CHAPTER 4
GOD AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Introduction

Human rights are one of the major achievements of modern day philosophy, and the promotion of these rights constitutes one of the central preoccupations of modern society. Their complete and effective implementation continues to be difficult, if not painfully lacking in Indian society. In fact, in Indian society many people live under different forms of political, socio-economic and cultural slavery.

There are many International Conventions that affirm various rights necessary for the well-being and development of the human person. Catholic Social Teachings (CST) is at the present time one of the few international authorities that defends the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. There are two reasons for this: “this declaration is in perfect harmony with the Christian vision of the dignity and the inviolability of the human person, and the family based on marriage” (Minnerath, Fumagalli, Possenti 24).

In the previous chapter we have discussed the institution of slavery, which was at all the times a threat to human dignity and a violation of human rights. It is the right of every human person to live a dignified life by developing one’s own identity and capacities.

Human rights and human dignity are closely related. Human dignity is the basis for attributing rights to the human persons, especially those rights necessary for realizing their full potential. In this chapter we will discuss in detail the origin and the importance of human dignity and human rights. This chapter will be divided into two parts. In the first part of the chapter we will analyze in detail the various aspects of human dignity, especially the Christian understanding of human dignity and in the second part we will discuss in detail various dimensions of human rights.

4.1 Origin and Significance of Human Dignity

The word dignity derives from the Latin word *dignus*, which means “worthy”. So to ask about human dignity is to ask about human “worthiness” or “worth” (“Dignity” 486).
What is the origin of human dignity? According to Aristotle (384-322 BCE) the human being is a “rational animal” (Aristotle 135). For him rationality is what is specific to a human being and gives dignity to a human person.

According to the existential philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 CE) it is the “good will” that gives ‘unconditional worth’ to a human person (Kant, Lectures 191-2). He means by this the capacity to make decisions and direct one’s living on the basis of reason. For him, this capacity is located in our intellectual and volitional consciousness, but in Critique of Judgment he discusses the importance of human imagination and feeling as well. Thus for Kant, “being human means being conscious imaginably, emotionally, intellectually, and volitionally” (Kant, Critica 517-28).

In the biblical view “human being is a child of God, made in the image and likeness of God. There is a human form of love that involves human persons imagination, emotions, intellect, and volitional consciousness” (Duffy, Gambatese 55).

When we consider the above mentioned origins of human dignity, we can conclude that any threat to a person’s capacity to imagine or feel or think or will is a threat to human person’s dignity. In the modern world the ‘commodity-consciousness’, that is “a tendency to acquire things, constitutes a threat to human dignity” (Duffy, Gambatese 55-7). The commodity-consciousness is a force that can stop human development which is based on love.

“Commodity-consciousness” has two dimensions: First, “the tendency to think of fulfilment in terms of the acquisition of commodities”, and the second, “the tendency to regard human beings themselves as commodities to be bought and used” (Duffy, Gambatese 56). When human persons are gripped by “commodity-consciousness”, their focus is not on the development of their higher powers but on the accumulation of things, and people seek fulfilment not by ‘learning to love’ but by ‘becoming thing-acquirers’. This tendency can easily pull people into practices and lifestyles that involve the tendency to think of other human beings as obstacles to the self’s pursuits, and the temptation is to eliminate them. In some other cases people consider their fellow human beings as an instrument to reach their objectives. Therefore they make full and profitable use of them, which can again be, and has been, accomplished in a variety of ways, including deceit, bribery, blackmail, and slavery. In both these cases, things have become secondary and reduced to things.
Slavery is one of the most dramatic forms in which another human being is viewed as a mere “property” and turned into a commodity to be used or exchanged.

4.1.1. Biblical Perspectives of Human Dignity

The creation story narrated in Genesis\(^8^4\) 1:26-30 affirms one and for all the dignity of human beings since they are created in the image and likeness of God. The counter theme to human dignity in the Bible is violence. The creation story found in Genesis is retold in the book of Exodus, the redemptive experience of the Israelites (Woznicki 4). The story of the Incarnation expresses and reaffirms human worth. The prophets, including Jesus, challenged those (especially the powerful) who denied the dignity and worth of the marginalized in society (e.g., widows and orphans, outcasts and sinners).

The Old Testament depicts human beings as specially created by God, and their origin stems from God himself. Only by God’s special intervention was the human person created according to His image and likeness. In this respect, John Paul II comments: “Even though man is strictly bound to the visible world, nevertheless the biblical narrator does not speak of his likeness to the rest of creatures...but only to God” (Woznicki 4-5).

Since human beings as a whole are created in God’s image and likeness they are able to enter into relationship and partnership with God. There is a special kind of creative activity involved in making the human person that puts him or her in a unique relationship with his or her creator and hence able to respond to Him (Wenham 29-30).

Di Lella calls the ‘creation story’ “the charter statement of human dignity and equality of all men, women, and children in the sight of God”(280-2). The image of God terminology clearly affirms the preeminent position of humanity in the created order and declares the dignity and worth of man and woman as special creatures of

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\(^8^4\) The first book of the Old Testament called Genesis\(^8^4\) by Christians and Bereshit (Heb.) introduces the two main subjects of Holy Scripture, God the Creator and man his creature, and sets the scene for the long tale of their relationship (Wenham 5). The climax of the first creation account is the creation of human beings: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). As the highest being among all creatures, man is thus the ultimate result of God’s creativity, the first in God’s plan but the last to be created (Woznicki 4). The narrator indicates stylistically that the creation of human beings forms the climax of this story of creation.
God. The ANE background provides an appropriate base for such a declaration about humankind (Curtis 389-391).

The creation story presented in the Genesis is re-imagined in the key events of Israel’s history, the *exodus* and *exile*. The book of Exodus narrates the presence of Yahweh in the midst of Israelites, who provides for Israel’s need in the wilderness (Exod. 15:22-27; 16:4; 16:9-16; 17:4-7). The presence of Yahweh promises guidance, protection, and success in their settlement in the promised land (Exod. 23:20-33). The book of Exodus is the fundamental declaration that “God is first of all a God at hand, a God with his people, a God who rescues, protects, guides, provides for, forgives, and disciplines the people who call him their God and who call themselves his people” (Durham xxi-xxiii). The presence of God among his people as Saviour and Rescuer affirms the worth and dignity of human persons. While the story of creation established the dignity of all humanity, since they are created in the divine image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-28), the story of the exodus establishes the special dignity of the Israelites, by their redemption from their dehumanizing slavery in Egypt.

The book of wisdom affirms that human beings have a dignity similar to God’s since like God they were created to be immortal: “... God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image (Heb.: *eikon*) of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it (Wis. 2:23-24). The creation of human beings in “God’s own image” is the charter statement of human dignity and equality of all men, women, and children in the sight of God (Di Lella 280-1).

While the *Torah* affirmed human dignity, the prophets called the people to particularize their recognition of this dignity through their compassion for the marginalized. All the prophets held the fundamental belief that Israel had been elected by God and enjoyed a special relationship with God by virtue of that election. However, most prophets agree that Israel refused to fulfil her obligations and had rebelled against God. The prophets described this rebellion in various ways: “Deviation in ethical behaviour, social injustice, the worship of other gods, and religious abuses” (Wilson 884-889). Through various prophesises people of Israel were invited to re-establish their relationship with God and regain their original dignity by being faithful to their obligations, especially by practicing social justice.
Jeremiah calls the worshippers to recognize the dignity of all people, particularly the marginalized of society, namely, resident aliens, orphans, and widows. He calls the people to perform deeds of righteousness, that is, “ameliorating the situation of the destitute” (Weinfeld, 7, 220). Jeremiah concretizes the vision of the *Torah*. Since all human beings are created in the divine image, the dignity of all human beings, especially the resident aliens, the orphan, and the widow, must be recognized and respected.

Another prophet conveniently called Trito-Isaiah \(^{85}\) prophesied after the exile (Blenkinsopp 42-54). The author of Trito-Isaiah also called for worship and justice. In a sermon perhaps delivered on the Day of Fasting, Yom Kippur (Weinfeld 18, 142), the prophet attacks the empty ritual. He effectively contrasts Israel’s desire for compassion (Stuhlmueller, 345). The sins of the house of Jacob are their failure to recognize the dignity of the marginalized. Recognition of the dignity of the marginalized meant concrete acts of giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, and shelter to the homeless.

Thus, creation, specifically the creation of human beings in the ‘image and likeness’ of God serves as a pervasive and coherent theme in the Old Testament, which highlights the dignity of human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God. Jesus, like his fellow Jews, delighted in the Torah which recognized the divinity of all people, especially the outcasts of his society, lepers (Mk. 1:39-45; 14:3), tax collectors (Mk. 2:15-17), and Samaritans (Jn. 4:4-42). Just as the creation story affirms the dignity of humanity, so the “Incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, reaffirms and even intensifies this dignity” (Erhueh 192).

As Gail O’Day suggests: “The incarnation binds Jesus to the ‘everydayness’ of human experience. When the believing community confesses that the Word ‘lived among us’ it affirms the link between the incarnation and its own humanness” (526). Through incarnation, states Schnackenburg, “Logos enabled us to be partakers of the divine Sonship” (266). So God is present in the human sphere (Brown 35). By becoming man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gave a new dignity to human nature and

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\(^{85}\) Some doubt concerning the unity of the Book of Isaiah was first expressed in the twelfth century. In modern scholarship the theory that 40-55 were written later than the prophecies of Isaiah of Jerusalem (Isa. 1-39) was proposed by two German scholars, Eichhorn and Doderlein. The anonymous author was called Deutero-Isaiah (Second Isaiah). Bernhard Duhm later suggested that Isaiah 56-66 is still later than the Second Isaiah; and this second anonymous author was called Trito Isaiah or Third Isaiah (McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* xv).
bridged the gap between the human person and his Creator. Incarnation, therefore, exalts the dignity of humanity. The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* affirms:

He who is “the image of God of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by the very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man (22).

Like any other prophets, the prophetic elements are present in the life and ministry of Jesus. Like Jeremiah, Jesus performed a prophetic action in the Temple (Mk. 11:15-17; Jer. 7:1-15; 26:4-6) and threatened its destruction (Mk. 13:1-2; Jer. 7:12-14; 26:6). This prophetic action eventually led to his arrest for blasphemy and a sentence of death. Like both Jeremiah and Trito-Isaiah, Jesus called for a cultic life conjoined with social justice (Mk. 12:28-33; Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Hos. 6:6).

In the programmatic beginning to the Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls his disciples to a fulfilment of the Torah (Matt. 5:17-19) and to a greater righteousness (Matt. 5:20). In this Sermon Jesus delineates what the true fulfilment of the Torah entails: it rejects the way of violence and injustice. Jesus calls for a greater righteousness (Mt. 5:20; 6:1-18) that involves the non hypocritical performance of cultic duties, specifically almsgiving (Matt. 6:2-4), prayer (Matt. 6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). In the Sermon on the Mount, Mathew, like Jeremiah and Trito-Isaiah, shows that righteousness entails both cultic observances and social justice that is the recognition of the dignity of both God and humanity (Harrington 76).

Paul’s view of the human condition and its divine redemption bears some resemblance to John’s Gospel. In both cases, the predicament is one of radical bondage to the tyranny of sin, from which Christ liberates those who entrust themselves to him and transfers them into a new relationship with him and with God (Jn. 8:31-36; Rom. 6:17-23; Gal. 4:4-7). Paul markedly personifies sin as a tyrant, a domain of enslaving force, to which humanity is subjected unless liberated by a superior power (Rom. 3:9).

Paul understands the plight of humanity as it is: “thoroughly estranged from God”. He speaks, “not of the restoration of Adam’s blessedness, but of Christ as humanity created eschatologically afresh, alive in the Spirit and apart from the dust of the old” (1 Cor. 15:20-25). To understand human beings as Paul does, one does not
start with Adam, who was created “in the image and glory of God”. Instead, one begins with Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. From that vantage point, one may look backward, upon our shared mortality with Adam, as well as forward to humanity’s confrontation in Christ, who is the image of God. Similarly “our hope of sharing God’s glory” lies exclusively “through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1-2; Phil. 4:19).

Paul applies the language of “image” in two directions, to the redeemer and to the redeemed. He speaks of primordial sin as idolatry, humanity’s foolish exchange of God’s incorruptible glory with derived images of corruptible creatures (Rom. 1:23). In effect, Christ’s coming reverses that polarity: Those whom God has called are predestined to conformity with the Son’s image (Rom. 8:29). Those who have worn the image of the earthly one will wear the image of the heavenly one (1 Cor. 15:49). For Paul, the individual and corporate morality are products of a divinely driven human destiny, “ongoing renewal in knowledge, in the likeness of its creator” (Rom. 12:2).

In the New Testament understanding of the human person, generally, Paul, Mathew, and John regard the human being as closely related to God. In essence, the normal human plight is the refusal of that relationship. The only dignity the New Testament envisions for human beings is their Christ-driven realignment with God (Matt. 5:48; Jn. 1:12-13), their liberating transformation in that splendour God has always intended for them (Jn. 17:20-26; 2 Cor. 3:12-4:6; Phil. 3:20-21).

4.1.2. Human Dignity in the Early Christian Thought

The Christian tradition has used the term “dignity” with reference to human beings in many ways. We can understand some characteristic features of Christian reflection on human dignity by sampling the writings of the Apostolic Fathers or Church Fathers.

Early Christian writers borrowed the term from Greco-Roman usage (Lat.: dignitas; Gk.: to axioma), even as they put it to new uses in the context of Christian beliefs and practice. Around the turn of Common Era (CE), Cicero used the term

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86 A group of early Christian writings that in modern times often includes 1 and 2 Clement, the seven genuine letters of Ignatius, the letter of Polycarp to the Philippians, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermes, and the Epistle to Diognetus. Some collections have also contained the Didache, the Martyrodom of Polycarp, the fragments of Papias, or the remains from the elders preserved in Irenaeus (Norris 93).
*dignitas* in two different senses, either “as designating an individual’s distinctive rank in society, or as designating humankind’s distinctive place within the natural order” (Soulen, Woodhead 3). While Christians used the term in both ways, they tended to give greater emphasis to the second sense in the light of their faith in God’s creative, redemptive, and consummating purposes for humankind. According to apostolic teaching if human dignity depends on God’s creative and redemptive mission “we should believe in his goodness and should look on Him as our Nourisher, Father, Teacher, Counsellor, Healer, Wisdom, Light, Honour, Glory, Power, and Life, and have no anxiety about our clothing” (Maxwell S 180). The Fathers also speak of the special dignity of a particular person’s vocation or ecclesial office (for example, martyr, virgin, or bishop), they tend to understand these in terms of a broader vision of human dignity as this appears in the light of three great divine works: 1) God’s work of creation and the fashioning of human kind as a whole, 2) the sphere of the church and God’s work of new creation in Christ, and 3) God’s consummation as the eschatological goal of creation (Soulen, Woodhead 3).

The Christian apologist Lactantius (ca. 240-325 CE) memorably addressed the dignity that comes to humans by God’s work of creation when he declared that God had created humankind as a “sacred animal” (Lat.: *sanctum animal*). For this reason, in *Divine Institutes* he declared, “God had prohibited that humans be killed, not only in those instances recognized by public law, but in any case whatsoever, including warfare and the exposure of infants” (Roberts and Donaldson 187). Augustine holds that “humankind is made after the image of God with respect to its rational or intellectual soul” (McKenna 358).

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87 An apologist defended one’s own belief or behaviour. Apologetics was a persistent task of the ancient church, owning to the suspicion, criticism, and hostility encountered by Christianity. This effort spawned a distinctive type of literature, the “apology”. In the Greek tradition, an apology (Gk.: *apologia*, “defense”) was, strictly speaking, a speech offered by the accused in a judicial proceeding. Christian apologies did not originate in legal proceedings, nor did they take the same literary form, but they all defended Christianity against criticisms. Many and varied examples appear during the first five centuries, but second century Christianity is sometimes called “the age of apologists” (Gamble 81-6).

88 Lactantius is Christian Latin apologist. He is a rhetorician and not a theologian. He emphasizes the providence of God, martyrdom, love of God and neighbour, and such virtues as humility and chastity. He upholds a dualism of soul and body, good and evil. He enjoyed a special favour with the humanists of the Renaissance, who called him “the Christian Cicero”. Some of his important writings are: *The Workmanship of God*, *The Divine Institutes*, *The Wrath of God*, and *The Deaths of the Persecutors* (McHugh 660).

89 Augustine (354-430 CE) was the Bishop of Hippo in the Roman province of Numidia in North Africa. The influence of Augustine has been profound to our own times. His powerful and rhetorically vivid description of the saga of humanity dominated the theological imagination of the Christian west from the medieval period onwards. Many particular aspects of influence might be discussed regarding Augustine’s importance in the Christian west, but it was primarily his grand, essentially biblical,
A second context in which early Christianity speaks of human dignity is with respect to “God’s redemption in Christ and its appropriation through life in the Spirit and the practice of Christian virtue”. In this connection some authors conceive of the dignity attained through redemption as something acquired gradually over time through the practice of virtue and discipleship. So Clement of Alexandria (ca.150-215) held that God is the human-loving Creator who acts through Logos to educate women and men to their fulfilment as the highest angels, bringing them to live in their proper heavenly dimensions. According to him Logos is the image and likeness of the Father; humans are in the image of the Logos and grow through disciplined education, into Logo’s likeness (Wagner 262-3). Dignity in this sense, according to Clement, is something that can be “augmented and increased” (Roberts, Donaldson 538). In contrast to the view of Clement, other writers like Chrysostom (c. 347-407) declare that God’s calling confers “the greatest mark of dignity”, whereby all who are united with Christ are made to be not merely “angels and archangels” but “sons of God” and “beloved” (Schaff 78). This great distinction come to all equally, for “where the nobility of faith is, there is none barbarian, none Grecian, none stranger, none citizen, but all mount up to one height of dignity” (347).

The third context in which early Christian writers spoke of human dignity is with reference to the ultimate goal of human life. According to Origen (ca. 185-251), “man received the dignity of God’s image at his first creation, which conferred on him the possibility of attaining to perfection”. But the divine likeness itself is “reached in the end” (Soulen, Woodhead 6).

When we consider these and similar remarks about human dignity in the early Christian tradition, several noteworthy themes stand out. A first and key point is that Christians believe that human dignity is conferred by God. It is not self-grounded possession enjoyed apart from relationship to the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.
Because human dignity is conferred by God, its measure and norm is to be discovered not in social convention but in God.

Dignity consists not so much in self-possession and entering into oneself but in reaching out in love and care to others. This is a second noteworthy theme marking early Christian reflection on human dignity.

A third theme that marks out the Christian view of human dignity is that its indispensable context is the church, the gathering of the faithful. Thus human dignity has an ecclesial rather than an individual horizon. Human beings are not whole, but part of the larger whole, the Body of Christ and the communion of saints.

The divine and human dignities are not opposites in Christian thought, destined to wax and wane in inverse proportion to one another. Rather, the former is the foundation of the latter; the latter is the revelation of the former.

4.1.3. Evolution of Human Dignity in Contemporary Christian Anthropology

The story of the emergence of modern conceptions of human dignity cannot be told without reference to social, political, and economic factors as well as cultural ones. It also includes the growth of property-ownership, the decline of political absolutism, the spread of democratic governments, de-colonization, and globalization.

In the modern world there is an attempt to disentangle human dignity from the theological context and make the concept and human being stand on its own. This process is known as the “de-contextualization” of human dignity.

This process of “decontextualization” of human dignity is the work not only of expressly secular theorists, but also theological writers who choose to bracket dimensions of Christian thought as irrelevant to a conception of human dignity.

The work of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), “On the Dignity of Man” (Lat.: De dignitate hominis), is a treatise that played an important role in the emergence of the modern conception of human dignity. The human persons of the Medieval Ages was humble, conscious almost always of his or her fallen and sinful nature, feeling a miserable foul creature watched by an angry God. But Pico and other humanists declared that human persons were only a little lower than the angels, having it within their power to become godlike (Kirk viii).

According to Blaise Pascal the dignity of human beings lies in the capacity to think but he links the rational capacity with faith. He insists that to attain rational
understanding of God, one must turn to God in loving faith. He portrays his faith not as the conclusion of an argument but as a loving response to God (Peters 83-4).

According to Pascal people cannot come to God through “reason alone”, he insists, that knowledge of the true God requires a loving affirmation of God and his plan for salvation. For him the rational understanding of God cannot precede the assent of faith, because without the love and humility that accompany genuine faith one lacks the very conditions necessary for the growth of understanding (Peters 87-8).

The central thrust in Kant’s practical philosophy is that rationality is valuable as the means to freedom or autonomy. In the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that the incomparable dignity of human being derives from the fact that he alone is “free from all laws of nature, obedient only to those laws which he himself prescribes” (226). In Kant’s view the human capacity for moral action, the ability to have one’s will directed by reason and not by the inclination of the moment – clearly distinguishes the moral worth of humans from the value of other sentient creatures (Meyer 405-6).

By grounding human dignity in the capacity for autonomous rational agency, Kant attempts to vindicate a conception of human dignity that stands alone, prior to, and independent of every concept of God. The idea of God is dependent on human dignity as its source and norm, not human dignity on God.

For the modern tradition, human dignity becomes itself the founding concept, from which flow rights. The modern concept of human dignity “stands remarkably exposed, and with it the human being, whose dignity now inheres solely in his or her own possessions and achievements” (Soulen, Woodhead 12). Thus, the modern understanding of human dignity is characterized by its fragile relationship to God and to human communities.

It is evident that once the human dignity is removed from theological and ecclesial contexts, the very concept of human dignity proves remarkably fragile, insufficient to sustain the ethical and metaphysical weight modern philosophers would place upon it. Modern thinkers put forward many reasons why the concept of human dignity had to be cut free from its theological roots, and there are some valuable outcomes of such “decontextualization”. But the price that has been paid has been a gradual weakening of the concept of human dignity.

The Catholic tradition instead draws its concept of human dignity from classical philosophy, particularly Aristotle, the notion of the “natural” goodness of
human rational substance, which needs only to be “perfected” by grace. In the modern period this understanding allows Catholics to develop a “personalist” position which affirms the dignity of each and every human being, and allows the Catholic Church to become a notable champion of freedom, democracy, and “human rights” (Heelas, Woodhead 70-109).

Christianity hosts a concept of human dignity and tries to liberate human dignity from modernist captivity by bringing humanity within the context of God’s differentiated action as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. By doing so, theology illuminates the nature and basis of human dignity and provides a robust vision of its multi dimensionality.

To have a better understanding of the Christian view of human dignity, we will take into consideration the theology of some of the contemporary theologians like Christoph Schwobel, Robert W. Jenson and H. Russel Botman.

In Christian theology the relationship of human persons to God is seen as fundamental for building a relationship among human persons. The starting point of Christoph Schwobel’ theology is “relationality”. He views human dignity as rooted in a specific view of reality in relation to God. For him human beings are related to God in three ways: as creatures made “in the image of God”; as creatures who have fallen out of relationship with God into sin and stand in need of God’s redemption; and finally as creatures who are restored to the image of God by the action of Christ, which sets humans in a new relation to God and one another (Schwobel, Gunton 28-9). Therefore every human person is called into a communion with God which is enacted as a conversation between God and humanity. In this communicative relationship humans are responsible before God.

The Christian understanding of human dignity can be developed only within the framework of the drama of the relationship between God and humanity in God’s history with his creation. When human persons contradict God’s will they are threatened by alienation from God. Only through the intervention of Christ, the Son of God can such human persons be saved from alienation from God and brought into renew the communion with Him.

Human dignity is therefore to be measured neither by the qualities we may or may not possess, nor by the abilities or disabilities we may have, but by God’s gracious offer of communion with those who have lost all claim to dignity (Schwobel, Gunton 141-65).
As part of the ecclesiastical recontextualization of human dignity, Robert W. Jenson states that life in community is the enabling condition of human personhood, and hence also of human dignity. And if this is so, argues Jenson, then the church in fact assures the community experience to its members. According to Jenson, therefore, the church’s defence of human dignity is enacted above all in its Eucharistic practice, liturgy, proclamation, and common prayer.

In the Church all classes and races drink from the one cup and eat the one bread and so participates equally in the life of the church. The cry for “social justice” is deep in the life of the church. Botman’s understanding of human dignity is seen through the lenses of equality and reconciliation.

Botman modelled the restorative root on the idea of “empowering equality”. Human dignity as equality restores through the empowerment of dehumanized people.

Reconciliation is, as much as equality, a practice with consequences for the restoration of human dignity. This instrument was selected primarily because it has the power to bring ‘embrace’ in a context of conflicting and irreconcilable causes. Once people find themselves defending irreconcilable causes they are tempted to dehumanize the opposing faction or to even demonize them. Through the practice of reconciliation, the victim and the perpetrator seek mutual embrace and freedom from conflict.

Reconciliation is also, however, deeply rooted in justice. The choice of reconciliation as a root metaphor for a discourse on human dignity is not a quest for a cheap, temporary, and optimistic embrace between enemies. True reconciliation is costly, lasting, and hope-bringing. The need to overcome past distortions of human dignity has caused others to choose the option of retributive justice as their main instrumentality.

Along with equality and reconciliation Botman puts forward the notion of oikos (Gk.), meaning “household” or “community”. The oikos is a God-given place.

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92 Equality is a complex notion with different manifestations. The various manifestations of equality are the following: numerical equality, that is, the equality of things such as the equilibrium of injury and indemnification when damage is recompensed; geometrical equality, which provides for differential treatment postulated on personal merits or status, for example, the right to vote qualified by the age of eighteen years; substantive equality, which requires that people are treated exactly the same irrespective of individual difference or merit; corrective or curative equality, which seeks to address the deficiencies of other forms of equality; corrective equality addresses historically entrenched distortions of equality through the employ of specified procedures such as affirmative action.
for living. It enables relationships, evokes neighbourliness and living for the other rather than for mere greed and self-interest. It has an ecological structure that displays bonded and openness, independence and relationship, the familiar and the alien, rest and movement.

The heart of the doctrine of reconciliation is the restoration of the *oikos*. It has its place in discussions and actions regarding gender equality, overcoming poverty and violence, and empowering the weak and exploited people of the world.

“Covenant” remains an important theological category for re-imaging human dignity in our times. Human beings are capable of entering into covenant with each other because they are covenantal beings by nature. Covenant is an anthropological reflection not only of what humans do but also of what humans are in light of God. As such, covenant provides a suitable metaphor for integrating the discourses and practices of equality (covenant and creation), reconciliation (covenant and re-creation) and *oikos* (covenant and fullness of life).

### 4.1.4. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) on Human Dignity

“Catholic Social Teaching is a body of doctrine developed by the Catholic Church on matters of poverty and wealth, economics, social organization and the role of the state” (Amalorphavdass 811). Through the social teachings, the church makes efforts to defend the dignity of human person and promotes social justice. It provides various responses to different ideologies which threatens the dignity of human person, and deals with various social as well as economic matters.

According to Pope Benedict XVI, the purpose of Social Teaching “is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just… (the Church) has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice… cannot prevail and prosper (217-252).

Although a certain concern for social problem was never totally absent from the self understanding of the church through the ages, it was only with the social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* issued by Leo XIII in 1981 that a first serious attempt was

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93 The Church strengthened its stand on the Social Teaching especially in the late 19th century. It should be recognized that the Church has become a thought provoking and relevant partner in dialogue with social issues of modern society. The 19th century is well known for the flourishing of various political and social ideologies, like liberalism, communism, socialism, capitalism etc. Catholic Social Teaching is distinctive in its consistent critique of these modern ideologies. The Popes in the modern times have developed and communicated its teaching on the social issues through the medium of encyclical letters.
made by the *Magesterium* to meet the social questions. The modern social question was indeed the “labour question”. The problems related to labour originated and developed with the rise and growth of capitalism and with the eruption of the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries.\(^94\)

The development of Catholic social teaching is a creative process which draws its insights from four important sources: Revelation, Reason, Tradition and Experience (Massaro 84).

The word *revelation* refers to the ways in which God is revealed to people. Revelation reaches the human person through the Scriptures, and therefore the Scripture has been the starting point of Christian ethics and the morality of human behaviour (Massaro 84-5). For the most part, Scripture is a record of God’s gracious ways of dealing with fallen humanity, offering successive covenants that contain the promise of redemption and salvation. When the various books of the Bible address the morality of human behaviour, it is in the context of an overriding concern to build a faithful relationship between God and human being.

Catholic theologians are eager to combine what they learn in the Bible with insights gained by other means of human knowledge, specifically human reason (Massaro 90). In general, modern social encyclicals exhibit a tendency to trust solutions and strategies by applying careful rational analysis to complex problems. One specific way of using reason in theological writings is to employ a form of argumentation called “natural reasoning”.\(^95\)

The word *tradition* here refers to all the previous reflection on social issues that has gone on within Christian theology. This serves as a reminder that what we call “modern Catholic social teaching” is only the latest in a long line of thinking within the Church about the meaning of peace and justice (Massaro 95).

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\(^{94}\) In the wake of the industrial revolution of the mid-nineteenth century, there rose many unprecedented and serious social problems. Men, women and children were mercilessly exploited by the rich employers who made them to work for long hours in factories in an unhygienic environment. The employees were given the minimum salary, which was not sufficient for a square meal. For them labour was a commodity to be bought and it was readily available at a cheap price, because of the poverty and the unemployment of the masses.

\(^{95}\) The fundamental belief of a natural law approach to ethics is that God created the universe with certain purposes in mind. God also created humans with enough intelligence that they can use their reason to observe the natural world and make reliable judgements about God’s purposes and how our behaviour may cooperate with God’s plans. Indeed, we have a moral obligation to make good use of our minds to figure out God’s intentions and to muster the courage to act on these convictions in daily life.
Although no social encyclicals were written or published before 1891 (RN), voices within the Church have always been active in commenting on issues of life in society, including its political and economic dimensions (Massaro 96). Several of the most influential figures in this regard lived during the earliest centuries of the Church. Collectively they are referred to as the “Fathers of the Church”. If we read many writings left behind by the Church Fathers, we encounter much insightful advice for Christians trying to live a life of faith amidst the challenges of a politically and economically divided world. Following the Fathers of the Church, the Scholastics of medieval Europe attempted to bring together the ideals of our faith with the practical demands of everyday world.

They key sources of Christian ethics are Scripture and tradition and they cannot be separated. They work together to help believers to know and interpret the word of God as it addresses our world today.

It would be impossible to talk about revelation, reason, or tradition without presuming an important role for human experience. Part of the task of Catholic social teaching is to help people of faith read and interpret “sign of the times” (Matt. 16:3; *Gaudium et Spes*). There are three steps to interpret the signs of the time: first take a careful look at the situation; make an accurate judgment about what is going on and how best to respond to it; finally act vigorously upon what have been learned. These three steps are described in some detail in paragraphs 236-241 of *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII’s encyclical.

This process emphasises the relationship between action and reflection and includes four steps: experience, social analysis, theological reflection and pastoral planning (Massaro 102-7).

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96 Among major Patristic figures are Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo and Jerome. They were writing and preaching between the second and fifth centuries of the Christian era, these theologians addressed numerous matters of the church doctrine and contributed greatly to the understanding of the Holy Trinity, the identity to Jesus Christ, the sacraments, Scripture, and the mission of the Church.

97 The towering figure among all the Scholastics was St. Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century Dominican priest and scholar who is quoted frequently in the modern social encyclicals. Aquinas had an extraordinary eye for finding ways to merge and reconcile many traditions of thought into a unified whole or synthesis. His work *Summa Theologica* (Lat.), build upon the traditions of ancient Greek and Roman scholars as well as Scripture and the writings of the Patristic era and the intervening centuries.
4.1.4.1. Dignity of Human Person in Modern Papal Doctrines

There is a large amount of social teachings in the documents of the modern Popes, and these teachings are quite unintelligible without a proper understanding of the human in relation to Creator. Fr. Charles P. Bruehl summed up much of the existing papal doctrine and prophesised much of the teaching of Pope Pius XII when he wrote in 1939: “It is becoming increasingly clear to thinking men that social salvation can come only from a philosophy which affords a true concept of the nature of man, a right idea of the purpose of human existence and a proper appreciation of the place of the economic order in the total scheme of life” (Staab 16).

Bruehl spoke of three elements in the foundation of a proper social doctrine. Of these three, the first is the true concept of the nature of man, and the other two concerns both the ultimate and the proximate purpose of man’s existence. It is evidently important to understand human person in all his aspects and tendencies (Staab 16).

The two great realities of life are God and the human person, and between these two realities there exists a relation of delicate balance. On the part of God there is communication on both the natural and supernatural planes: He is the Creator and has dominion over everything. On the part of human person there is a relation of absolute dependence on God (Fanfani 21). According to the infinite goodness of God’s nature, God tends to divinize man; but if man attempts to divinize himself by distorting in any way the reality of God or by exalting the individual, he destroys the delicate balance of life with a consequent loss of human dignity.

Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Humanum Genus* states: “That God is the Creator of the world and its Provident Ruler; that the eternal law commands the natural order to be maintained, and forbids that it be disturbed; that the last end of man is a destiny far above human things and beyond this sojourning upon earth: these are the sources and these the principles of all justice and morality” (424). According to this encyclical, the modern problem is ultimately rooted in the human race’s ancient fall from communion with God into sin and in the consequent separation of humanity into two parts, “the Kingdom of God” and “the Kingdom of Satan” (Holland 151). It is clear from Leo’s overall program, however, that these two kingdoms are not to remain in irreconcilable polarization. Rather, this world is to be rescued from Satan by church’s spiritual mission to create a Christian civilization that would direct the nations and their civil societies to their proper end.
There is a historical development of this imbalance, or as Pope Pius XII calls it, “false process of thought and action which humanizes what is divine and divinizes what is human” (Reply to 704-706).

The definitive shift of the centre of the universe from God to the human person came with the reformation of the sixteenth century and it reached a logical peak in the eighteenth century (Maritain 20-26). Pope Leo XIII accuses the pretended Reformation of the sixteenth century for having introduced the principle of disintegration, by rejecting the transcendental authority which paved the way for the “the contemptuous and mocking philosophism of the eighteenth century, which ridiculed the Scriptures and rejected all revealed truth” (Praeclara 710).

When modern philosophical trends favour the disintegration of the relationship between human beings and God, it is the church who safeguards the proper relationship between God and the human person. The very doctrine of the church breathes a healthy humanism.

It is the duty of the Church to maintain the balance in the relationship between God and man and to defend human dignity. Pope Leo XIII in his first encyclical letter showed the church as the mother of nations, the patron of cultures, and the defender of human dignity (IDC 585-92).

The doctrines of modern Popes expresses the natural and supernatural dignity of the human body, soul, intellect, and will. Pope Pius XII gives a comprehensive presentation of the dignity of the body in an address on Sports and Gymnastics: “The Pope says that the body in its structure and form, its members and functions, its instincts and energies, is treated by various sciences, such as anatomy, physiology, psychology, and aesthetics. These sciences show progress from day to day, leading us from marvel to marvel (Address 868-76). Pope Pius XII appeals strongly also to the supernatural dignity of the body because of our incorporation in Christ. In this context the Pope refers to a passage from First Corinthians 6:13 and 15 where Paul speaks about the dignity of human body, in a context where he speaks against the sexual immorality. Paul affirms that the body is for the “Lord and the Lord is for the body”. With this affirmation Paul underscores that Christ’s Lordship is exercised over Christians in their bodily existence (Collins 245-247).

Pope Pius XI in his encyclical letter on the Kingship of Christ, after stating that Christ must reign in our minds, in our wills, and in our hearts, he adds: “He must reign in our bodies, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of
our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle, as instruments of justice unto God” (*Quas Primas* 609).

Pope Leo XIII calls the soul the noblest part of man (*Cum Multa* 242). The human soul is the essential part of the human person because body and soul form one nature and in this substantial union “soul is the determining factor” (*Pius XII, Address* 872) and this soul which is simple, spiritual, intellectual, and immortal, is created by God (*Leo XIII, Libertas* 594). The human soul has two majestic faculties, the intellect and the will. As Pius XI says, “For man surpasses all other visible creatures by the superiority of his rational nature alone” (*Casti Connubii* 544). And these faculties are proper to the human person: “Only man, the human person, and not society in any form is endowed with reason and a morally free will” (*Pius XI, Divini Redemptoris* 79).

Human intelligence is the noblest gift of God to man which distinguishes the human person essentially and completely from the rest of the creation. Pope Leo XIII develops his thought on the dignity of human intellect in his encyclical “Christ our Redeemer”. Human intelligence, he says, has a wide field of its own in which to employ itself freely with investigation and experiment. But the mind must subject itself humbly to the teachings of Christ. “There is nothing servile in serving Christ our Lord with the understanding, but it is especially consonant to reason and to our personal dignity” (*Leo XIII, Tametsi* 281). By faith the human person does not submit his/her intellect to the sovereignty of any fellow being, but to that of God the Creator, the first cause of all and the immutable truth. “He attains at once the natural good of the mind and mental freedom” (*Tametsi* 281).

Along with the human intellect, the human will also occupies a prominent place in the writings of modern Popes. Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Libertas* speaks of the human will and its consequences:

“Liberty, the highest of natural endowments, being the portion only of intellectual or rational natures, confers on man this dignity – that he is ‘in the hand of his counsel’, which has power over his actions. But the manner in which such dignity is exercised is the greatest moment, inasmuch as on the use that is made of liberty the highest good and the greatest evil alike depend. Man, indeed, is free to obey his reason, to seek moral good, and to strive unswervingly after his last end. Yet he is free also to turn aside all other things; and in pursuing the empty semblance of good, to disturb rightful order and to fall headlong into the destruction which he has voluntarily chosen” (*Libertas* 593).
The church always has taught the freedom of the will as a dogma of faith, “and whatever heretics or innovators have attacked the liberty of human person, the Church has defended it and protected this noble possession from destruction (Libertas 593). In her respect for the freedom of the will of the human person, the church follows her founder closely. The respect that Christ had for human freedom is brought out by Pope Pius XII in an address to nurses. He asks them to mark Christ’s pity and the complete surrender of His service (Address 725).

In his first encyclical letter, Summi Pontificatus, Pope Pius XII remarks that “the first pages of the Scripture, with magnificent simplicity, tells us how God, as a culmination to His creative work, made man to His own image and likeness” (426); and in Rerum Novarum Leo XIII discusses the dignity and rights of the working man in view of this spiritual greatness: “It is the soul which is made after the image and likeness of God; it is in the soul that sovereignty resides, in virtue of which man is commanded to rule the creatures below him, and to use all the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fishes of the earth and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures which move upon the earth” (659).

In a recent study on the dignity of the human person, Cronan says, “it is because of the superior and potentially unlimited intellectual spirituality that he consummates the rest of creation being, existence, and operation, and is the ultimate in excellence” (59). The intellect of God is both the source of creation and contains all creation itself. St. Thomas Aquinas says that it is necessary for the perfection of creatures that there be some creatures endowed with intellect in whom the form of the divine intellect should be expressed according to their esse intelligible (Cronan 59). The human person is, in the depth of his being, the image of God; and this image, as the Pope says, confers upon man a special dignity and grandeur.

Just as human person can recognize the image of God in himself and as a consequence must love himself, he can also recognize the image of God in every other human person. Referring to this fact, Leo XIII says that by religious education the child “is accustomed to respect in his brethren the likeness of God that shines in his own countenance” (In Mezzo alle Ragioni 101). The Popes refer to this capacity of recognition as the basis of love. For example, according to Leo XIII “the love of God should not be severed from the love of our neighbour, since men have a share in the infinite goodness of God and bear in themselves the impress of his image and likeness” (Sapientiae Christianae 402).
The ultimate dignity of the natural image of God in human person is that by his/her intellect he/she can know God himself/herself as the *summum verum*, and consequently by his/her will he/she can love God as the *summum bonum*. Leo XIII expresses this dignity in his encyclical on Christian citizenship:

“To contemplate God, and to tend to Him, is the supreme law of the life of man. For we were created in the divine image and likeness, and are impelled, by our virtue, to the enjoyment of our creator. But not by bodily motion or effort do we make advance toward God, but through acts of the soul, that is, through knowledge and love. For, indeed, God is the first and supreme truth, and the mind alone feeds on truth. God is perfect holiness and the sovereign good, to which only the will can desire and attain, when virtue is its guide” (*Sapientiae Christianae* 402).

It is evident that the natural image of God in human person can be considered statically in the supreme faculty of the human intellect as reflecting the intelligence of God. It is also evident the image of God can be considered dynamically as far as the intellect tends towards the supreme truth, which is God, and leads the will to tend towards God as the supreme good.

4.1.4.2. Vatican Council II and the Teachings on Human Dignity

Vatican Council II also affirms the greatness and the worth of the human person derive from God because man is God’s image. The understanding of man as the “image of God” is also the ground for man’s finitude and littleness (Ehrueh 188).

Man as the “image of God” is being expressed explicitly in the pastoral Constitution on the Church in Modern World (*GS*). According to *Gaudium et Spes*, “Image of God” (Lat.: *Imago Dei*) is the basis and foundation of human dignity (*GS* 17, 19, 22, 25). Taking into account this view Vatican II suggests that one must view human dignity in the main spectrum of Christian anthropology, namely, in the context of man: 1) in his relation to God, 2) in his social nature, and 3) in relation to the created universe (Ehrueh 189).

According to Council Fathers, God himself calls the human person to dialogue with him. This call to dialogue with God as a person is the highest ground for human person’s dignity (*GS* 19). God only calls, does not compel anyone. The dignity of the human person, therefore, consists in this: that God allows him/her to have a say in his or her well being, and enjoys an interpersonal relationship with God. God respects the human person. Hence all must respect the human person as God’s partner. In other
words, anyone who violates the human person ignores God and offends Him. In the fundamental understanding of *Gaudium et Spes* sin may be termed a “disfigurement” of the image of God in the human person (Thanikal 7-9). Though sin may obscure the image of God in a human person it cannot erase God’s image or blot out human person’s dignity.

According to Vatican II, human activities are good if they promote human dignity; they are bad if they neglect or offend it. The Pastoral Constitution itself affirms:

> Human institutions, both private and public, must labour to minister to the dignity and purpose of man. At the same time let them put up a stubborn fight against any kind of slavery, whether social or political, and safeguard the basic rights of man under every political system. Indeed human institutions themselves must be accompanied by decrees to the highest of all realities, spiritual ones, even though meanwhile, a long enough time will be required before they arrive at the desired goal (*GS* art. 29).

Thus, for instance, the purpose of human institutions is directly human person, and human dignity.

Human dignity is not only vertical but also horizontal (footnote). Besides God, human person is related to fellow human beings and to other creatures in the universe. The Pastoral Constitution itself emphasises: “But God did not create man as a solitary... For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential” (*GS* art. 12).

A person develops his/her personality and individuality only in the context of society. A dignity is not lessened by society, instead it is nurtured, and should be guaranteed in it. Therefore, society should exist to promote the good of the human person, individually and collectively (*GS* art. 25). Conversely, it is by serving fellow men in society that man grows and becomes truly human (*GS* art. 24). This means that no human society should use human persons as instruments. They must be treated as persons.

In order to develop the true identity of a person in a society, he/she requires “freedom” and “responsibility” (*GS* art. 17). “Freedom cements the human person’s relationship to God as a person, and responsibility guarantees other people’s freedom in man’s dealings in the society” (Erhueh 201).

For the humanization of persons in society, therefore, responsibility and love are key words. This makes human person forsake selfishness and dedicate himself to
the needs of his/her fellowmen. Humanization the practice of justice and peace, and needs the recognition of the dignity and rights of others, and the fundamental equality of all men.

It is generally accepted that the human person is the crown and centre of the universe (GS art. 12, 14, 34). In Genesis tells us that God gave human person domination over each of creation (Gen. 1:28). The Fathers of Vatican II also affirm human dignity by proclaiming that human person is not only the purpose of creation but also of the incarnation and redemption (GS art. 22; Dignitatis Humanae art. 11). Hence it goes without saying that the dignity of the human person far surpasses the excellence of earthly creatures in the material universe. Through his or her qualities spiritual and bodily human person encompasses the whole universe and summarizes it in himself/herself.

Hence the Fathers of Vatican II vehemently condemn anything that goes against human dignity. Any use or abuse of the human person as an object or that which degrades human beings as mere tools is bad. So also anything opposed to life itself. The Fathers clarify:

Furthermore, whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator (GS art. 27).

Human person is the only creature God has willed for itself (GS art. 35). All things – money, society, culture, etc. – are there for the service of man. Hence they must uphold the dignity of the human person as their primary objective. If they violate the human person, “they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator” (GS art. 27).

The Council Fathers affirm that human person is a creature of God and through the sacrament of baptism he or she receives a new life, a life of intimate communion with the Persons of the Trinity. The “new life” that one begins with the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism is seen as a “gift” and not as the fruit of man’s work or merit. The Vatican document Christifideles Laici says that God bestows on
the baptized the gift of “new life” in his merciful love. The document categorically affirms that it is through grace that we receive participation in the divine life and sees in the “great mercy” of God the reason for the “new life” (Kurisinkal 13-14).

4.2. Human Rights and Responsibilities

Human rights provides a network of minimum standards and procedural rules for human relations. The focus of human rights is on the ‘life and dignity of human beings’. A person’s dignity is violated when they are subjected to torture, forced to live in slavery or poverty, i.e. without minimum of food, clothing, and housing (Nowak 1).

We have seen that the Bible makes some quite staggering assertions about the dignity of human beings which came to be the foundations of the human rights. The very fact that the human person is created in the “image and likeness” of God makes human beings unique. It imbues each human person with profound dignity and worth.

The Bible points to the fact that human persons are endowed with freedom to choose. This freedom is constitutive of what it means to be a person – one who has the freedom to choose between alternative options, and to choose freely. To be a person is to be able to choose to love or not to love, to be able to reject or to accept the offer of divine love, to be free to obey or to disobey. That is what constitutes being a moral agent (Witte, Alexander 3).

L. Swidler defines human rights as “a claim to be able to and allow to perform an action because one is a human being – not because one is a citizen, or is permitted in law, or has a grant from the king or a Pope, or for any other reason... The person has rights not as son, not as father, not as brother, or whatever, but as human being. Here the individual is valued for his or her own sake and not just as a relationship to others” (12). Thus human rights are those claims that belong to the human person as a human person, based on what he or she is.

Human rights are those which enable a person to love as a human person, developing himself or herself as a human person. To fulfill oneself as a human person in all the different spheres of life, one needs these rights. Thus, human rights are those rights that human beings need or ought to have, to realize or actualize their full potential.

Value systems based on human rights are is found in all major cultures and religions. Human rights are said to be moral rights, because they are derived from the
moral principles and norms that are related to the attainment of human person’s good, and thus uphold and protect the dignity of the human person. In other words, moral rights are related to the core values that are important for all well-being of the human persons (Kusumalayam 44-45).

Human rights are also fundamental rights. J. Donnelley argues that all human rights are “basic rights” in the fundamental sense and that systematic violations of any human rights preclude realizing a life of full human dignity – that is, prevent one from enjoying the minimum conditions necessary for a life worthy of a human being (41).

The assertion that the human persons have rights signifies that they are vital aspects of being human. Due to these vital aspects that human beings carry within their own essence, our behaviour towards each other must be such that these aspects must not be harmed but protected and enhanced (Freeden 11).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights places the minimum requirements or conditions for a “dignified life that is worthy of a fully human being”. These requirements or conditions are so basic to the life of the human person – to flourish as a human person (Cronin 33). The Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognizes the human rights as “inalienable”, which means that “we may not be deprived and we cannot deprive ourselves” of these rights (Fleming 45, 47-48). The human person has rights on the basis of his or her humanity. Alienating one’s rights is equal to denying one’s humanity and the dignity attached to it. Therefore these rights cannot be taken away easily from his or her by decision of anyone; nor can one alienate his/her human rights easily by the decision of anyone.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations (UN) (1948), conceptualizes human rights as inherent to humans and therefore universal, that is held equally by all. The universality of human rights is an attractive doctrine because it helps those who are oppressed or deprived of their rights, to appeal to for their rights on the basis of this doctrine. It can ensure that people everywhere have rights that are so fundamental to their life and dignity. The concept of the universality of human rights is supported by the concept of the universality of the human person. Our aspiration and human needs are more or less the same in any part of the world. All of us want to lead a safe, decent and dignified life. The basic aspiration does not differ from culture to culture, though the form in which they are realized might differ. The basic human spirit is the same everywhere, reflects Rosalyn Higgins, an expert in international law (97).
The inherent worth and dignity of the human person, which is in fact the fundamental underlying value of all human rights, can be extended beyond the barriers of sex, race, religion, and so on, practicing the principle of reciprocity. What we need to achieve here is a commitment of that irrespective of culture or place, the worth and dignity of the human person must be respected.

Human rights are not only universal but also indivisible. There is a unity that runs through the enumeration of different rights that we have. In this unity or indivisibility we also see that these rights are interrelated and interdependent. In the implication and application the rights are to be considered relative to and depended on one another (Wright 148).

The human person is subject of different rights. We cannot cut him/her into pieces to enjoy or claim different rights. He is the subject of different rights, trying to actualize himself or herself, so that his/her life may be full. Therefore we cannot separate rights from one another; they are interdependent and interrelated. There is an underlying unity between different rights that exist for the welfare of the human person. That unity should not be destroyed, though we may differentiate between different types of rights for the purpose of understanding and even for implementation. As the human person is a complex unity of different dimensions, so the rights are a complex unity helping, protecting, and leading one to the fullness of his or her being.

4.2.1. Genesis of Human Rights

Violence is the origin and, as such, the principle of human rights (Maldonado 10). Our times are characterized by the systematic presence of violence in various forms, both open such as military or physical violence and much more subtle forms as economic or psychological, as well as different forms of cultural domination. It is due to this situation of systematic violence that problems concerning human rights exist.

Clearly in the history of humankind there have been diverse periods of violence, even of systematic violence against individuals, peoples and entire cultures. The whole history of ‘transatlantic slave trade’ and other forms of slavery are clear examples of such systematic violence. Systematic violence is the imposition of a determined form of violence upon the life of society and of individuals.

Violence upon individuals and large groups within society derives from two different fronts. First, the State is recognized as the main guarantor or the main
violator of human rights. Seeing the State as the source of violence is based on the objective actions it carries out or avoids in guaranteeing life as well as human rights. Usually a corrupt government fails to guarantee the rights of the individuals and groups within the society. As a consequence they become the violator of human rights. The second main source of violence and violations of human rights comes generally from civil society itself. The most classical examples are paramilitary groups, large corporations, unjust systems like boned labour etc. How they exist varies from one country to another (Maldonado 11-13).

The object of human rights consists first in denouncing the conditions that give rise to violence, and then in the gradual or total suppression of those forms of violence. Apart from the critique and the negation of violence, human rights are really the defence and acknowledgment of the value and dignity of life.

4.2.2. Biblical Perspectives of Human Rights

Many Christian ideas and arguments have played their part in the establishment of human rights (Stendahl 146). The academic world claims that “the embodiment of human rights in positive law was the result of a conscious secularization process helped by a number of philosophical movements, which excluded the possibility of any claim that the idea of human rights is something originally and authentically Christian” (Sachs 36-7). But from its earliest formulations of human rights declarations, we can certainly find traces of religious concepts (Burggraefe 131-2).

Human dignity based on the concepts of the image of God and Christ’s redemption becomes the basis for human rights debate from a Christian theological perspective. It is in the community of the human family that a human person realizes his or her being the “image of God”. This gives the concept of human dignity a social or communitarian dimension. Therefore in the Catholic social-moral reflection, the human persons must not be conceived in overly individualistic terms, but as being inherently connected to the rest of society or even the whole human family.

The Bible has long been the anchor text for Christian teaching on human rights. Bible is filled with critical passages that have long inspired deep theological insights into the nature of rights.
It is not easy to speak about human rights in Old Testament terms because the phrase, rich in meaning and connotation though it has become, is still abstract. Old Testament uses language and idea and images which are almost concrete.

Foremost among the biblical texts is the Genesis account of the creation of men and women (Gen. 1:26-28). Christian theology emphasises that man is created in the “image and likeness of God” forms the deep ontological foundation of human dignity, human worth, and human rights. To bear the image of God is to be capable of living in proper relationship with God and with others, with the rest of creation, and with oneself (Kusumalayam 195).

Also fundamental to Christian understanding of human rights is the Mosaic Law, which is based on a series of covenants between God and ancient Israel. This Mosaic Law is amplified by the Prophets of the Hebrew Bible and the Rabbis of the Tanuld.

The New Testament is heavily peppered with a number of strong texts on Christian freedom (Rom. 8:2; 21; Jn. 8:32; 36; 1 Pet. 2:16). The Evangelist John in his Gospel (8:36) presents Jesus as the Redeemer who has come to liberate slaves and give them the freedom of sons. Therefore to enjoy real freedom from sin and slavery one needs to remain with Jesus. That is the mark of the real disciple (Beasley-Murray 133-4). Paul in the letter to Romans emphasises that the liberating action has taken place “in Christ Jesus”: “There is no condemnation for those in Christ, because in Christ God has set you free”. Thus the source of Christian freedom is the redemptive action of Christ Jesus (Wright 576-7, 596). To describe the ideal life in terms of freedom meant much for the ancient world because of its clear distinction between the slave and the free man. St. Peter in his letter (1 Pet. 2:16) insists that the freedom of the Christian does not lie in his superiority to outward circumstances, but in his willingness to accept obedience (Best 115). These passages, together with the many apostolic instructions on Christian ethics, have long inspired Christians to work out the meaning of Christian freedom within their Christian communities.

The New Testament also calls for a much greater equality among humans than what prevailed in either the Jewish or Greco-Roman cultures of Christ’s day. Paul’s manifesto to the Galatians in the most famous statement: “In Jesus Christ, you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as we were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there in neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:26-28). In the above
mentioned quote Paul insists on the termination of the social distinction between slaves and free persons and there is an implied reference to the new creation in Christ. Religious, social, and sexual pairs of opposites are not replaced by equality, but rather by a newly created unity. In Christ, persons who were Jews and persons who were Gentiles have been made into a new unity that is so fundamentally and irreducibly identified with Christ himself. Members of the Church are united in Christ, because they have become members of the Body of Christ (Martyn L 374-378). This radical Christian message of human equality trumped conventional Greco-Roman hierarchies based on nationality, social status, gender and more. St. Peter amplified this call to equality with his admonition that all are called to be prophets, priests and kings: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet. 2:9).

The New Testament is even more radical in its call to treat the “least” members of society with love, respect, and dignity. Christ took pains to minister to the social outcasts of his day – Samaritans, tax collectors, prostitutes, thieves, traitors, lepers, the lame, the blind, the adulterers, and others. Echoing the Hebrew Bible, Christ called his followers to feed and care for the poor, widows, and orphans in their midst, to visit and comfort the sick, the imprisoned and the refugees. Christ and Paul called believers to share their wealth, to help those in need, to give up their extra clothes and belongings even to their creditors. They further more called believers to “love their enemies”, to give them food and water, to turn their cheeks to those who strike them, forgo lawsuits, vengeance, and retributive measures, to be peacemakers in the radical demands of Christian discipleship (Matt. 5:21-6; 12:9-21).

Human rights are primarily explained as the fruits of justice from the point of view of those who benefit from a just ordering of social relationship. Rights are bound therefore to the duty or responsibilities of all, particularly in those entrusted with authority, to act according to the requirements of justice or the common good.

4.2.3. Catholic Social Doctrine and Human Rights

Human rights are those moral claims that human persons make on the things necessary or essential for realizing one’s personhood. History bears witness to the fact that while the Roman Catholic Church strongly opposed human rights until the 19th century, she has emerged as one of the champions of human rights-advocacy towards the end of the 20th century (Douglass, Hollenbach 127-50). The historic changes, like the industrial revolution toward the end of the 19th century in the Western world and
the new experience of the reality of pluralism around the world in the 20th century influenced a change also in the Church’s outlook on the social realities of human experience. Thus we find certain rights seeing the rays of light in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII, when it talks of the rights of workers, and reaching a high point in the recognition of various human rights in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of John XXIII. It is here in *Pacem in Terris* of John XXIII with its realization of a broader view of the human person in relation to society, a powerful and thorough statement of the Roman Catholic understanding of the human rights in the modern time began to emerge.

In the history of Catholic social doctrine, surely one of the most important developments has been the Church’s assimilation of what Pope Benedict XVI has called the ‘true conquests of the Enlightenment’ (*Address* 2006). This assimilation has found striking expression in the extent to which Catholic social doctrine has appropriated, and even championed, human rights ideas.

Later, John Paul II endorsed public and even described the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nation on 10th December 1948, as ‘a true milestone on the path of humanity’s moral progress’ (*Address* 1979). Here we intend to analyze the Catholic thought on the issue of human rights.

### 4.2.3.1. Communitarian Dimension of Human Rights

An important achievement of the Enlightenment was the affirmation of the individual. But this affirmation of the individual has sometimes exaggerated the freedom and autonomy of the individual human person in such a way that it overlooked or ignored the social nature of man which is also are essential part of the human person for the realization of his/her personhood.

Nevertheless the church in her teachings on human rights never lost sight of relational or social nature of human persons (Calvez, Perrin 110ff.). Thus in the teaching of the church on human rights, human person is affirmed in his/her uniqueness as an individual as well as in his/her social or relational aspect. Human persons are obviously dependent on God but also on many other human beings – family, friends, teachers, various associations, and the political community (Curran 134).

Pope John XXIII, juxtaposed the individuality and sociality of human person in the basic principle of the church’s social teaching: “Individual human beings are
the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution. That is necessarily so, for men are by nature social beings. [...] On this basic principle, which guarantees the sacred dignity of the individual, the church constructs her social teaching” (MM nn. 219-20). The Pope also notes with attention that sometimes this solidarity would require that the common good of the community or the group be given sufficient attention, and further the need to reconcile and subordinate one’s rights and interests to those of others if the common good demand it (Calvez, Perrin 116-9).

Taking into consideration the social nature of the human person at various levels, the church has also recognized certain group rights. John Paul II recognizes the existence of group rights, like the ‘rights of peoples and nations’ in Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, when he said, “peoples or nations too have a right to their own full development, ... nor would a type of development which did not respect and promote human rights – personal and social, economic and political, including the rights of the nations and of peoples – be really worthy of man” (nn. 32-4).

The church in her human right tradition, at least in the recent past, has defended both individual as well as collective/group rights affirming the position that it is neither individuals nor groups separately, but it is when they are brought together that true human dignity is attained, and true human ‘flourishing’ is possible.

4.2.3.2. Solidarity and Human Rights

In Pacem in Terris, John XXII dedicates an entire section of his teaching to this concept of solidarity and active collaboration to ensure that human persons everywhere are enabled to realize their basic rights in order to live life with dignity. Whereas he speaks of ‘truth, justice, love, and freedom’ as four values that should guide and direct social life, when he comes to the issues of global interdependence, John XXIII substitutes ‘solidarity’ for ‘love’ (PT, n. 80).

Solidarity, directed for the good of the whole human person and the whole group, is one of the central themes in the writings of John Paul II (Hollenbach 313). According to him, the interdependence of the human persons should be turned into the virtue of solidarity (Dorr 302), which he describes as not a mere feeling of vague compassion, but “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all”.


The relational or social nature of man is not merely to have a ‘sense of being with the other’ but should lead to form a ‘solidarity’ with the others, making everyone ‘responsible’ for those in the group (GS n. 26).

As the well-being and flourishing of the individual human persons is related to the well-being and flourishing of other individual human persons and the social/political groups to which they belong, the well-being and progress of these social and political groups depend on the well-being and progress of other social/political groups in the world (John XIII, Pacem n. 130). This world level solidarity in the family of mankind is stretched further by John Paul II to include the whole creation, and the need to take care of ecology and nature, in such a way that mankind safeguards the integrity of the Creation (SRS, n. 26).

Since solidarity is not mere ‘feeling’ for the other, but ‘being with’ and ‘being for’ the other, another essential element in the theory of human rights should be the issue of ‘responsibility

4.2.3.3. Human Rights and Human Responsibility

‘Humanity as an image of God has a unique capability and responsibility for the well-being and future of the world (Sachs 21), and the invitation given to humanity to become the image and likeness of God entails human responsibility not only for other fellow human beings, but for the whole creation. The notion of responsibility is also founded on the etymology of the word ‘solidarity’ which is derived from Latin juridical term in solidum, which means that each person in a group is responsible not only in part but for the whole (Walgrave 149-150).

The reciprocity of rights and responsibilities or rights and duties should lead us to acknowledge and recognize ‘responsibility’ as an important decision of the theory of human rights. “In order to picture human life without responsibility we should have to conceive of individuals stripped of language, values, and attitudes which are the conditions for their interactions with others (Schweiker 14). As a Christian disciple cannot affirm himself only, negating the other, so there cannot be a Christian theory of human rights that affirms only one’s rights and negates one’s responsibility. Responsible decisions and behaviours are called for because one’s decisions and behaviour can have an impact on the exercise of rights by others and consequently on the realization of personhood by others in the group.
The sense of responsibility should lead every generation to come out of an economics that is solidly founded on an extreme individualism and work towards an economics for the global community. It is not individuals or special groups and communities that have to be liberated from the extreme individualistic tendencies but also different generations from their collective egoism in exploiting their present at the expense of the future.

4.2.3.4. Human Rights and Equality

When we look at the recent Catholic social teachings on equality, we find there an evolution. Leo XIII, who promoted the rights of the workers against ‘socialism’ and declared that “man precedes the State” on the basis on human dignity (RN, n. 7), had a very different view on equality:

“no one doubt that all men are equal one to another, so far as regards their common origin and nature, or the last end which each one has to attain, or the rights and duties which are thence derived. But, as the abilities of all are not equal, as one differs from another in the powers of mind or body, and as there are very many dissimilarities of manner, disposition, and character, it is most repugnant to reason to endeavour to confine all within the same measure, and to extend complete equality to the institutions of civic life. ... in the commonwealth, there is an almost infinite dissimilarity of men, as parts of the whole. If they are to be all equal, and each is to follow his own will, the State will appear most deformed; but if, with a distinction of degrees of dignity, of pursuits and employments, all aptly conspire for the common good, they will present the image of a State both well constituted and conformable to nature” (RN, n. 26).

As this citation makes clear, for Leo XIII all are equal because of their common origin, nature, and end, and are equal with regard to the rights and duties derived from and, all should work for the common good. This will promote a healthy social order, comfortable to nature.

The recent Catholic social teachings have emphasized that both individuals and peoples should enjoy fundamental ‘equality’ (Paul VI, PP n. 47). The recognition of equality is to be seen as an essential element of ‘solidarity’ which should be established also between peoples and nations.

As part of building up solidarity and cooperation at the international level, various economic and social imbalances that exist between nations have to be reduced, so that each of these nations can work on terms of equality with the rest for the attainment of universal prosperity (John XXIII, MM n. 174).
Conclusion

The metaphor of God the Creator bestows the ontological status of goodness on the entire created world. The implication of this is radical; it suggests that all fundamental human tendencies and basic patterns of the created natural world are good in the primordial sense of that word. “God saw everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). The primordial goods listed in the systems above, insofar as they are truly basic, are endowed with a sacred valence from the standpoint of the Christian narrative. They are blessed by God and should be respected by humans. They should be taken seriously as they received further moral refinement, prioritization, and organization.

The metaphor of God the Creator assigns a special status to humans as made in God’s image. The Christian doctrine of *imago Dei* (Lat.:) gives ultimate seriousness to the status of humans as ends. Furthermore, basing respect on the primordial relation all humans have with the divine requires that we show respect to the neighbour with all the more seriousness. It is one thing to be a rational animal; it is something even more profound to be a child of God.

The Christian narrative about creation informs and enriches the more directly ethical dimensions of human existence. This narrative, however, if devoid of a principle of obligation and a view of primordial goods, can be vague about what we should do to address the ethical challenges of life. Christianity includes within the themes of creation, judgment, and salvation as proximate concern for human flourishing.