

ASIAN  
HORIZONS

Vol. 18, No 4, December 2024

Pages: 537-542

## *Editorial*

### **HUMAN DIGNITY: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON *DIGNITAS INFINITA***

“The glory of God is human being fully alive, and the life of humanity is the vision of God” (Irenaeus). Christian theology has a vital role to play in diagnosing and addressing the manifold ways in which human dignity is threatened in contemporary culture and society. The Church has been notable for the way in which it has accorded the concept of human dignity a central place in its social teachings for several decades, a trend solemnized by the Second Vatican Documents, *Gaudium et Spes, Dignitatis Humanae* (1965). The concept of human dignity stands as a foundational principle in Christian theology, permeating ethical, moral, and doctrinal teachings. The belief that every person, created in the image and likeness of God, possesses inherent worth anchors theological reflections on human dignity. This understanding is not merely a philosophical construct but a deep, spiritual truth affirmed in key magisterial documents, especially in *Dignitas Infinita* recently.

Christian anthropology posits that every human being is *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:26-27), reflecting the divine nature of God. This spiritual origin grants every individual an intrinsic value that is not contingent on societal status, wealth, or abilities. The dignity of the human person, therefore, is sacred and inviolable, because it is rooted in the divine purpose of creation and the salvific plan of God. *Dignitas Infinita* builds on the theological reflection of human dignity by emphasizing the infinite worth of each human person in the eyes of God. It explores how Christ’s redemptive act confirms the infinite value of every human soul. The Incarnation is the ultimate affirmation of human dignity – God became man to lift humanity into eternal life.

Therefore, Human dignity must be acknowledged and defended in every aspect of life.

*Gaudium et Spes* affirms human dignity as rooted in humanity's creation in God's image and redemption through Christ. It emphasizes the intrinsic worth of every person, calling for solidarity, justice, and respect for human rights. Whereas *Dignitatis Humanae* underscores religious freedom as a cornerstone of human dignity, asserting that individuals have the right to seek truth and live according to their conscience. Practical approaches include defending religious liberty in pluralistic societies, opposing coercion in matters of faith, and fostering interfaith understanding. Governments and institutions must ensure laws protect this freedom, while individuals can promote tolerance and respect for diverse beliefs in their daily interactions. While *Gaudium et Spes* advocates for policies that protect the vulnerable, promoting economic equity, and fostering dialogue across cultures and religions. Communities can embody this by supporting initiatives that address poverty, inequality, and discrimination, ensuring that every individual's dignity is upheld in social, political, and economic systems.

The *Imago Dei* concept teaches that humans are created in God's image, endowing them with inherent dignity and worth. This calls for recognizing the divine spark in every person, regardless of race, status, or ability. Practically, this means rejecting prejudice, fostering inclusivity, and treating others with compassion and respect. Communities can reflect this by creating spaces where all feel valued, supporting marginalized groups, and celebrating the diversity of God's creation.

And finally the recent declaration *Dignitas Infinita* reaffirms the Church's commitment to human dignity in the face of modern challenges like bioethical issues, digital exploitation, and social injustice. It underscores that technological advancements, including AI, must always serve humanity and respect the intrinsic dignity of every person. It warns against the misuse of technology that could lead to dehumanization or exploitation, particularly in digital spaces where manipulation, isolation, and violence are prevalent. *Dignitas Infinita* situates its discussion of AI and digital exploitation within a broader ethical framework rooted in the Church's social teaching. It calls for transparency, inclusion, and care for the environment in the development and use of technology, ensuring that it serves the common good and upholds human dignity. The document highlights

the importance of ensuring that AI and digital tools are used ethically, avoiding practices that promote discrimination, harm individuals, or create social inequalities. This aligns with Pope Francis' broader call for a "culture of encounter" over a "throwaway culture," where technology should foster human connection rather than alienation. *Dignitas Infinita* explicitly condemns digital exploitation, including cyberbullying, online harassment, and the spread of harmful content such as pornography. It warns that the digital environment can become a space of loneliness, manipulation, and violence, particularly for vulnerable individuals. Practical steps include advocating for ethical technology use, protecting life from conception to natural death, and addressing systemic inequalities. Individuals and organizations can engage in education, activism, and charitable works to combat dehumanizing practices and promote a culture of life and respect. Together, these documents and concepts provide a robust framework for upholding human dignity in thought, action, and policy, urging us to build a world where every person is respected and cherished.

In the modern world, human dignity faces numerous challenges that undermine its intrinsic and universal value. These challenges often stem from societal, technological and ideological shifts that prioritize utility, individualism, or power over the sacredness of human life. Abortion and Euthanasia, social inequality, technological exploitation, Human trafficking, religious and cultural persecution, and environmental degradation are a few contemporary challenges to human dignity. These challenges call for a commitment to upholding human dignity through ethical reflection, advocacy and action rooted in the recognition of every person's infinite worth as created in God's image. However, addressing contemporary challenges to human dignity requires a multifaceted approach, like promoting a culture of life, combating inequality, ethical use of technology, eradicating human trafficking, protecting religious and cultural freedom, and a sense of environmental stewardship as the possible solutions to uphold human dignity. Be a compassionate human being!

### **The Contributors' Insights**

The article by Pablito A. Baybado, Jr. and Marites R. Redoña, *The Challenges of Beyond Human Dignity: An Analysis of the Foundation of Dignity in Christian Theology* critically examines the Catholic Church's theological understanding of human dignity, particularly through the lens of *Dignitas Infinita*. It addresses contemporary challenges to the

concept of human dignity, including cultural relativism, animal rights, and technological advancements, which have led to calls for “beyond human dignity.” The authors argue that human dignity, rooted in the *imago Dei*, is inherently infinite and unchangeable, transcending all circumstances. They critique the secular and anthropocentric views that render dignity malleable and context-dependent, emphasizing instead its ontological foundation in God’s love and creation. The article highlights the Church’s fourfold distinction of dignity—ontological, moral, social, and existential—underscoring that ontological dignity remains inviolable. Ultimately, the authors call for a reaffirmation of human dignity as a stable, theological anchor in a world increasingly influenced by cultural and situational interpretations, ensuring it guides authentic human existence and ethical action.

The article by Linta Uroth SABS, *Imago Dei’ the Focal Point of Human Dignity: A Sublime Invitation Envisioned in Dignitas Infinita*, explores the concept of *imago Dei* as the foundation of human dignity, emphasizing its relational interpretation. Rooted in theological anthropology, the article discusses how *imago Dei* fosters a threefold relationship: with God, fellow humans, and nature. It highlights the Church’s role in addressing modern threats to human dignity, such as abortion, euthanasia, poverty, and digital violence, as outlined in the declaration *Dignitas Infinita*. The relational perspective of *imago Dei* calls for dialogue, actions promoting the common good, and ecological stewardship. The article underscores the Church’s mission to inspire a renewed understanding of human dignity, urging humanity to embrace its divine image and work towards a harmonious, just, and compassionate world. Ultimately, *imago Dei* serves as a transformative concept that unites humanity in its shared divine origin and purpose.

The paper *Human Dignity: When Ethics and Spirituality Converge* by Deogratias M. Rwezaura, SJ, explores the relationship between African Christian spirituality and morality. He argues that spirituality—an experiential union with God—must be integrated with ethics, shaping human dignity. The paper critiques dualistic thinking that separates spiritual and moral life, advocating a holistic approach. Drawing from African traditions, it highlights the communal aspect of human dignity, emphasizing interdependence. The paper discusses virtue ethics in light of *Imago Dei*, stressing character formation through spiritual and moral practices. It calls for an integrated faith, urging Christians to embody justice, love, and

reconciliation. Finally, it underscores that holiness is universal, requiring ongoing formation and socialization beyond sacramental participation for a mature Christian life.

The inaugural address by Joy Philip Kakkanattu, CMI, states, that human dignity as central to Christian identity, rooted in humanity's creation in *imago Dei* and affirmed through Christ's Incarnation. It highlights the document *Dignitas Infinita*, emphasizing ontological dignity as inviolable and transcending all circumstances. Pope Francis's call for contextual theology and prayer – balancing vertical (divine) and horizontal (human) dimensions – underscores solidarity and action. Addressing diverse global challenges (e.g., Germany's structural issues vs. India's cultural contexts), the address stresses Christian identity as a unifying constant. Practical steps include deepening theological understanding, fostering personal faith, and promoting dignity through kenosis (self-emptying) and service. Amidst modern pessimism, the author urges hope and active commitment to upholding human dignity, anchored in Christ's resurrection and magisterial teachings.

The article titled, *Preserving Human Dignity in a Culturally Diverse World* explores the concept of human dignity, emphasizing its inherent and inalienable nature as the foundation of human rights. It discusses various paradigms of dignity – spiritual, rational, social, and moral – and highlights the challenges of preserving dignity in a culturally diverse world. P. Lawrence Thomas argues that cultural sensitivity and pluralism are essential for safeguarding human dignity in inter-cultural living environments. The article calls for promoting intercultural dialogue, understanding cultural diversity as a common heritage, and building a culture of dignity through education and respect. It concludes that upholding human dignity is crucial for creating a just and equitable society in an interconnected world.

The article titled, *Sibling Dynamics in the Digital Era: A Qualitative Study on the Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Sibling Relationships* by Abhilash Joseph and Maria Lourdes L. Chavez investigates the influence of social media on adolescent sibling relationships in the digital era. Through qualitative interviews, the study highlights how platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok shape communication, emotional bonds, and conflict resolution among siblings. Key findings reveal that social media fosters connectivity, emotional support, and shared experiences, particularly for geographically separated siblings. However, challenges such as online

rivalry, social comparison, and digital distractions can strain relationships. The research underscores the dual role of social media as both a connector and a complicator in sibling dynamics, emphasizing the need for balanced online and offline interactions. This study contributes to developmental psychology by addressing gaps in understanding how digital platforms mediate familial bonds, offering insights for promoting healthier sibling relationships in an increasingly digital world.

The paper *From a Vision to Action: Implementing a Vision of Dialogue from Vatican II to Contemporary Catholic Schools Today* by Benny Kaippullyparamban Joy explores how Vatican II's vision of dialogue has influenced Catholic education, particularly in contemporary Catholic schools. It discusses key Vatican II documents like *Gaudium et Spes*, *Nostra Aetate*, and *Gravissimum Educationis*, emphasizing their shift from exclusivism to inclusivism. The study highlights the emergence of the Catholic dialogue school (CDS), which promotes interreligious engagement while maintaining Catholic identity. The paper evaluates the 2022 Vatican directive, which leans towards a kerygmatic model but also allows for a recontextualising approach. Finally, it reflects on the implications of CDS in the Syro-Malabar Catholic school context in India, examining its alignment with national education policies and religious value education.

**Joby Jose Kochumuttom**  
Editor-in-Chief