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## THE DESTRUCTION OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN TODAY'S WORLD AS A SERIOUS MORAL AND EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE

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**Abstract.** The fundamental value of human life is human dignity. The exceptional profundity of dignity is confirmed by the act of creation, redemption and vocation of man to ultimate fulfilment in God. The dignity which man possesses should constitute an essential motivation for his behaviour with respect to himself and to other people. The sense of dignity is deepened by service to others and by responsibility for one's own life. Conversely, the loss of the sense of one's own dignity occurs as a result of the lack of love as well as indifference or hatred towards others. In our times, symptoms of a lack of respect for human dignity can increasingly be observed, which is why there is a need for appropriate formation to make it possible to behave in accordance with the requirements of human dignity.

**Key words:** dignity, human, creation, redemption, destruction, formation, teaching of the Church, moral life.

**Streszczenie.** Współczesna destrukcja godności człowieka poważnym wyzwaniem moralno-wychowawczym. Podstawową wartością życia ludzkiego jest godność człowieka. Na całą głębię godności wskazuje fakt stworzenia, odkupienia i powołania człowieka do ostatecznego spełnienia w Bogu. Godność, którą ma człowiek, winna być dla niego podstawowym motywem postępowania względem siebie i innych ludzi. Poczucie godności pogłębia się poprzez służbę innym i odpowiedzialność za swoje życie. Z kolei zatracenie poczucia godności własnej następuje przez brak miłości, obojętność czy

nienawiść wobec bliźniego. Obecnie coraz częściej można zaobserwować przejawy braku poszanowania godności człowieka, dlatego potrzebna jest praca nad sobą i właściwa formacja, by można było w codziennym życiu postępować zgodnie z wymogami ludzkiej godności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** godność, człowiek, stworzenie, odkupienie, destrukcja, formacja, nauczanie Kościoła, życie moralne.

## INTRODUCTION

While reflecting on the question of how to live a human life, one cannot ignore the truth about man, since he is the subject of morality and constitutes the supreme value, single and unique. Thus, every man should be treated with love for the very reason that he is a man.<sup>1</sup> According to Pope Francis, “affirming the centrality of the human person means, above all, allowing all to express freely their individuality and their creativity”.<sup>2</sup> The subjectivity of a person understood this way leads to the conviction that a person is an aim in itself and cannot be used instrumentally.

Today, however, a distinctive lack of consideration for the personal dignity of man can be observed, which is a clear symptom of a practical moral permissivism. It is this trend that promotes various ways of destruction of man as a rational being, free and endowed with inalienable dignity, a being redeemed by Christ and summoned to eternal life. Permissivism is undoubtedly one of the strongest intellectual inspirations for the so-called culture of death.

In the face of the destructive influence of permissive trends and events on man, a dire need appears for the rediscovery and promotion of the comprehensive truth about human dignity. It takes place in the course of a suitable education and appropriate self-education of man. It seems that today, there is a need for good guides who, by referring to the eth-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, “Człowiek stworzony na obraz Boga. Audiencja generalna,” *L'Osservatore Romano* (Polish edition) 7, no. 4 (1986): 19.

<sup>2</sup> Francis, “Address of Pope Francis to the European Parliament,” Vatican website, 25 November 2014, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141125\\_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141125_strasburgo-parlamento-europeo.html).

ics of Christian personalism and an objective hierarchy of values, will cast a light of truth upon the fundamental dimension of human existence.

## 1. MAN AND HIS DIGNITY IN TODAY'S WORLD

Accepting the ethics of Christian personalism, one should perceive the actual reason of a moral duty in the dignity of man. In philosophy, theology, humanities and social studies, a great deal has been said about the dignity of man and his worth.<sup>3</sup> In modern times, especially from the end of the 18th century onwards, numerous social, political and economic changes have been introduced as a result of a desire to establish and strengthen the dignity of man. Objectively speaking, they have all served the purpose regardless of their reasons, justification and background. The entire development of the issue of human rights is situated in this stream of the development of human civilisation. The evolution has progressed into the direction of approaching dignity in more universalistic terms while simultaneously abandoning divisions such as “the worthy” and “the unworthy.”<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, especially in the 20th century, an exceptionally gross violation of human dignity and rights took place. This was the advent of scrupulously designed and implemented programmes whose aim was to deprive man of his dignity and to demonstrate that the implementation of such an idea is perfectly possible. These were programmes devised to destroy man by depriving him of his humanity. There are notorious examples where the dignity and worth of man, the family and human rights were trampled this way. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis clearly emphasises that “we have to remember that the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences. A number of diseases are spreading. The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation, even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Franciszek Janusz Mazurek, *Godność osoby ludzkiej podstawą praw człowieka* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 2001), 48–54.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jacek Czajowski, *Człowiek w nauce Jana Pawła II* (Rome: Dom Polski Jana Pawła II, 1983), 40.

are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, it is no wonder that the Church has placed the issue of human dignity in the centre of her teaching, making an effort to exhibit its true dimension.

Pope Benedict XVI has indicated many times that there is an urgent need for the recreation of the “Christian tissue of human society,” since wherever God as the supreme goodness is disregarded, then always, in such places, “human dignity is put at risk.”<sup>6</sup> This means that societies which regard agnosticism as a foundation of public order depreciate their own freedom and become desperate and marked by sorrow. The rejection of God leads to a spiritual emptiness inside which man remains in contradiction with himself. Therefore, the Church is obliged to make a widespread proclamation of her vision of humanity in which dignity is of the utmost importance.<sup>7</sup>

It has to be borne in mind that all the burning issues of the contemporary world, such as abortion, euthanasia, cloning, genetical experiments and manipulations, death penalty, unemployment or domestic violence – and most importantly military conflict – have their source in the lack of understanding of and respect for human dignity and the rights and duties that stem from it. The theological vision of human nature speaks about its certain permanent qualities. It describes them as “a gift” (anthropological truth) and “a task” (ethical truth) – that is, rights and responsibilities originating from human dignity. It is important to remember that complementarity and harmony need to be maintained between rights and obligations. The Catechism of the Catholic Church formulates the idea as follows: “Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbour (without any ex-

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<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, apostolic exhortation, Vatican website, 24 November 2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), sec. 52. Cf. Francis, “Meeting with Workers: Address of Holy Father Francis,” Vatican website, 22 September 2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130922\\_lavoratori-cagliari.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130922_lavoratori-cagliari.html).

<sup>6</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Odkryć oblicze Boga*, ed. Wiesław Sapalski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2006), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Stanisław Jasionek, *Wychować człowieka. Osoba ludzka. Prawa człowieka. Wychowanie moralne* (Kraków: WAM, 2007), 19–57.

ception) as *another self*, above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, one person’s right becomes, at the same time, the source of a duty towards another person (e.g. one’s right to life, liberty, work or property is simultaneously an obligation to respect others’ rights to life, liberty, work or property). It is a transformation of the evangelical “golden rule”: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Mathew 7:12, cf. Luke 6:31).

Therefore, it seems that Christian testimony in this respect is of fundamental importance. At this point, it would be difficult not to refer to John Paul II’s prophetic statement uttered in Cracow in the Church of St. Anne during the pilgrimage in 1997: “Here in Poland, the great debate on the theme of man in no way ended with the fall of Marxist ideology. It continues, and in some ways has even intensified. Debased forms of understanding the human person and the value of human life have become more subtle and for that reason more dangerous. Today there is need of great vigilance in this area.”<sup>9</sup>

In our times, there are also various ideas concerning human dignity. According to some of them, human dignity and its value are understood as absolutely autonomous, totally excluding all references to the transcendent God and even going as far as to deny the existence of God and Divine Providence. Others, accepting the coherence and worth of every man and his relative autonomy, emphasise the observance of personal liberties while claiming, however, that the original foundation of this autonomy and liberty is the attitude of man towards the highest transcendency of God, although they interpret the latter in many different ways. There are also such ideas which, seeking the source and the true meaning of human dignity, refer to the theology of salvation history. Even taking sin into consideration, they attempt to brighten the mystery of the human condition with the incarnation of people in Jesus Christ, God and man in a perfect

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<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed.* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), sec. 1931 (hereinafter: CCC).

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, “Meeting with the Rectors of the Polish Universities: Address of John Paul II,” Vatican website, 8 June 1997, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/june/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19970608\\_ato-academico.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19970608_ato-academico.html), sec. 5.

way.<sup>10</sup> In the light of all these different concepts, a question can be posed about how the issue of human dignity is presented by the Church.

## 2. DIGNITY AS THE FUNDAMENTAL CRITERION OF EVALUATION AND ACTION OF MAN

It goes without questioning that dignity is an internal trait of every man: such is the teaching of the Church. The “content” of personal dignity comprises reason, will, conscience and freedom. Speaking about human dignity, Joseph Ratzinger accentuates its unconditionality and validity. Unconditionality means that dignity and the rights that stem from it take priority over all state legislation. They exist independently and they have always had to be respected due to the fact that they belong to values of a higher order. The validity of human dignity, in turn, eventually directs the reflection towards God the Creator.<sup>11</sup> These attributes cannot be disposed of, and no one is able to take them away from us, hence dignity is intrinsic, lasting, inalienable and obliging. It is a common and absolute value, since its ultimate foundation is the *imago Dei*. It is also supernatural.<sup>12</sup> This greatness of man, his subjectivity and his dignity are relevant and constitute the expression of his own way of existence; they have not been bestowed upon him by society or history.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, they should be respected and protected as a manifestation of human existence and should not be subjected to any manipulation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, *The Dignity and Rights of the Human Person*, Vatican website, accessed 10 October 2022, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_1983\\_dignita-diritti\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1983_dignita-diritti_en.html).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Duchowe fundamenty Europy wczoraj, dziś i jutro,” ed. M. Borkowski, *Spółeczeństwo* 14, no. 4–5 (2004): 655.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Helmut Weber, *Spezielle Moralthologie* (Graz: Styria, 1999), 77; Franciszek Janusz Mazurek, “Społeczno-prawne konsekwencje zasady godności osoby ludzkiej,” *Chrześcijańin w Świecie* 21, no. 6 (1989): 2; Henryk Skorowski, “Godność osoby jako podstawa chrześcijańskiej koncepcji praw człowieka,” *Collectanea Theologica* 62, no. 1 (1992): 71–73.

<sup>13</sup> Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 3 October 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html), sec. 106–107.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, “Educating Young People in Justice and Peace: Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace,” Vati-

The question of human dignity should always be considered in reference to the integral vision of man. Such a vision is depicted in the biblical truth about the creation of man by God and in the truth about the Incarnation and Redemption by Jesus Christ. It was Redemption that “definitively restored his dignity to man.”<sup>15</sup> In particular, human dignity is fully expressed after the resurrection of the body.

Man has been summoned by God to exist. The confirmation of this truth can be found in two passages in the Bible which, despite the fact that they are different in character, complement each other. One of their main messages is a lesson about human dignity.

According to the first passage, the dignity of man consists in the fact that he was created in the image of God (cf. Genesis 1:26) as it was stated by God Himself on the pages of the Holy Scripture.<sup>16</sup> This truth has also been restated by Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Laudato si'*: “The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God’s image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, ‘who is not just something, but someone.’”<sup>17</sup> Created in the image of God, man has been clearly distinguished from other creatures which he surpasses with his intellect and will. Thanks to his nature, he is summoned to participate in God’s dominion over the world and to cooperate with Him, but he is also obliged to control his actions and take responsibility for them (cf. Genesis 3:5,22). Furthermore, he is able to pronounce himself consciously for truth and goodness and, as a conse-

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can website, 1 January 2012, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20111208\\_xlv-world-day-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20111208_xlv-world-day-peace.html), sec. 2; Marian Machinek, “Godność osoby ludzkiej,” in *Jan Paweł II. Encyklopedia Nauczania Moralnego*, ed. Janusz Nagórny and Krzysztof Jeżyna (Radom: Polwen, 2005), 218.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 4 March 1979, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_04031979\\_redemptor-hominis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html), sec. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, 7 December 1965,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), sec. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Francis, *Laudato si'*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 24 May 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html), sec. 65.

quence, he is able to live a moral life which is appropriate for him, obliging but at the same time difficult.<sup>18</sup>

In the second passage, the whole attention is also drawn to man (cf. Genesis 2:4b–25). In the light of the truth revealed, it has to be assumed that man was created as one of the first works of God. Other creatures come only after man, since they are supposed to serve him. They are all his objects and only he remains a subject among them, and this is because he is able to objectify cognitively everything that surrounds him. This is how man achieves his self-definition and awareness of his own self. Self-consciousness manifests itself as the original and fundamental expression of humanity.<sup>19</sup> Thanks to it, man learns about the world. Self-consciousness also expresses itself in the commandment which God gave man regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Since man possesses the ability to differentiate and choose between good and evil, he was created as a partner for “the Absolute.” This is where the sovereignty of an individual person is expressed: in the ability to recognise goodness on one’s own, to accept it and to direct one’s pursuits towards it. A sovereign person is a master of his or her own choices and deeds and exists and acts in an independent way. Thus, liberty appears to constitute the foundation of the moral life of man, since it manifests itself as the ability to make choices – above all, the choice between good and evil in a moral sense.<sup>20</sup>

It needs to be stressed that although man’s dignity is portrayed explicitly and unambiguously in the light of the truth revealed about his creation, it has not been shown completely. The key to understanding the entire truth about man and about his worth and dignity is Jesus Christ. It is in Him and through Him that man gained full awareness of his dignity.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. CCC, sec. 1703–1707. See also Ireneusz Mroczkowski, “Chrześcijańska koncepcja człowieka i jego działania,” in *Być chrześcijaninem dziś. Teologia dla szkół średnich*, ed. Marian Rusecki (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 1992), 284; Ewa Reszczyńska, “Biblijne podstawy godności osoby ludzkiej,” in *Wyznawać wiarę dzisiaj. Katecheza dorosłych na podstawie Katechizmu Kościoła katolickiego*, ed. Stanisław Łabendowicz (Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne Sandomierz, 1999), 462–464.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kazimierz Kubik, “Teologiczne podstawy godności osoby ludzkiej,” *Polonia Sacra* 3, no. 4 (1999): 104–105.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Francis, “Address of Pope Francis to the European Parliament.”



The exceptional and outstanding role of man in the world is expressed to the full extent in Christ's acts of Incarnation and Redemption.<sup>21</sup>

The Incarnation introduces a bright light into the mystery of man, revealing the worth and dignity of humanity. Still, it is the blood shed on the Cross by the God-Man so that man could be truly man and could be treated like man that teaches the best lesson about human dignity. Therefore, through the work of Redemption, our dignity has been explicitly revealed and extremely enriched. According to Pope Benedict XVI, "the aim of the Incarnation is a transformation through the Cross and a new corporeality of Resurrection."<sup>22</sup> Through His Cross and Resurrection, Christ the Redeemer gave people salvation, grace and love. In Christ, man received special ontic enrichment: he became a child of God and a participant in His life.

Dignity perceived in this manner confirms the greatness of man in the eyes of God. It refers to the true image of man and to his full dimension. The dignity which he possesses should serve as the essential criterion for evaluation and behaviour in reference to himself and to others. At the same time, it should also serve as the most important criterion of his attitude towards others.

The Church is deeply committed to the defence and promotion of human dignity. During his meeting with representatives of the world of labour and industry of the region of Molise at the university in Campobasso on 5 July 2014, Pope Francis remarked that "the most serious problem is dignity. This is why we must . . . defend our dignity."<sup>23</sup> In her defence of human dignity, the Church points to the two-dimensional character of the truth about man: first of all, she emphasises the essential truth referring to the very concept of man with his creative and redemp-

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Tomasz Maria Dąbek, "Godność człowieka na podstawie Biblii," in *Refleksje nad godnością człowieka*, ed. Zbigniew Marek and Anna Królikowska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2007), 31–32.

<sup>22</sup> Benedykt XVI, *Elementarz Josepha Ratzingera – Benedykta XVI dla pobożnych, zbuntowanych i szukających prawdy*, ed. Marian Zawada (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008), 18.

<sup>23</sup> Francis, "Meeting with the World of Labour and Industry: Address of Pope Francis," Vatican website, 5 July 2014, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140705\\_molise-mondo-del-lavoro.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco_20140705_molise-mondo-del-lavoro.html).

tive dimension, but she also considers the truth about the “particular condition” of man.<sup>24</sup>

The defence of man and his dignity in the Church is conducted mainly by presenting the possible ways in which they should be respected. The Church emphasises that everyone has to respect the fundamental and inalienable human rights. This has been pointed out by Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “I would like also to call the attention of everyone to the importance of defending and promoting the human rights of every person, based on the natural law written on the human heart, which, as such, are ‘universal, inviolable and inalienable.’”<sup>25</sup> Currently, Pope Francis also demands that the inalienable human rights should be defended and promoted: “Today, the promotion of human rights is central to the commitment of the European Union to advance the dignity of the person . . . Promoting the dignity of the person means recognizing that he or she possesses inalienable rights which no one may take away arbitrarily.”<sup>26</sup>

The wide range of human rights which are defended by the Church encompasses all the issues related to human dignity. Man should be vested with all the rights that ensure his dignity. The scope of these regulations should be such as to facilitate living one’s life in accordance with its fundamental requirements. Therefore, the laws should apply to all circumstances and spheres of human life.<sup>27</sup> All the human rights which are defended by the Church originate from the dignity of the individual person on the one hand and serve to protect and guarantee this dignity on the other, hence they constitute a monolith. That is why the violation of any of these rights acts against man.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Janusz Nagórny, *Posłannictwo chrześcijan w świecie. Tom I. Świat i wspólnota* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1998), 181.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, apostolic exhortation, Vatican website, 30 September 2010, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html), sec. 101.

<sup>26</sup> Francis, “Address of Pope Francis to the European Parliament.”

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Konrad Głombik, “Prawa człowieka w nauczaniu Kościoła Katolickiego. Próba syntezy w 60. rocznicę uchwalenia Powszechnej Deklaracji Praw Człowieka,” *Teologia i Moralność* 7 (2010): 135–139.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. John Paul II, “Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See,” Vatican website, 9 January 1989, <https://www.vatican.va/con->

### 3. DISCOVERING AND SHAPING THE SENSE OF HUMAN DIGNITY

In the context of the reflections presented above, one pertinent question should be posed here, that is, to what extent is man aware of the sense of his worth and dignity. The sense of human dignity comprises a large set of requirements concerning the individual person and their behaviour and actions. There is no doubt that each and every man has the right to experience his own dignity. But is everyone really aware of this? It turns out that knowledge about one's own Christian dignity can significantly influence one's moral life. To solve this problem, we need to direct our attention to the question of the highest values which indicate the right behaviour and give meaning to life as well as to the responsibility for making decisions and to one's knowledge of oneself.

A man who lives according to great values has a better sense of his own dignity. The most important task in his case is to lose his life in order to regain it. This is a clear reference to the evangelical truth – one which is unfortunately hardly ever realised, even though it constitutes one of the most fundamental ways to achieve the peak of Christian life. Bearing this in mind, man should choose a task which will go far beyond his capabilities. It has to be a quest which will require all his energy and will engage all his thoughts and yet will serve a common good. By taking up a difficult task, man senses his shortcomings and his dependency on God and other people, but he also realises that he is offering a gift of himself to God and to other people and that he is simply serving them. Still, to rise up to such a challenge, one has to have a mature personality which can only be attained through constant self-improvement and through life with God.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the idea of pursuing such a mission may serve as a guideline, indicating the road to follow so as to achieve the acme of human and Christian life – something to which everyone belonging to Christ is summoned. It can considerably deepen everyone's sense of worth and dignity, yet correspondingly it also demands unwavering respect for God and for the

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tent/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1989/january/documents/hf\_jp-ii\_spe\_19890109\_corpo-diplomatico.html, sec. 1–2.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Tadeusz Zadykowicz, "Kim jest człowiek?" in *Wyznawać wiarę dzisiaj. Katecheza dorosłych na podstawie Katechizmu Kościoła katolickiego*, ed. Stanisław Łabędowicz (Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne Sandomierz, 1999), 454–459.

dignity of another man. It gives one a sense of dependency on God and others and creates an atmosphere of affiliation with a community of people. Real humanity is attained through service to God and people and through the awareness of one's own inadequacy. When correctly understood and accepted, the feeling of one's own insufficiency and dependency on God and others does not destroy the sense of one's own worth and dignity but, on the contrary, strengthens it. Man's internal struggle as he is searching for the right way and getting lost, with all his falls or indifference, does not destroy his sense of dignity. Man can always return to the merciful Father like a prodigal son.

When pondering over man's worth and dignity, his individuality and uniqueness also need to be underlined. At the same time, it is important to realise that special obligations towards others stem from this individuality. Human dignity is manifested in the fact that man – possessing reason and free will – should also have a sense of responsibility. The moral rule of individual and social responsibility should dominate man's entire life. As a result, man should be responsible not only for his own life but also for the lives of others. It is not enough to ask oneself about the worth and meaning of one's own life. Instead, one should also ask what creative task they want to pursue, what they want to be responsible for and what needs of others they want to cater for.<sup>30</sup>

The sense of dignity deepens through love of other people, whereas the decay of dignity occurs as a result of the lack of love, indifference, neglect, anger or hatred towards our neighbours.<sup>31</sup> The loss of the sense of one's own worth and dignity should be understood subjectively in terms of self-deprecation or even self-hate. Objectively, however, no one can ever lose their human dignity.

From this perspective, it can be argued that the sense of human worth and dignity is born but also tested within a community, and especially within a family. It is in a family that man learns best and shapes his personal dignity and the dignity of others.<sup>32</sup> He can experience his limitations, but he also feels needed; he can love and he can be loved.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. CCC, sec. 1706.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Francis, *Laudato si'*, sec. 213.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Jerzy Bajda, "Rodzina miejscem promocji godności osoby ludzkiej – w perspektywie przyszłości Europy," *Sprawy Rodziny* 77, no. 1 (2007): 48–49.

The discovery of one's own worth and dignity also takes place while learning about oneself. Here as well, man is supported by his parents and teachers.<sup>34</sup> This process of knowing oneself can never be completed. Man develops all the time, broadening his mind and changing. Better knowledge of oneself, one's nature, dignity and worth makes it possible to better understand the incomprehensible God. Knowing oneself, reaching the deepest corners of one's personality and learning about God – or rather seeking contact with God – requires an experience of desert and solitude. This provides the possibility of creative reflection on one's own problems and the opportunity to establish a closer relationship with God. When it comes to the sense of man's dignity and worth, desert, solitude, silence and reflection are also necessary for its vivification.

After taking all the above into consideration, it turns out that the education of a child and of an adult should be based not only upon informing and forming but also, above all, on demonstrating, visualising and directing the pupil towards the value of personal dignity. The most important form of education is self-education. A child, a young person or an adult alike have to discover the worth of dignity and recognise its strength that motivates them to become active.<sup>35</sup> An educator can only act as a guidepost along this road. In the case of a child, it will be most efficient if the child can see his or her special importance as a subject, the extraordinary significance of the "I"; the best teaching method in this case is a specific testimony that expresses itself in everyday life through respect towards others and gentleness in interactions with them. This will demonstrate (or at least suggest) the value which constitutes the motivation for such behaviour. Personal dignity of the "I" is best revealed in juxtaposition with "you" or with a third person. The method of testimony is the only way to experience dignity.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Wojciech Chudy, *Pedagogika godności. Elementy etyki pedagogicznej* (Lublin: TN KUL, 2009), 56–59.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Paweł Góralczyk, "Odkryć w sobie niepowtarzalną godność," *Roczniki Teologii Katolickiej* 8 (2009): 59–70.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis carried out in this paper indicates that the notion of human dignity on the one hand defines the elementary vision of man, but on the other, it constitutes a distinctive criterion of morality as an indicator of the moral value of human activity. Personal dignity is “*the most precious possession* of an individual.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, everyone who discovers and understands their dignity can find great strength that will help them overcome the many obstacles which they will come across on the way to truth. Discovering one’s own dignity – one’s Christian dignity – may constitute a substantial motivation to constantly correct one’s ways and to sanctify one’s life. Thus, man should respect his dignity, defend it and cherish it. His duty is to respect and promote the dignity of another person. The sense of one’s own dignity as well as the dignity of others is shaped by having a responsible attitude towards life, respecting human rights and doing good deeds for the benefit of other people.

Nonetheless, a lack of respect towards human dignity can increasingly be observed in today’s world. For that reason, man is in need of an appropriate formation programme, which can be achieved through the process of education and self-education. Correctly understood and carefully shaped in the process of moral formation, an attitude of respect towards one’s own dignity and the dignity of others makes it possible to live a truly human life.

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<sup>36</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, apostolic exhortation, Vatican website, 30 December 1988, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html), sec. 37.

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