

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING PRINCIPLE: DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

- From Education for Justice

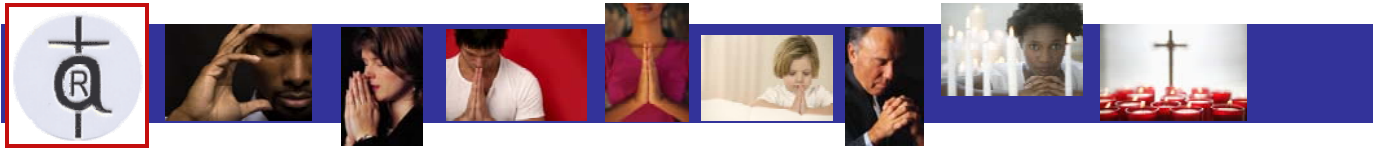
WHAT DOES THE CHURCH SAY ABOUT HUMAN DIGNITY?

Human Dignity originates from God and is of God because we are made in God's own image and likeness (GN 1:26-27). Human life is sacred because the human person is the most central and clearest reflection of God among us. Human beings have transcendent worth and value that comes from God; this dignity is not based on any human quality, legal mandate, or individual merit or accomplishment. Human dignity is inalienable - that means it is an essential part of every human being and is an intrinsic quality that can never be separated from other essential aspects of the human person

Human beings are qualitatively different from any other living beings in the world because they are capable of knowing and loving God, unlike any other creature. Belief in the dignity of the person is the foundation of morality. The principle of human dignity is the foundation of all the Catholic social teaching principles.

Where does this teaching on Human Dignity come from?

- **Biblical source:** Scripture— rooted in scripture
- **Moral source:** Tradition— the use of reason and reflection based in the Catholic tradition.
- **Ecclesial source:** Church teaching— expressed in the Popes' Encyclical letters, Apostolic letters, Synod documents, Apostolic exhortations, and the bishops' Pastoral letters, which respond to the issues of the day.



WHAT DOES THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SAY ABOUT HUMAN DIGNITY?

The following are direct citations from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Paragraph references precede each passage.

- #1700** The dignity of the human person is rooted in his/her creation in the image and likeness of God. It is fulfilled in his/her vocation to divine beatitude. It is essential to a human being freely to direct him/herself to this fulfillment. By his/her deliberate actions, the human person does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience. Human beings make their own contributions to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth.
- #356** Of all visible creatures only man is “able to know and love his creator.” He is “the only creature on earth that God has will for its own sake,” and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity:
- #357** Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.
- #362** The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic LANGUAGE when it affirms that “then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God.
- #1738** Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order.