

PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY AND THE COMMON GOOD

James Kanali♦

The Jesuit Hakimani Centre, Nairobi - Kenya

Abstract

The concept of human dignity seems to require, in and of itself, some privileged “places” and “ways” of exercising it. In many countries, people do not enjoy equal access to basic services and resources, nor are they given the possibility to participate in public decision making. This particularly affects the lives of poor and marginalized groups. As I argue further, exclusion and discrimination are perpetrators of poverty and provoke social tensions and conflict. In fact, all policies, programmes, and technical assistance should foster the realization of Human Rights as laid down in the International Bill of Human Rights. This Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) promotes the concept of responsible governments, with the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of their citizens. People are active citizens entitled to rights rather than depend on their government’s mercy or the goodwill of international support. And people are expected to respect other human beings’ rights – the same rights as they enjoy themselves.

Key words: Dignity, Common good, Rights, Exclusion, State.

1. Introduction

My aim in this paper is to interrogate the concepts of human dignity and the common good, but I also will be trying to stimulate a conversation on the concepts rather than being definitive. The hope is

♦ **Mr. James Kanali** has worked with the Jesuit Hakimani Centre (JHC), a Jesuit Social Centre of Concern, for Eastern Africa. As the Assistant Programmes Manager. He is Kenyan; and holds an MPhil degree in International Peace Studies and international relations from Trinity College [School of Ecumenics], the University of Dublin- Ireland, a Certificate in Conflict Mediation from the same university and BA Honours University of Zimbabwe. He has worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service in the Sudan. Email: kanali@jesuits.net

that practitioners will appreciate their understanding of the terms, any tips or tools they have encountered or developed for addressing their work through a dignity and common good spectrum, and the challenges of implementation. I would very much welcome thoughts and criticism, as my discourse is not conclusive. In this article, I shall attempt to address some of the impediments that exist in meeting the realization of the aspiration of universal respect for human dignity and the common good that underlies the endorsement of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human and Peoples Rights. From the onset, I pose the question: why is so much done in remedying social evils instead of avoiding them in the first place? It is imperative to take stock of the fact that our rights and desired dignified life depend much more on norms, set forth dependent on reference, to longer history, culture, or local tradition, and sometimes without reference to any stipulated ontological or metaphysical ground.¹ For instance, the United Nations declaration of human and people's rights presupposes that the assignment of what is right has meaning and should not be violated. In case a violation occurs, there is a provision for a judicial office to adjudicate with specifics of law for enforcement. Take, for instance, the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, which was based on the above observations, in that there is inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights for all humanity. This means that the set declaration is committed to a natural conception of human dignity since rights are "intrinsic" to all human beings. In this sense, dignity is an intrinsic feature of every human being, and pre-exists all juridical-political acts.² As such, drawing from the document *Pacem in Terris* by John Paul VI, all people of goodwill must work to bring about peace in all the relationships in our worldwide community.

For instance, Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, made a special contribution to the 2002 *Human Development Report named Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*³ by saying:

¹ The Declarations of Human Rights preamble, the drafters cite "disregard and contempt for human rights" as the cause of "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind," referring to the excesses of World War II. And they assert that such rights have now been proclaimed, and that a "common understanding" of them is necessary. They assert faith in human dignity and equality, to social progress, and the importance of "the rule of law" and of "friendly relations between nations" as reasons for promulgating the Declaration.

² Monsalve Viviana, B. and Román Javier, A., "Tensions of Human Dignity," *International Journal of Human Rights*, 6,11 (2009), 41-42.

³ UNDP: (2002) Human Development Report. "*Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*," <https://doi.org/10.18356/b6670cee-en> 26th September, 2023.

Respect for human dignity implies commitment to creating conditions under which individuals can develop a sense of self-worth and security. True dignity comes with an assurance of one's ability to rise to the challenges of the human situation. Such assurance is unlikely to be fostered in people who have to live with the threat of violence and injustice, with bad governance and instability, or with poverty and disease. Eradicating these threats must be the aim of those who recognize the sanctity of human dignity and of those who strive to promote human development. Development as growth, advancement, and the realization of potential depend on available resources—and no resource is more potent than people empowered by confidence in their value as human beings.⁴

From the foregoing, one can justify the tensions behind human dignity. For instance, in the December issue of the *International Journal of Human Rights*, one of the tensions highlighted concerns the idea of human dignity as enunciated in various international documents, which presupposes that human rights as stated in modern constitutions, emphasizes that dignity is a “natural” characteristic with which all human beings are born, thus naturally endowed with it, just as each human is endowed with reason for the simple reason of having been born.⁵ Therefore, dignity is a defining element of the idea of human nature, which, in principle, characterizes every being that is part of the human species, regardless of random features such as place of birth, ethnic origin, social status, or gender. In fact, when treating the concept of dignity, society should view it as a core, essential good that is undeniable.

2. The Common Good and Rights

According to the document *Pacem in Terris*, each person has a right to life and the means necessary to live it. Further, all of humanity possesses a natural right, to be respected, to worship, to work and support a family, to form associations, to emigrate, and to take an active role in public life. All people also have the duty to respect the rights of others, work for the common good, and maintain an attitude of responsibility. Therefore, the purpose of public authority is to aid in the attainment of the common good. This is best realised when personal rights and duties are protected. Accordingly, nations that

⁴ Knight B. A. and Sahai C., Aung San Suu Kyi, in Article in “Dignity and Development, 2018” *Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace, Series, Dignity and development*, 10 (2018), 2-3

⁵ Monsalve.V.B and Roman.J.A. (2009). “Sur- International Journal on Human Rights,” 6, 12 (2009), 40-41. Accessed 27/10/2023.

have achieved significant scientific, cultural, and economic development should not exert unjust political dominance over other states, but instead ought to use their advancement to further the global common good. The principle of the common good reinforces the idea that social conditions are such that everyone is able to reach his or her full human potential and realize their God given human dignity. The common good is about respecting the rights of all people.

Nonetheless, one of the problems with the concept 'dignity', is that it tends to be used by people with high status as a placeholder for the highest good without specifying the content of what it means in practical terms. Partly, this is because dignity – like love, friendship, hope, and faith – is a 'cluster concept'⁶ philosophically and a 'thick concept'⁷ anthropologically, which means that it is ubiquitous in every culture but open to a variety of interpretations.⁸ Thus, dignity is a difficult concept to pin down, let alone implement as a strategy. However, we have examples to borrow from when addressing the issue[s] of the common good. "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another" (Zechariah 7:9).

The common good could be stated as the end or purpose of public society and the state. By definition, the common good is good for the whole society but also flows back to the good of the individual who belongs to the community.⁹ Think, for example, of clean air or equal rights for all. The true human condition requires one's fullest enjoyment of human dignity. And among the enjoyments is a state of harmony or peace, in which all people of good will must work to bring about peace in all the relationships in our worldwide community. For example, in Rawlsian analysis primary goods are taken to be constitutively diverse (including "rights, liberties, and opportunities, income and wealth, and the social basis of self-respect"), and Rawls

⁶ A cluster concept is one that is defined by a weighted list of criteria, such that no one of these criteria is either necessary or sufficient for membership. Wittgenstein alleged that game was such a concept.

⁷ In philosophy, a thick concept (sometimes: thick normative concept, or thick evaluative concept) is a kind of concept that has a significant degree of descriptive content as well as being evaluatively loaded. Paradigmatic examples are various virtues and vices such as courage, cruelty, truthfulness and kindness

⁸ See: Y M Barilan, Review of Remy Debes (ed.), *Dignity: A History*, Oxford University Press, 2017, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/dignity-a-history>. Accessed 24/10/2023.

⁹ Curran E. Charles (2004). "The Teaching and Methodology of *Pacem in Terris*" in *Journal for Catholic Social Thought*, 1, 1 (2004), 21. For further clarity see the document *Pacem in Terris* from numbers 53-66.

deals with them through an overall “index” of primary goods holdings.¹⁰

Pope John Paul II states, “We are all really responsible for all.” Every individual in God’s human family has a certain responsibility to cooperate in unity. As members of the human community, we must look out for our brothers and sisters. The principle of the common good reinforces the idea that social conditions are such that everyone is able to reach his or her full potential and realize their God given human dignity.¹¹ The individual, however, does not have unrestricted rights at the expense of others, but also the rights of the group do not come before individual rights. According to John Finnis’ argument, if rights are used in a disciplined way, then they can legitimately be employed to express the fullness of the demands of justice, no less than claims in justice with rationally defensible content.¹² In the document *Pacem in Terris*, the argument about rights posits that every human being is a person endowed with intelligence and free will who consequently has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from one’s very nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable.¹³ In the context of the Catholic Church, the aforementioned social conditions require mutual respect among all members of the community, as well as the government in maintaining them. Today, with the interconnectedness of the world, there is a need for international structures to intentionally support the development of individuals.

According to John Locke, “public good” refers to interests that are common to all members of a political community (e.g., the interest in bodily security and property), where members have a relational obligation to care for the common interests.¹⁴ As such, the public good in his submission refers to the common good. In other words, when

¹⁰ See particularly Atkinson, *Social Justice and Public Policy*, (1983), and his *Poverty and Social Security*, New York: Wheatsheaf, 1989.

¹¹ For more information, see the principles of the Catholic Social Teachings of the Church.

¹² John Finns argues that; the modern language of rights provides, as said, are a supple and potentially precise instrument for sorting out and expressing the demands of justice.... he concludes thus, it is the shift of meaning in the term “right” [away from meaning “duty”] and its linguistic predecessors by repeating that there is no cause to take sides as between the older and the newer usages, as ways of expressing the implications of justice in a given context.

¹³ Curran E. Charles, “The Teaching and Methodology of *Pacem in Terris*,” 23.

¹⁴ Stanford Encyclopedia (2018). *The common Good*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/common-good/> accessed 16/8/2023.

citizens face various questions about legislation, public policy, or social responsibility, they resolve these questions by appealing to a conception of their relevant facilities and interests. That is to say, they argue about what facilities, especially health, educational, livelihood, recreational, and others, have a special claim on their attention and how they should be expanded, contracted, or maintained for now and the future.

Furthermore, there is a communal conception of the common good, it takes interests in what citizens have, where the status of being a citizen and the interests attached to it are both understood. For example, imagine that citizens are considering changes to trade rules in their society. They may be inclined to assess proposals in terms of how attractive they are from the standpoint of their sectional interests as members of a certain profession or participants in a certain industry. But a communal conception of the common good directs citizens to set interests aside and assess proposals in terms of how well they answer common civic interests, such as the interest in national security or the interest in a productive economy.¹⁵ Hence, the idea of the common good has to be met by the public authority of the world community. In retrospect, the world community too, must have as its fundamental objective the recognition, respect, safeguarding, and promotion of the rights of the human person. In spite of what seems obvious, one has to go on by arguing that, as a result of the far-reaching changes which have taken place in the relations between the human family, the universal common good gives rise to problems which are complex, very grave and extremely urgent, especially as regards security and world peace. Alternatively, the public authorities of the individual political communities placed as they are on a footing of equality one with the other, no matter how much they multiply their meetings or sharpen their wits in efforts to draw up new juridical instruments, are no longer capable of facing the task of finding an adequate solution to the problems mentioned above.¹⁶

¹⁵ A communal conception of the common good, though it is not distributive, may nonetheless have distributive implications. This is because the proper organization of the collective effort by citizens to maintain certain social conditions may require a particular distribution of social resources and social authority. See Finnis 1980, 165–168 and 173–5; see also Walzer’s discussion of longevity and health care, 1983: 87–89)

¹⁶ Pope John XXIII: *Pacem in Terris* human rights and duties in natural law. *The Catholic Lawyer*, 9, 3 (Summer 1963), 192.

3. The Emotions of Exclusion and Disgust

What shapes exclusionism? And what role does fear play in the creation of such hierarchies? Most are triggered by actual or simulated environmental factors tend to draw the agency into vulnerability lenses. According to the United Nations, social exclusion¹⁷ is a multidimensional phenomenon not limited to material deprivation; for instance, poverty is an important dimension of exclusion, albeit only one dimension. Accordingly, social inclusion processes involve more than improving access to economic resources. And I would go as far as saying that social inclusion is defined as the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights.¹⁸ However, our society has an ugly history of exclusion based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability agism and religion. Our current political moment demands equality and dignity for previously excluded groups. Distressingly, so often, there is hatred propaganda and criminalization of the underprivileged.¹⁹ Therefore, finding remedies, means understanding the roots of the problem. A philosophical-psychological analysis of the emotions of exclusion ought to be interrogated to clarify where we are, where we might go, and how else to pursue the reciprocity of equality in an unequal world.

The above observation is enshrined in the 2030 Agenda as a principle that every person should reap the benefits of prosperity and enjoy minimum standards of well-being.²⁰ This is captured in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are aimed at freeing all nations, people and all segments of society from poverty, hunger and to ensure healthy lives, access to education, modern energy and information. Social exclusion increases exposure and vulnerability to

¹⁷ The Social Exclusion Survey 2009, carried out in six countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), constitutes a notable exception. Designed for the purpose of measuring exclusion, the survey allowed for the construction of a multidimensional exclusion index. The survey was not used to sample pre-defined population groups at high risk of exclusion only; instead, it was assumed that all individuals face some risk. Survey results are presented in a UNDP publication covering countries in transition (UNDP, 2011).

¹⁸ <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/chapter1.pdf>. Accessed 25/8/2023.

¹⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Monarchy of Fear*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018.

²⁰ See the United Nations Agenda, 2030, Population and the Sustainable Development Goals. At 2023 Population Matters.

natural hazards and disasters in several ways. Certain groups, such as indigenous peoples, who are more likely to live in rural areas and rely on natural assets, such as forests, bodies of water, or fish or livestock, to sustain their livelihoods and meet their basic needs, are heavily affected by climate and weather events. At the same time, excluded groups often lack the means to access insurance, credit, and other productive resources that could help them buffer against (as well as recover from) shocks and invest in adaptation. Exclusion limits political participation and clout, such that excluded groups may lack influence over resource allocation and representation in policies and strategies related to environmental protection, disaster prevention and management.²¹ Thus, it is contended that promoting social inclusion requires tackling social exclusion by removing barriers to people's participation in society, as well as by taking active inclusionary steps to facilitate such participation. As a political response to the exclusionism challenge, social inclusion becomes a deliberate process of encompassing and welcoming all people and embracing greater equality and tolerance for the common good of all.

4. Human Dignity and Capabilities

Looking at the concept of human dignity, it highlights a special elevation of the human species with special potentiality associated with rationalization as a basic entitlement of each individual. The concept is connected to the ideas of sanctity, autonomy, personhood, flourishing, agency and self-respect, and it produces, at different times, strict prohibitions and empowerment of the individual.²² Martha Nussbaum posits in her theory of capability approach that dignity by and large should be met by the state because it is central, and the state should be able to provide certain capabilities to all members of society as a matter of minimal justice.²³ For Nussbaum, it is imperative that we respect human dignity and work toward providing all people with a life worthy of dignity. She goes on to state that human dignity is associated with not only being born of human parents but also with elements of humanhood. Nussbaum associates human dignity with non-humiliation, self-respect, being treated as an end and not a mere

²¹ <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/chapter1.pdf>. Accessed 25/8/2023.

²² Stephen Riley and Gerhard Bos; Utrecht University Netherlands; Internet Encyclopaedia of philosophy, [IEP], A peer reviewed academic Resource.

²³ Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, 71.

means, giving rise to moral claims, being integral to the central capabilities, and even reason.²⁴ This concept of human dignity should be treated as the foundation of human rights because any reconstruction of the complex menu of human rights in international law has to take account of their wide-ranging implications for legal, moral, and political governance. Put another way, one necessary condition for a defensible, foundational account of human rights is that their foundational principle must have an interstitial function straddling these fields of normative practice.

In the document *Caritas in veritate*, the pope argues that; *Ubi societas, ibi ius*: that every society draws up its own system of justice. Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is “his” what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot “give” what is mine to the other without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, but it is it also not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity²⁵ and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity, or in Paul VI’s words, “the minimum measure” of it²⁶ an integral part of the love “indeed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us. On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights and capabilities of individuals and peoples. It strives to build an earthly city according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy, and communion. Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitments for justice in the world.²⁷

²⁴ Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 77; Women and Human Development, 79; Women and Human Development, 2845; *Frontiers of Justice*, 363.

²⁵ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 22: AAS 59 (1967), 268; Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

²⁶ Address for the Day of Development (23 August 1968): AAS 60 (1968), 626-627.

²⁷ Pope Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009). No.6.

5. Political Ordering

In the classic view of Aristotle, the political order acquires its meaning through participation in intrinsic ends. It aims at the good.²⁸ Correspondingly, the law should secure society's compliance with standards of conduct that advance the common good. It follows, therefore, that one's "right," flows indirectly from the community's commitment to some demonstrable conception of authentic human fulfilment. In the encyclical *Centesimus-Annus*, two things have been emphasized: first, the great clarity in perceiving, in all its harshness, the actual condition of the working class – men, women and children; and second, equal clarity in recognizing that sometimes the evil of a solution, which may appear like reversing the positions of the poor and the rich, is in reality very detrimental to the very people whom it is meant to help.

Understandably, a person who is deprived of something he calls "his own," and the possibility of earning a living through his own initiative, depending on the social machines and on those who control it, makes it much more difficult for him to recognize his dignity as a person, hence hindering progress towards the building up of an authentic human community.²⁹ This is a Marxian thought, who is dissatisfied with the fact that one class, though small in number, enjoys almost all the advantages of the unbridled greed which modern inventions have so abundantly provided.³⁰ Karl Marx's favourable remarks on capitalism as against the unfreedom of precapitalist labour arrangements relate exactly to this question.³¹ Nonetheless, without economic prosperity, every human being ought to be accorded dignity, freedom, and liberty.³²

The replication of colonial power structures by those in power is an underwhelming experience. Reason being, in addition to

²⁸ Aristotle writes, every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good.

²⁹ John Paul II Encyclical "*Centesimus Annus*," 1991, no. 13.

³⁰ Anne Fremantle, ed., *The Social Teaching of the Church*, New York: The New American Library, 1963, 80- 88.

³¹ See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 99, 29-30.

³² Mukasa, M., *Capitalism for the Poor, a Reality or a Dream*. Kampala: Angel Agencies Limited, 2014.

development, philanthropic practices, and political framing, the work structure that claims to be pro-poor can be disempowering if it replicates colonial power structures, as it tends to reduce the dignity of people in a myriad way.

6. The People's Voice and Flourishing

According to Jonathan Glennie, the saddest thing in the world is not poverty but loss of dignity.³³ He argues that development is more than just achieving outcomes; rather, it implies a different way of seeing the world and fellow human beings and puts 'dignity' at the core of the work. The mandate is to improve the quality of life of people, a crucial component to be included in development. For instance, how do we frame development in view of the people we work with and for? What are the key frames through which dignity can be built, sustained, or undermined in development work? For example, i) In our methods of work; how do we treat people? ii) In our goals and outcomes; does our work shift power to people and communities or does it take power and agency away from them?

Development must be built on 'mutual respect' and 'compassion' while at the same time being an enabler in valuing the dignity and rights of persons who are respected and treated ethically. This means that service providers who offer direct services or goods to the least vulnerable, for example, the elderly, should be more empathic about the importance of horizontal relationships between people. When writing about dignity, what is at stake in most cases is power and its dynamism in relationships. Hence, it is imperative that we listen to voices on the receiving end of development and how they are impacted by development processes. People in society need to have a voice about the change that will happen in their community. The world cannot claim a desire to fight poverty while, on the contrary, it refuses to make adjustments to the way it is ordered.³⁴ One cannot have it both ways people must be courageous enough to challenge some of the structural notions and arrangements, including embedded structural programmes.

³³ Jonathan Glennie (2015); "*The saddest thing in the world is not poverty; it's loss of dignity.*" <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/28/dignity-sustainabledevelopment-goals>. 24th September 2023.

³⁴ Glennie, *The saddest thing in the world is not poverty; it's loss of dignity.*

The economist Amartya Sen³⁵ looks at dignity in relation to development as freedom rather than just economic or even social progress. For Sen, poverty is a deprivation of one's freedom and choices. It is said, quite sensibly, that if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it. But while it may not be obvious how to fit dignity into a spreadsheet, it is at least an attribute that is eminently knowable.³⁶ While most poverty measures are disputed, dignity is perhaps the one thing that humans across the globe, in myriad different contexts, most instinctively recognise and long for. Sen offers an incisive approach to dignity by using the freedom lens saying that it is both the end and most efficient means of sustaining the economic life of a people and the key to securing the general welfare of the world's entire population. In the new global economy, where, despite unprecedented increases in overall opulence, the contemporary world denies elementary freedoms to vast numbers perhaps even the majority of people, he opines, it is still possible to practically and optimistically retain a sense of social accountability.

All in all, the aforementioned development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom, says Sen, such as poverty as well as the tyranny of a few, poor economic opportunities, systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities, intolerance, or overactivity of repressive states. In his book *Development as Freedom* Sen posits that sometimes a lack of substantive freedoms relates directly to economic poverty, which robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, achieve sufficient nutrition, obtain remedies for treatable illnesses, be adequately clothed or sheltered, or enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities.³⁷ Importantly, dignity and personal good are necessary because what people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. For Sen, social opportunities (in the form of education and health facilities) facilitate economic participation.³⁸ Economic facilities (in the form of opportunities for participation in trade and production) can help to advance personal abundance as well as public resources for social facilities. While it is important to conceptually distinguish the notion of poverty as capability inadequacy from that of poverty as lowness of income, the two

³⁵ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* 88-89.

³⁶ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 87-88.

³⁷ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 87.

³⁸ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 83-84.

perspectives cannot but be related, since income is such an important means to capabilities.

7. Some Impediments to Dignity and Common Good

It is not uncommon for “dignity” to be rolled out in the opening salvo of UN documents, but it is a concept seldom contemplated in depth. For the sake of optics, it is used as a title to gather the goals aimed at tackling poverty and inequality under one more manageable theme – those at the bottom of the economic ladder lack dignity, and it is the job of the rest of the world to help give it to them. But that is actually a very limited interpretation of a word that, if understood properly, could mean fundamental changes to our ways of working, and the overall story we are trying to tell. The thing about dignity, and the reason it is a transformational concept, is that it knows no social, economic, gender or ethnic barriers.

Moreover, just as the dignity and unity of the human society cannot be founded on the opposition of classes, so also the right ordering of economic life cannot be left to the free competition of the market forces. For from this source has sprung up or originated poison which has spread all the errors of individual economic teachings destroying the moral character of the society. For instance, not only is wealth concentrated in our times but an immense power and despotic economic dictatorship is consolidated in the hands of a few, who often are not owners but the trustees who administer the funds but inadvertently do it with abandon and arbitrariness.³⁹ A critique to human dignity and common good in a way arises when a dominant culture employs rights concepts selectively, to undermine the stability of local cultural order for the sake of its hegemony. For instance, the use of the rights concept may be consciously or unconsciously adopted by the aggressor for the sake of symbolizing cultural dominance. The dominant culture that officially advances a dynamic of cultural chauvinism that cripples the capacity of the local culture authentically to assimilate a new idea, either because of passivity or resentment. Thus, the libertarian thought is that the government must not be thought to be a mere guardian of law and of good order, but rather must put forth every effort to ensure that both the individual and the public welfare develop spontaneously out of the very structure of

³⁹ Anne Fremantle, ed. *The Social Teaching of the Church*, New York: The New American Library, 1963, 87.

administration.⁴⁰ In essence that the common good be preserved and wrong to any individual be abolished.

To summarize, it is evident from the discourse that in addition to definitions, any concept of human dignity seems to require, in and of itself, some privileged “places” and “ways” of exercising it. In many countries people do not enjoy equal access to basic services and resources nor are they given the possibility to participate in public decision making. This particularly affects the lives of poor and marginalized groups. Exclusion and discrimination are perpetuators of poverty and provokes social tensions and conflict. All policies, programs and technical assistance should foster the realization of Human Rights as laid down in the International Bill of Human Rights. This Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) promotes the concept of responsible governments, with the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of their citizens. People are active citizens entitled to rights rather than depend on their government’s mercy or the goodwill of international support. And people are expected to respect other human beings’ rights – the same rights as they enjoy themselves.

From the discourse so far raised, systemic injustices, such as unfair legal systems or unequal access to the rule of law, can compromise dignity and the common good by perpetuating inequality and discrimination. Lack of social solidarity that perpetuates individualism and the culture of excessive individualism that tends to prioritize personal interests over the common good, leads to social fragmentation and a disregard for the dignity of others. The violations of basic human rights, including freedoms of expression, assembly, and religion, can undermine dignity and hinder the common good by restricting individuals' abilities to participate in public life. Addressing these impediments to dignity and the common good often requires collective action, social policies, legal reforms, and a commitment to upholding human rights and justice. Ethical considerations play a vital role in guiding efforts to overcome these challenges and create societies where dignity is respected, and the common good is advanced.

⁴⁰ Anne Fremantle, ed., *The Social Teaching of the Church*, 80- 83.