ratzinger and the prefect of the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*) noted the importance of internal transformation to bring genuine economic and socio-political transformation in the world. He noted,

[We cannot] localize evil principally or uniquely in bad social, political, or economic structures as though all other evils came from them so that the creation of the new man would depend on the establishment of different economic and socio-political structures. To be sure, there are structures which are evil and which cause evil and which we must have the courage to change. Structures, whether they are good or bad, are the result of man's actions and so are consequences more than causes. The root of evil, then, lies in free and responsible persons who have to be converted by the grace of Jesus Christ in order to live and act as new creatures in the love of neighbour and in the effective search for justice, self-control, and the exercise of virtue.³⁷

The Catholic Church as an organization, which promotes holistic transformation of societies has the potential to appeal to all peacemakers to work for restorative justice, while advocating for peace in the society. Peace without adequate justice would mean nothing to the victims of conflicts and wars.³⁸

36 See Marvin Krier Mich, *The Challenge & Spirituality of Catholic Social Teaching* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), pp. 1–16.

37 Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), 'Instructions on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation,' no. 15. [Online] Available: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html [Accessed November 4, 2016].

38 See Thomas Noakes-Duncan, 'The Emergence of Restorative Justice in Ecclesial Practice,' *Journal of Moral Theology* 5, no. 2 (2016): 1–21.

The Catholic Church's perspective of *Imago Dei* as the basis for human dignity could be instrumental in promoting gender equity.³⁹ Even though the Catholic Church has a great need to introspect its internal functioning to do justice to women, it has the potential to reach out to the innumerable women who are victims of gender inequity, violence and abuse. The Catholic Church through its large network of educational and medical institutes attempts to give all women the opportunity to get adequate education about their reproductive capabilities and responsible parenthood. It also provides medical care and economic support to pregnant women and women with infants. Further, the Church agencies work with all secular agencies to promote women's active role in all fields of life.⁴⁰ These agencies also support and protect women who are victims of domestic violence. These agencies challenge cultures, which subordinate women, and allow inhuman practices like women's circumcision, temple prostitution, child marriage, and polygamy.

Thus, the Catholic Church with its concept of human dignity can collaborate with the secular world to promote justice and peace in the society.

4. Promoting human and environmental integral sustainable development

Human dignity is the key concept of Christian anthropology and social teachings. Human dignity has direct relation to integral sustainable development. This concept has universal appeal even in secular nations, which do not associate with any religion. Mere economic development cannot lead to the integral human development. A human person's integral development depends on social, political, economic and environmental issues. Thus, the states need to assure that every person has sufficient resources to meet his or her basic needs. Further, the states need to provide every person the opportunities to develop one's skills and capabilities.

39 See Tina Beattie, 'Dignity beyond Rights: Human Development in the Context of the Capabilities Approach and Catholic Social Teaching,' *Australian eJournal of Theology* 22, no. 3 (2015): 150–165.

40 See Janne Haaland Matlary, 'Women and Work: The Radical Papal Teaching,' in *The Right to Work: Towards Full Employment*, eds. Margaret Archer & Edmond Malivaud (Vatican: Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 1998), pp. 263–285.

Moreover, the states also need to encourage freedom of expression and freedom to dissent for the integral development of people.

In the contemporary times, states focus too much on economic development and neglect the damage done to the environment. In the name of economic progress, states do not hesitate to destroy ecosystems. However, integral sustainable development of the environment has direct link with the integral sustainable development of humans. Pope Francis strongly advocated integral sustainable development of both humans and environment in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. He noted,

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.⁴¹

Pope Francis includes spiritual development of humans as an essential factor for integral sustainable development. The spiritual perspective can help humanity to see everything inter-related as creatures of God. World leaders, scientists, economists and environmentalists need a deeper conversion of heart to frame policies, which could benefit not only the present generation but also the future generations. The inter-relatedness of all organisms makes us realize that mere profit-making and domestic development cannot be the yardsticks to measure development. For instance, if a developed nation buys wood from a developing nation then the developing nation loses its forestland. Deforestation could lead to severe damage of ecosystems and eventually cause damage not only to the citizens of the developing nation but also the whole world. Thus, the importing nation needs to consider the overall effect of their consumption and prudently avoid damaging the ecosystems of the developing nations.⁴²

Even though the economic, socio-political and environmental issues are not the subject matter of religions, there is a great need for an inter-disciplinary approach to solve the problems. Experts in all fields of human and natural

41 Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si*, no. 8. [Online] Available: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclical5/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html [Accessed November 5, 2016].

42 Reginald Alva, 'Laudato Si Challenges Irrational Rationalization,' *Asian Horizons* 9, no. 4 (2015): 709–723.

sciences including those in religion need to come together to discuss and debate about problems, which the earth, our common home, is facing. Pope Francis noted the progress in scientific research could help humanity to understand better the need for integral sustainable development for the common good. He noted,

Ongoing research should also give us a better understanding of how different creatures relate to one another in making up the larger units which today we term ‘ecosystems’... Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself... So, when we speak of ‘sustainable use’, consideration must always be given to each ecosystem’s regenerative ability in its different areas and aspects.⁴³

Brown too notes the importance of integrating all fields of knowledge along with moral values for genuine integral sustainable development. He notes, ‘One of the core tenets of Integral Sustainable Development is the recognition that we are part of this grand territory, not simply observers or analysts of its flows and patterns.’⁴⁴

World leaders and experts from different disciplines need to come together to combat the effects of over-consumption, environmental degradation and exploitation of the weak.⁴⁵ They need to frame policies, which would benefit not only the present generation but also the coming generations.

All world leaders need to reflect on the problems related to the imprudent and arbitrary use of natural resources to achieve economic and technological progress.⁴⁶ For instance, the increase in the sale of automobiles may lead to economic progress. However, the increase in the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere due to fuel emissions is bound to cause health hazards. What would be the use of having millions of private automobiles

43 LS, no. 140.

44 Barrett Brown, ‘Theory and Practice of Integral Sustainable Development Part 1,’ *AQAL: Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* 1, no.2 (2006): 366–405.

45 Partha Dasgupta, ‘Impediments to Sustainable Development: Externalities in Human-Nature Exchanges,’ in *The Proceedings of the Joint Workshop on Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature, Our Responsibility*, eds. Partha Dasgupta, Veerabhadran Ramanathan & Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo (Vatican: The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 2015), pp. 63–78.

46 Reginald Alva, ‘Sustainable Development in the Light of the Teachings of *Laudato Si*,’ *European Journal of Sustainable Development* 5, no. 4 (2016): 177–186.

on the street, if people lose their health. In such cases, world leaders need to encourage and invest in cleaner technologies, which can increase the quality of life and result in safeguarding the dignity of a person.

Thus, to safeguard human dignity, the concept of integral sustainable development of both humans and the environment are inevitable.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we examined the scope of dialogue between the Catholic Church and the secular world by using the concept of human dignity. Even though there are differences in understanding the concept of human dignity, both the Catholic Church and the secular world can come together to safeguard the dignity of humans. This dialogue can help all in facing the challenges to life and human development. The Catholic Church in spite of its doctrinal differences on certain issues like abortion and euthanasia has great potential to work with the secular world to create a more just and peaceful society. Further, the concept of human dignity based on *Imago Dei* could lead to integral sustainable development of humans, and also highlights the need for the integral sustainable development of the environment, as all are interconnected. Thus, the Catholic Church's perspective of human dignity can serve as an apt starting point to initiate dialogue with the secular world to make our planet a better and safer place to live.

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