



JNANADEEPA

PJRS ISSN 0972-33315

15/1-2 Jan-Dec 2012: 135-83

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4295700

Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4295700>

Human Dignity as the Basis for Dialogue Between Religion

J. Charles Davis

Humboldt Research Fellow, Albert Ludwigs University of Freiburg, Germany

Abstract: Religious, philosophical and legal traditions search for common grounds for dialogues. International conventions use universal terms for breaking barriers, settling issues and building bridges. In such attempts, the concept of human dignity seems to play a vital role. Human dignity is the foundation and the constituent of human rights of equality, justice and peace. So the author explores human dignity in Islam. The understanding of the noble concept of dignity can be a powerful tool to educate one's own followers for promotion of equality and justice as well as to create bridges between followers of different religions for world peace and harmonious living together. Upholding intrinsic dignity and fundamental equality can change the world. Human dignity is a word that has the tremendous power to unite the world. Dialogues between religions must go on and human dignity is a good theme for dialogues and initiatives to uphold human rights and promote a better world to live in peace and harmony.

Keywords: Islam, human dignity, dialogue, shari'a.

Noel Sheth hails from a family whose members belong to many religions. Noel was an ardent promotor of dialogue with peoples and religions for peace in the world. He spent his life for interreligious academia. His death in Bogota/Colombia during a conference was sudden, sad and shocking that prevented our meeting in Frankfurt. We never know that we would never meet. Death puts definitely an end to our physical existence but memories remain. Convictions in life after life and resurrection console us and keep our bond of relationships and friendships eternal. Significant persons continue to inspire us through their word and deed even beyond death. In honour of such a noteworthy human, my professor, mentor, colleague and friend Prof. Dr. Noel Sheth SJ, I dedicate my article on human dignity in Islam. Human dignity is a theme dear to him in his efforts to building bridges between peoples, cultures and religions.

Religious, philosophical and legal traditions search for common grounds for dialogues. International conventions use universal terms for breaking barriers, settling issues and building bridges. In such attempts, the concept of human dignity seems to play a vital role. Human dignity is the foundation and the constituent of human rights of equality, justice and peace. The Greco-Roman philosophies exalted human rationality that accounted for human dignity and equality. Judeo-Christian traditions saw humans as the images of God and plead for inviolability of human life and for equal respect. Immanuel Kant grounded human dignity deriving from freedom, rationality and capacity for moral reasoning and thus promoted autonomy and equality. It appears almost self-evident that the intrinsic human dignity underlines a basic equality. Yet, there have been wars between peoples and nations. In the age of biotechnology, humans have been also at times used as biomaterials. The

dehumanizing, tragic Nazi incident has driven international bodies to return to human nature and human dignity to safeguard human species. Since the World War II, there has been a growing awareness of fundamental human dignity and equality of all people despite differences of gender, race or religion. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), despite differences of distinctive anthropologies and debated philosophies, has succeeded to establish a common understanding with a universal appeal of human dignity in protection of humanity.

In the present time, there are clashes within Islam due to many extremist attitudes of some groups. In the context of the horrible killings by the Islamic State of Iran Syrian (ISIS), it appears that human rights paradigms are out of picture in Islam. War and violence threaten people and destroy world peace. In the wake of increasing violence by such Jihadi groups in the name of religion, it is more than a mere academic quest to understand the concept of human dignity in Islam in order to prevent tragedies and promote understandings. Does Islam advocate and promote human rights at all? Let us first fathom the concept of dignity in Islam and see whether there are universal human rights on the basis of this God-given dignity.

Everything in Islam depends on the allegiance to the will of Allah. God's majesty, and faith and submission to God are the pivotal pillars of Islam. Islam did not have a systematic system of human right paradigms like Judeo-Christian traditions which had a historical process of judging human actions in the light of the ten commandments and two great commandments of love that ground for human rights. The concept of human dignity does not seem to be familiar to Islam as in Judeo-Christian tradition, as the idea of image of

God is not explicitly found in the Qur'an. The transcendence of God in sharp contrast to human beings is constantly emphasized in the Qur'an, Islamic traditions and theology. These things might invite us rather to think that the idea of human dignity is foreign to Islam. That is not the case.

Islam stresses the moral element in human nature, which has the dignity as a creature of God first and as a believer second. To submit to the one God is essential to complete human nature (*fitrat al-insan*) itself, that is why faith (*iman*) and servitude (*ibada*) are what dignify humans. Human condition (*fitra*) is enhanced by the faith in one God (Allah) through the natural religion (*ajlah*) which is Islam, thus dignity of human consists in the natural submission to God, whom the creation of humans stands in the first place in his entire creation. Obligation is primary in Islam and it is in the fulfilment of obligations that individuals acquire rights. The dignity of humans is only in relation to God. Humans are primarily God's creature.

1. Two Kinds of Human Dignity

In order to understand the right to human dignity in Islam, we need to first know the meaning and kinds of dignity in Islam itself. Dignity may mean many things: honour, great, respect, purity from corruption and an art of perfection. There are two kinds of dignity attributed to humans in Islam according to Allama Mohammad Taqi Dschafari:

- (1) An innate and natural dignity that all humans possess. Unless humans deliberately deceive or commit a crime against themselves or others and thereby reject their own dignity, they are in possession of this valuable quality;
- (2) There is a higher dignity

acquired through the attainment of values, and the use of talents and positive abilities in human nature, and through means of development, perfection and goodness: this dignity is acquirable and desired willfully. The ultimate and outstanding human value pertains precisely to this dignity and greatness.

1.1. *The Natural Dignity*

The natural innate dignity which is not acquired is the one that God awards to every human being. Many verses of the Qur'an and legal traditions speak of this dignity. Islamic scholars and experts primarily refer to the Qur'an to provide a proof for human dignity: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference" (al-Isra: Q 17:70). This Qur'anic verse substantiates quite distinctively that God elevated the sons of Adam (humans) in their nature and placed them above other creatures. On account of this indisputable and decisive reason, humans must recognise the greatness of honour for each other as a right and be committed to this right.

Kamali says that the text [al-Isra Q 17:70] is self-evident and comprehensive in its recognition of dignity for all human beings without limitations or qualifications of any kind. According to al-Alusi (d. 1270/1854), "everyone and all members of human race, including the pious and the sinner, are endowed with dignity, nobility and honour, which cannot be exclusively expounded and identified. Ibn 'Abbas, the Companion of the Prophet Muhammad famed for his Qur'anic exegesis, has commented, however, that

God Most High has honoured mankind by endowing him with the faculty of reason.” Dignity is the right of every human being regardless of colour, race or religion. It is established for every human being as of the moment of birth and it is the natural and absolute right of every one. Mustafa al-Siba’I, Abd al-Hakim Hasan al-Illi, Ahmad Yusri and Sayyid Qutb attempt to inform the world that human dignity is not a privilege of a few, but belongs to pious or of ill-repute, Muslim or non-Muslim. The children of Adam are honoured not because of any specific status but for the very fact that they are human beings. Thus, dignity is not earned by any human effort or meritorious conduct; it is purely an endowment of God’s favour and grace upon every human being.

The origin of this natural dignity exists in the relationship between God and humans: “And when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration” (al-Hijr: Q 15:29) and “so the angels prostrated – all of them entirely” (al-Hijr: Q 15:30). God created humans valuable with a precious grace that even angels fall down before them in adoration. The source of this human greatness consists of characteristics, powers and talents. Through proper use of these gifts in an honest search for a reasonable life, humans appropriate this specification of a valuable and elevated dignity and greatness. On account of human greatness, two important rights emerge: the right to life and the right to the natural dignity that humans are obliged to uphold mutually. Hence, everyone is obliged to respect the right to dignity of the other, who has not forfeited the dignity in oneself or other through fraud or crime. The right to life and the right to dignity are given equal credence. In the Islamic view, human greatness remains intact even after death and no one has the

right to violate the natural dignity. The natural dignity is not earned by or exchanged for money either, as Masada ibn Sadaqa explains it through an incident:

The head of the faithful, Imam Ali (a.) sent 5 Wasaq (ca. 50 Kilo) dates to a man who was generous and magnanimous and never expected anything from the head of the faithful or others. Someone told the head of the faithful: "I swear before God, that he has not requested nothing from you. It would be perhaps 1 Wasaq enough." But the Lord spoke: "God would not like to increase people like you in the society of the faithful. I donate but you show greed. I swear before God, if I do not give him what he hopes from me (personally or from the treasury), unless he asks me for, and I have given him nothing unless for a price that I have received from him, then I have purchased him to sell his dignity. It means that I have forced him to exchange his dignity for 5 Wasaq dates and his face that casts unto the Earth in honour of his and my God.

There is no better evidence than this record for the human dignity and honour. Such traditional evidences make it clear that we will not be in a position to defend the right to life and the obligation to respect the human dignity, when we consider the human life as mere natural phenomenon without any proof of the supernatural level. It is the supernatural, divine power that make human life intrinsically worthy and valuable. This natural dignity is present in every human being and continues to remain intact even after death.

There are many more affirmations of the dignity of humans in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* that clearly state that humans are elevated to the dignified status of God's beloved

children and hence, there is a basic unity and equality of humanity. In the eyes of the Creator, everyone is precious and dignified, thus man as God's vicegerent (*khilafah*) on earth has to treat each other with mutual respect. The Qur'anic declaration on human dignity prompted Weeramantry to express that the Qur'an gives the foundation that dignity is intrinsic to the personality of every individual so that "no regime, however powerful, could take it away from him" and "provides the basis of modern doctrines of human rights." Mutual recognition of human rights springs forth from the equal right to human dignity.

1.2. The Higher Dignity

The higher dignity is above the natural dignity that is also common and available to all humans. The higher dignity is based on the values of fear of God and piety: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you people and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted" (al-Hujurat: Q 49:13). A literal translation of the last sentence sounds better: The most esteemed of you is the one who is the most God-fearing.

Although the children of Adam are endowed with so many powers, talents and virtues, when they refuse to respect human rights, they go astray and become ignorant, ungrateful and hardhearted. It reveals that the most blessed God has only made the prerequisites for securing values, greatness and honour in humans. This means that all positive powers and talents that God has conferred on humans are necessary for dignity and honour and are essential in order to acquire the right to dignity. It does not mean that humans

will be in possession of noble nature and higher dignity in all occasions and under all conditions. When a human being has lust, deceit, corruption and self-centeredness, and uses the powers and talents for unclean purposes, certainly such a human being does not have the right to dignity and noble nature. When one acts against life, greatness and freedom of others, s/he becomes guilty to be reprimanded and punished in defense of the rights of others to life, greatness and freedom.

Muhammad ibn Dschafar Aqba tells about the head of the communities, Imam Ali (a.) and speaks in a preaching in praise of them: "O People, the Prophet Adam (a.) had neither male nor female slaves. All humans are born free, though God has entrusted the responsibility of some people on some others." It follows from this fact that the tradition proves the absence of slavery in Islam and the common greatness and dignity of humanity is brought forward as the basis for freedom, nobility and sincerity. Allah loves every righteous person. The Qur'an says, "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight with you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly" (al-Mumtahanah: Q 60:8). Muhaddis Qummi wrote down a tradition on human greatness in Safinat-ul-Bahar:

Hussein ibn Khalid says that he told Imam Reza (a.): Oh, son of the Prophets, the Prophet of God be blessed, man says that God has created Adam in his image. Is this correct? Imam Reza replied that God would destroy those who omit the beginning of the tradition. The tradition is this: The great Prophet passed by, while two men were fighting with each

other. One said to the other: 'God has formed your face and the face of those who are similar to you, uglily.' The great Prophet spoke: 'Slave of God, do not speak so wickedly. God, the blessed and the majesty, has created Adam similar to his face.'

Using the gifts of God, if one does to act rightfully and righteously, there is a chance for losing this higher dignity. The right to higher dignity as well the respect for this right to the higher dignity from others can be removed when one acts against the nobility, the worth and the greatness of humans. Apart from God, both natural as well as higher dignity do not exist. They are purely gifts of God, in a sense, natural dignity is endowed upon humans eternally and higher dignity is to be earned by individuals using powers, talents and virtues given by God.

2. The Right to Dignity

No individual or a society can claim the right to life for themselves, if they do not respect the right of others to dignity. The right to dignity is not merely a question of demanding respect from others, but it is equally against violation and humiliation. It has both positive and negative elements. Although ignorance does not forfeit the right to dignity of the ignorant person, it should not become the cause for violation and humiliation of the right to dignity of others. Ignorance can be a cause for not acknowledging the right to dignity of oneself and others, but ignorance of rights should never be a justification for violation of rights.

Discussing philosophies of various political theories and schools, for example, of Hobbes and Machiavelli that dichotomise the human society on the one hand, and the values, dignity and respect of human nature for the

proclamation of human rights on the other, Dschafari poses the question: when a thinker or a school asserts that all humans are equal in the use of right to human dignity and honour, and that there exists no difference between humans, is it justifiable of a spiritual order that keep Moses, Jesus and Mohammad on par with Pharaohs, satans and gold worshippers without any difference? He tends to believe that every legal, cultural, political and ethical consideration on equalization of criminals, executioners, enemies of rights and truth with rest of the society is a harm to the human dignity. Making a comparison between two verses of the Qur'an, Dschafari claims that there is a difference in the nobility (al-Isra: Q 17:70) of the persons with different ranks in the order of the higher dignity while all humans without exception are equally conferred with the natural dignity (al-Hujurat: Q 49:13).

3. The Ranks of Dignity

In the view of Islam, it is clear that all humans are inherently in possession of the natural dignity. However, in the practical world they are supposed to use the powers, talents and virtues in order to lead a righteous, dignified life. In the development of human life, there are different ranks corresponding to the reach of individual humans. This rank depends upon the ability and nobility of the person. This higher dignity is an achievement in human developmental stages. In the moral-legal normative realm, this dignity is highly influential. A human being, although inherent with the natural dignity, can go astray and consequently may lose the acquired ranks of higher dignity.

Dschafari lists the ranks of this dignity: (1) The people in the first rank are in their primary developing states who

are not yet reached the level of understanding principles and laws as foundations for life. They possess the external shell of human life with unused spiritual capacities and personality in the status of a seeds that are sown in the field of their being. They live with factors of natural and social environment and natural requirements of material dimension. The proof for dignity for the natural creation of humans is found not only in the Qur'an (al-Isra: Q 17:70) but also in the traditions. This dignity is natural and intrinsic to all humans as members of the family of God. (2) A human being, who during the stages of development of his personality recognizes his fellow humans as equal, bases his life on principles and laws, is harmony with life of others and considers pleasures, pains, usefulness and dignity of others as in oneself, feels obliged to respect the status of others on account of principles and laws, has the higher dignity in addition to the natural dignity. (3) When a person develops himself in the path of perfection and acts not only with reason and conscience but also out of love and serves the humanity, he is said to have obtained a greater dignity and deserves the paradise of God. At this stage, one has overcome pleasures and egoism, and is able to strive for higher goals of life. (4) In addition to the firm faith and consciousness of obligations, when a human being reaches the stage of being representatives of God on earth or becomes prophets who receive the revelation of God, he moves to the higher stage of dignity. (5) The next rank of dignity belongs to those who accepted Islam and applies his nature and reason for the search of the right faith and the best commandments using the spirit, thoughts, conscience, feelings and nature, and finally (6) the followers of Islam who have obtained a perfection and fear of God are said to be most noble ones (al-Hujurat: Q 49:13).

The right to higher dignity is a preference or characteristic of an individual that is neither transferrable nor dispensable. Attached to the right to dignity are the rights to education, freedom and equality. In the light of Islam, the protection of these rights is important. Likewise, the correction of an individual who in his own freedom gives up these rights is a duty. In this world, a human life without dignity is equal to or lower than the life of an animal. An individual without dignity despite having powers and talents can cause so much of harm to the society. Dschafari believes that it is not so much bad intention or enmity, but animalistic attitude of disrespecting human dignity can damage the humanity. In other words, it is not possible for an individual who has comprehended the greatness, honour and dignity of humans to inflict humiliation upon others and thereby violate dignity of others. Persons in families, societies or groups who disregard the rights and commands do not own value and dignity themselves.

4. Human Dignity in Islamic Theology and Jurisprudence

In Islamic theology, human creatures are radically different from their creator who provides them with sufficient spiritual and material sustenance in this world and in the afterlife. Humans are legally categorized as male-female, free-slave, Muslim-nonMuslim, etc. Without trespassing the legal limits (*hudud*), they are supposed to behave as per the category. Both theologically and legally, humans are considered to be free: “human freedom is a gift from God, so it is possible for any individual to follow and submit to God or to reject His message. In the same way, it is possible to follow and obey or reject his law (*shari‘a*). In any case, the conception of the human being in Islam ‘is not merely

religious' (cf. Shaltut 1980: 8) but comprehensive and multiple, and it is always line to freedom and liberation." Though the Islamic theology does not speak on ethical and legal aspects of human dignity, it is rooted in Islamic sources and their later interpretation (*tafsir*), which is an important element for consideration of human dignity. Some of the most important Islamic scholars and Qur'anic interpreters such as Mahmud Shaltut tried to interpret key concepts of revelation along with its legal development in the light of theology and jurisprudence.

The Qur'an, as we have seen, gives high consideration to human beings with ample support for an Islamic understanding of human dignity. The German Jesuit and a renowned scholar on Islam, Christian Troll, similar to other Islamic scholars such as Ali al-Qasimi and Ahmad S. Moussalli, identifies four Qur'anic references to the assertion of a special human dignity bestowed upon them by God.

1. And We have certainly honoured [*wa-laqaad karram-na*] the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them [*wa-faddalna-hum*] over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference. (al-Isra: Q 17:70)
2. And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority [*khalifa*]." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not

know.” (al-Baqara: Q 2:30)

3. Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant. (al-Ahzab: Q 33:72)
4. And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam – from their lions – their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we have testified.” [This] – lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, “Indeed, we were of this universe.” (al-A’raf: Q 7:171)

Interpretation of the verse al-Isra 17:70 would mean that “the idea of having honored [*karamat al-Insan*] by God allows us to speak of an intrinsic value bestowed by God on human beings that requires special treatment. This honor may come from the fact of being preferred over other creatures from the capacity God gives humans to rule the world, or from the commandments given in the Qur’an that protect people.” The term successor (*khalifa*), open to many interpretation, in the verse al-Baqara 2:30 would also imply that a special kind of deputy of God on earth. Being God’s representative would parallel the idea of God’s image on earth. The verse al-Ahzab 33: 72 refers to the trust that only humans are able to assume it. Troll interprets that the term ‘trust’ is a reference to human freedom and moral responsibility. Troll and many Islamic scholars interpret the aspect of “testifying” in the verse al-A’raf 7:171 as the idea of human dignity.

Miklos Maroth says that the Islamic tradition of human dignity is promoted only by shari‘a and the Qur’anic treatment of slaves and women confirm the idea of different levels of human dignity. However, “Islamic jurisprudence interpreted these levels by stating human equality: all human beings (‘children of Adam’) are Muslims in their intimate natural condition by birth (*fitrat al-insan*), so Islam is the natural way of worshipping God. In this sense, equality is established as a natural paradigm.”

There are however conflicting views in contemporary Islam, “on the one hand, for conservatives and fundamentalist theologians, religious obligations are prior to human freedom. We are free, as an expression of our human dignity, only after having performed those obligations. Therefore, society should compel people to fulfill their religious obligations. On the other hand, contemporary Muslim theologians in dialogue with modernity think that human freedom should precede religious obligations and that it only makes sense to fulfill them when we do so freely. This position allows thinking of a human dignity common to all men and women.” One of the Islamic thinkers, the Shiite Abdulaziz Sachedina asserted that a common human nature (*fitra*) in the Qur’an implies shared ethical obligations and equality of every human being and presupposes a set of human rights.

5. Islamic Philosophy and Human Dignity

Muslim philosophers were from the early period of the Islamic history (9th-12th century) devoted to the study of the human condition. Al-Farabi (872-950 CE) and Ibn Sina (980-1037 CE) were the first to study human nature and its role in cosmogony (metaphysics) and in society (ethics and politics) different from the perspectives of the Muslim

theologians (*mutakallimun*) and jurists (*fuqaha*). While philosophers studied the essence of God and His attributes, theologians and jurists focused on the development of a strong canonical legal corpus. The field of ethics was primarily a matter of philosophy.

The Iraqi Islamic scholar ‘Ali al-Qasimi defines Islam as a “liberating revolution for the human being,” and connects the essence of humanity to four liberating values: life (*al-haya*), freedom (*al-hurriyya*), equality (*al-musawa*) and justice (*al-‘adl*). The moral and legal foundations for other human rights can be inferred from these four values. Ben Achour affirms that there is no single conception of humanity in Islam and thus there is a need to go beyond the exclusive religious framework for foundations of universal human rights. Ben Achour establishes that justice which is a Qur’anic duty which appeals to the whole humankind. Similarly, Ahmad S. Moussalli says that religion (*al-din*), the self or soul (*al-nafs*), reason (*al-‘aql*), family (*al-nasl*) and money (*al-mal*) are the five human fundamental necessities which at the same function as their duties, which are preserved by the shari‘a. Moussalli believes these interrelated necessities and duties affirm the central role of human dignity. To defend freedom and pluralism based on justice in general interest of society is to uphold human dignity.

6. Human Dignity in the Shari‘a

The Arabic expression ‘*karamat al-insan*’ is equivalent to human dignity. The root ‘*krm*’ appears in many Qur’anic verses meaning ‘to bestow honour upon’ or ‘to venerate’ or ‘to treat with deference.’ The Qur’ani dictionary has another equivalent term ‘*faddala*’ which means ‘to like better’ or

‘to give preference to’. The verse Q17:62 mentions that the angels prostrated to Adam following the commandment of Allah, but Iblis (Satan) protested saying: ‘Shall I prostrate myself along with one whom Thou hast created of clay? Tell me, Lord, can I submit to this one whom Thou hast honoured above me (*karramta ‘aleyya*)?’ The meaning of the word here is simply ‘venerate’. Similarly, the oft-quoted verse Q17:70 says: ‘we have indeed honoured the children of Adam (*karramna bani Adam*), and provided for them means of transportation in land and sea, and given them wholesome food and exalted them high above the greater part of Our creation.’ The term ‘to honour’ implies that Allah provides for human beings with everything they need for a comfortable life. Interpreting the same verse, al-Qurtubi says that humans have a privileged position (*karamat*) in creation with tall stature, beautiful form and great abilities. God is the only source of *karam* and it is God Himself who bestows *karam* on humans. Thus, Karamat is not an inherent quality of human achievement, but a special gift of Allah.

Belhaj interprets that this privilege is given only to Adam’s children. It is disputed whether God gives *karam* to all human beings. The verse Q14:49 says: ‘Verily, the most honoured among you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous (*atqa*) among you.’ The term ‘*atqa*’ is often translated as ‘most righteous,’ but the etymological meaning is ‘most pious’ or ‘most God-fearing.’ Maroth draws a conclusion that God does give *karam* to all human beings, but the degree varies in proportion to one’s devotedness. For modern philosophers, it would not be difficult to make the distinction between the *karam* as ontological category bestowed upon all humans, while the religious or social dignity might vary in degrees corresponding to one’s

faithfulness to Allah.

The term *karam* normally refers to an elevated position and special treatment for a comfortable life. The expression *maqam karim* is translated as 'pleasant abodes,' (Q26: 58-9) and as 'comfortable dwelling' (Q44:26-8). It means that a pious and God-fearing creature deserves a life in security, free of harm, in well-being and comfort. Humans are even superior to angels who are commanded to prostrate to Adam (Q7:12). While angels have no freedom but to follow the commandments of God, humans have free will.

Man is a rational being, however, always has a choice, on which his dignity depends. If he obeys Allah he will be dignified, but if he rejects Allah's commandments he will be punished. Allah's commandments revealed to his chosen creature can be found in the Qur'an, and, consequently, Qur'an gives everybody a guideline on how to attain human dignity.

The elevated creature is free from any kind of subjection except the worship of God. It is in submission to the will of Allah, humans preserve their privilege of dignified position and those who obey Allah's commandments are further elevated to the rank of His representatives (*khulafa'*) on earth. Pious ones will be dignified and impious will be humiliated. Belhaj and Bielefeldt infer that the Qur'an speaks of human dignity primarily in terms of morals and not in terms of law. Despite the understanding of graded social dignity of humans by various scholars, Izzeddeen al-Khateeb al-Tameemi, the chief qadi in Jordan, speaks of the equal dignity which is inseparable from humanity itself.

So, human dignity originates from Divine Will

and the immortal law of God. Hence, human dignity is inseparable from a human being whether a male or female, irrespective of colour, time, place, social position, prestige among people, age, even if still a foetus, or dead lying in his grave... In other words, dignity and human beings form a syndrome that never part with each other. Dignity is an admirable value in human being's life. Human esteem does not emanate from universal declarations, international resolutions, regional agreements or inter-state conferences. Commitment to it from an Islamic standpoint is based on doctrine, not on accidental interest or temporal benefits.

The foundation of human dignity, which is a doctrine of Islamic religion, is founded on the Qur'an that gives the highest value to human life. The duty of shari'a is to preserve human life and dignity and protect them from violation and chaos. Encroachment on human life is prohibited and humiliation on human dignity with reputation is forbidden. Defamation is a major sin whether against Muslim or dhimmi (non-Muslims). The shari'a bans everything that disturbs the security of society and threatens the high values derived from human dignity. The shari'a prohibits anything that endanger the lives, honour, minds and property of individuals and the necessary condition of human dignity is the safe and secure life individually and in family and society. Toleration of the deviant lifestyle of any person is an offence against human dignity. Deviant behaviours such as rape and adultery are not mere ethical violations but require legal prohibition. Human dignity excludes all kinds of behaviour that go against the general rules of nature. Human dignity is not limited to the lifetime of individuals, all humans before birth as well as after death have equally

dignity, though the degree of dignity might vary according to their loyalty to God.

According to the shari'a understanding, human dignity is a reality in humans but in earthly life it may vary in degrees in different humans. We may infer that the dignity of humans in its existential human nature is guaranteed equally, but the social honour may differ among them. The purpose of human life is thus to attain the degree of a perfect being and to restore the dignity of proximity (*qurba*) to God in freedom through self-preservation and natural duty of reproduction. The main task of the religious law is to ensure the welfare and well-being of humans, which constitute human dignity. Thus, the fundamental duty of shari'a is to protect and defend human dignity.

7. Human Dignity in Qanun

Qanun (canon) is the generally accepted document of the Islamic countries deliberated by leading politicians of the Muslim countries in Cairo. According to qanun, man is the deputy [*khalifat*] of God on Earth, and this fact defines his position. The aim of this document is to "affirm his [mankind's] freedom and right to a dignified life in accordance with the Islamic *Shari'a*." Article 1§1 of the Cairo qanun states:

All human beings form one family whose members are united by their subordination to Allah and descend from Adam. All men are equal in terms of basic human dignity and basic obligations and responsibilities, without any discrimination on the basis of race, colour, language, belief, sex, religion, political affiliation, social status or other considerations. The true religion is the guarantee for enhancing such dignity along the

path to human integrity.

The Cairo Declaration of Human Rights speaks of equality of human dignity for all humans, however the last reference to 'true religion' is open to interpretations. Subjecting Cairo Declaration to the Islamic shari'a quoting the Islamic Ummah as the best community while making many exceptions for shari'a has raised objections. Ann Elizabeth Mayer critiques that "the Cairo Declaration treats dignity as being congruent with the inequalities mandated by versions of Islamic law that are favoured by conservative Muslim opinion that subordinates women and non-Muslims," and concludes that "once scrutinized, dignity as used in the Cairo Declaration is revealed to be a concept that embraces inequalities. It presupposes the superiority of Islam over other faiths and the retention of traditional understandings of Islamic law, viewed as mandating a hierarchy granting male Muslims superior rights and subjecting women and non-Muslims to discriminatory treatment." This problem is to some extent clarified by a great Islamic scholar Mohammad Hashim Kamali who says that "the Qur'anic vision of mankind is basically that of a single, unified entity, regardless of any differences of origin and status. Unity and equality are the necessary postulates of human dignity." To authenticate his claim of the unity of mankind, he refers to the essence and origin of humanity inherent in the Qur'an (al-Nisa: Q 4:1):

O mankind! Keep your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single soul and created its mate of the same [kind] and created from them countless men and women. And keep your duty to your Lord, by Whom you demand your rights from one another, and [observe] the ties of kinship.

The key phrase '*khalaqakum min nafsin wahidatin*' – He created you from a single soul – refers to both male and female, the first parents and indicates that "Islam is addressed to humanity at large, and all its basic teachings on justice, promotion of good and prevention of evil (*amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*), the doing of good (*ihsan*), cooperation in good works (*ta'awun*) and building and beautifying the earth (*'imar al-ard*) are addressed to all people. Similarly, the Qur'anic designation of *khilafah*, that is, God's appointment of man as His vicegerent on earth, and the numerous references in the Qur'an to the subjugation (*taskhir*) of the universe to the benefit of man, are addressed to the whole mankind. The essence of worship (*'ibadah*) is also a common theme of all religions."

The typical address in the Qur'an 'O people' (*ya ayyuha al-nas*) is for humanity at large without any specification of a section or group. All humans are included. No one is excluded. Therefore, "there could be no affront to the human dignity of any single person without there being an affront to the dignity of all – including the dignity of the perpetrator of the indignity." Thus, Islam seeks unity in origin, unity in creation and unity in basic values for the benefit and improvement of all people who must enjoy equality and equal treatment without any discrimination. Islam has placed an infinite value on humans, because God has made them sacred (al-Isra: Q 17:33). Al-Ghazali says: "in respect of the sanctity of life and the prohibition of aggression against it, Muslims and non-Muslims are equal. An attack on the personal safety of non-Muslims involves the same punishment in this world and the Hereafter."

Concluding Remarks

In Islam, life is seen as a God-given gift and human life as a privileged one in the creation. The dignity of humans is sacrosanct and inherent in relation to the Creator. Though there are various ranks in the social honour, the natural human dignity is one, equal and common to the whole humanity. Dignity respects freedom and overrules compulsion including in religion (al-Baqarah: Q 2:256). Dignity can be violated by deviant behaviours and defamation. It is human obligation to respect human dignity and thus to show obedience to God.

There are other Islamic views that justify inequality of humans and various grades of higher dignity. Extremist Islamic groups that perpetrate violence seem to take few verses literally out of context in the name religion and not to have understood the underlying Qur'anic teachings on the fundamental, natural dignity that stands as foundation for universal human rights. Elements that cause violence and divisive attitudes need internal corrections with the application of human mind in the interpretation of the Scriptures and traditions.

There is a great need for openness from the part of Islamic scholars to re-read the sources and principles of the shari'a in the light of God-given gift of human reason keeping the universal principle in mind that a just, loving and merciful God would neither allow inequalities and discriminations among humans nor will he wish bloodshed.

The understanding of the noble concept of dignity in religious traditions can be a powerful tool to educate one's own followers for promotion of equality and justice as well as to create bridges between followers of different religions

for world peace and harmonious living together. Upholding intrinsic dignity and fundamental equality can change the world. Human dignity is a word that has the tremendous power to unite the world. Dialogues between religions must go on and human dignity is a good theme for dialogues and initiatives to uphold human rights and promote a better world to live in peace and harmony.

Notes

1. Mona Siddiqui, "Between God's Mercy and God's Law: Human Dignity in Islam," in: Paul Middleton (ed.), *The God of Love and Human Dignity: Essays in Honour of George N. Newlands* (London: T & T Clark, 2007) 51-64, 51.
2. See Juan Antonio Macias and Gonzalo Villagran Medina SJ, "Human Dignity as a Space for Islamic-Catholic Dialogue on Human Rights," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 26/1 (2016) 75-91, 83.
3. See Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, reprint 2011) xv.
4. Allama Mohammad Taqi Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," *Al-Fadscher: Die Morgendämmerung*, Issue 149, Vol. 31 (April-Juni 2014) 21-27, 22. All the translations in this article from German to English are mine.
5. The Qur'anic quotations are taken from the Sahih International. Available at www.quran.com (accessed in November 2017).
6. See Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 1.
7. Mahmud al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, vol. XV (Beirut: Dar al-Turath al-'Arabi, undated) 117. Quoted in: Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 1.
8. Quoted in: Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 1; Mustafa al-Siba'i, *Ishtirakiyyat al-Islam*, 2nd ed. (Damascus, al-Dar al-Qawmiyyah li'l-Tiba'ah wa'l-Nashir, 1379/1960) 66; 'Abd al-Hakim Hasan al-Illi, *al-Hurriyyat al-'Ammah* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1403/1983) 361. Kamali narrates an incident mentioned in the hadith in order to show that religious bearing did not restrict ~~human dignity of all humans that Prophet saw a funeral procession~~

passing by: upon seeing it, he rose in respect and remained standing. One of his Companions informed him that the deceased person was a Jew. The Prophet disapproved the intervention and posed the question, "Was he not a human being?" Thus, he affirmed the fact that the inherent human dignity conferred by God is universal and calls for unqualified respect. Similarly, the Prophet's Companions took part in the funeral of a Christian woman as recorded by Ibn Hazm (in his *al-Muhalla* (K. *al-Jana'iz*)). Quoted from Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Huquq al-Insan bayn Ta'alim al-Islam wa I'lan al-Umam al-Muttahidah* (Alexandria, Egypt: Dar al-Da'wah li'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzi', 1413/1993) 37. See Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 1

9. See Ahmad Yusri, *Huquq al-Insan wa Asbab al-'Unf fi'i-Mujtama' al-Islami fi Daw' Ahkam al-Shari'a* (Alexandria, Egypt: Mansha'at al-Ma'arif, 1993) 30; quoted in: Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 1f.
10. See Sayyid Qutb, *at-'Adalah al-Ijtima'iyah fi'l-Islam*, 4th ed. (Cairo: 'Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1373/1954) 59; quoted in: Quoted in: Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 2.
11. See Kamali *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 2, from Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuh*, 3rd ed. 8 vols. (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1409/1989) VI: 720: "Even a criminal is entitled to dignified treatment. For punishment is meant to be for retribution and reform, not indignity and humiliation."
12. See Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 22.
13. See Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 23.
14. Quoted in: Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 23, original from Masada ibn Sadaqa, *Wasail al-Schia*, vol. 2, p.118.
15. The Qur'anic verse, *al-Isra* 4:1, says: "O mankind! Keep your duty to your Lord, who created you from a single soul and created its mate of the same [kind] and created from them countless men and women. And keep your duty to your Lord, by Whom you demand your rights from one another, and [observe] the ties of kinship."
16. J. Weeramantry, *Islamic Jurisprudence: An International Perspective* (Basingstoke (UK): Macmillan, 1988) 64; Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 2.
17. See Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 23.

18. Quoted in Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 23, originally from Shaykh Faiz Muhsin Kashani, *Al-Wafī*, vol. 14 (1978) 20.
19. Quoted in: Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 23, original from Muhaddis Qummi, *Safinat-ul-Bahar*, vol. 2, pp. 54-55.
20. See Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 23-24: Dschafari raises a question: „Kann eine, Person, die das Recht der anderen auf Würde nicht achtet, selbst ein Recht auf Würde besitzen?... [er antwortet]: Das Nicht-Beachten des Rechtes auf eine natürliche Würde und Ehre hat nicht nur eine Ursache. Die Antwort hängt von dem Grund der Missachtung und Beleidigung ab.“
21. See Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 24-25. He quotes from the Qur'an to oppose the equality in this sense: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted" (al-Hujurat: Q 49:13).
22. Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 25-26.
23. While categorizing the natural dignity (1) and the higher dignity into five ranks (2-6), Dschafari has strongly confirmed about the natural dignity in humans and through the higher dignity tried to list different levels of honour in religion and society. He does not contract the idea of natural dignity, which is inborn and inherent in humans, as the Qur'an as well as other hadiths and Islamic scholars explain. We cannot undermine his idea of higher dignity, since it plays a normative-legal role in governing the society.
24. See Dschafari, "Das Recht auf menschliche Würde," 26-27.
25. Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space for Islamic-Catholic Dialogue on Human Rights," 83; Mahmud Shaltut, *Al-Islam 'aqida wa-shari'a* (Cairo: Al-Shuruq, 1980).
26. See Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space for Islamic-Catholic Dialogue on Human Rights," 84. Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006).
27. Christian Troll, *Dialogar Desde La Diferencia: Como Oriestarse En Las Replaciones Entre Cristianos Y Musulmanes* (Santander: Sal

- Tarrae, 2010) 97-100; Cited in Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space for Islamic-Catholic Dialogue on Human Rights," 83-84.
28. Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space for Islamic-Catholic Dialogue on Human Rights," 84.
 29. See Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 84; Mona Siddiqui, "Between God's Mercy and God's Law: Human Dignity in Islam," in: Paul Middleton (ed.), *The God of Love and Human Dignity: Essays in Honour of George N. Newlands* (London: T&T Clark, 2007) 51-64.
 30. Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 85; Christian Troll, *Dialogar Desde La Diferencia: Como Oriestarse En Las Replaciones Entre Cristianos Y Musulmanes* (Santander: Sal Tarrae, 2010) 97-100.
 31. See Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," in: Marcus Müwell et al. (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 155-162; Christian Troll, *Dialogar Desde La Diferencia*, 99. Cited in Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 85.
 32. Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 85.
 33. Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 85-86.; Troll, "Dialogar Desde La Diferencia," 104-015.
 34. See Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 86; Abdullah Sachedina, *Islam and the Challenge of Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 71-72.
 35. See Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 83.
 36. Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 86; 'Ali al-Qasimi, *Huduq al-insan bayna al-shari'a al-islamiyya wa-l-i'lan al-alam* (Rabat: Ramsis, 2001) 27.
 37. See Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 87; Yadh Ben Achour, *La deuxieme Fatiha: L'Islam et la pensee des droits de l'homme* (Pariss: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011) 30.
 38. Cited in: Macias and Medina, "Human Dignity as a Space....," 87; Ahmad Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy: Pluralism and Human Rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001) 126.

39. Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 155f.
40. Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 156; Majma'at al-lughat al-'arabiyya (ed.), Mu'jam al-faz al-Qur'an (al-Qahirat, 1990).
41. Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 156.
42. See Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 156; Abu Abdallah al-Qurtubi, al-Jami' li-alikam al-Quran, ed. Abdallah al-Turki (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-risala, Undated).
43. Cited in: Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 156; A. Belhaj, "Karamat al-insan – emberi meltosag," in: M. Miklos Maroth (ed.), Az iszlám politikaelmelete: Terminologiai vizsgalat (Piliscsaba: Avicenna Kaido, 2009) 196; A. Belhaj, Muslim Political Theory: A Comparative Terminological Investigation, ed. Miklos Maroth (Piliscsaba: Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2010).
44. See Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 156; The contemporary Islamic scholars (Belhaj 2009: 196; al-Qurtubi (undated): 125-6) refer to this kind of graded dignity from the expression al-takrim al-ilahi li-'l-insan.
45. See Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 157.
46. Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 157.
47. See Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 157; Belhaj (2009) 196; M. F. Othman, luquq al-insan baina 'l-shari'at al-islamiyya wa 'l-fikr al-qanun al-gharbi (Dar al-Shuruq, 1983) 62.
48. Belhaj (2009) 196: cited from H. Bielefeldt, "Western versus Islamic Human Right Conceptions? A Critique of Cultural Essentialism in the Discussions on Human Rights," Political Theory 28/1 (2000) 109.
49. Izzeddeen al-Khateeb al-Tameemi, Islam and Contemporary Issues (Amman: 2003) 462. Qutoed in: Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 158.
50. See: al-Tameemi, Islam and Contemporary Issues, 474f.
51. L. Milliot and F. P. Blanc, Introduction a l'etude de droit musulman (Paris: Dalloz, 2001) 173; Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 160: "There is, however, one open question: does everybody have the same dignity, or is the dignity of mankind in

general limited to some elements only, while some other elements are given to those only who are pious Muslims? From what has been said, various conclusions may be drawn. It seems that all human beings have the same gifts as far as man's place in the creation is concerned. This must be a matter of general agreement. It is not clear whether the other elements of human dignity (secure life and what is connected with it) are part of the dignity of all human beings. Some Muslims authors are ready to acknowledge that human dignity as such is given to everybody, while some others exclude from human dignity everybody who is not a devoted Muslim." Abdessamad Belhaj asserts: "The sacred nature of human beings does not only apply to Muslims: it is extended to all those with whom Muslims have made peace treaties... or defence treaties... Nevertheless, certain interpretations inside the Muslim world tend to dehumanize non-believers. Unlike the mainstream interpretation that understands the concept of karama as being concerned with all human beings as children of Adam, these radical interpretations restrict its sense to believers who actively practise their faith."

52. The Nineteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (Session of Peace, Interdependence and Development), held in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt, from 9-14 Muharram 1411H (31 July to 5 August 1990). The 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, which was put forward by the Organization of the Islamic Conference – renamed in 2011 the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the organization to which all Muslim majority countries belong – has outstripped other Islamic declarations in terms of international prestige. Online at www.oic-oci.org/english/article/human.htm; Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments, vol. II, Regional Instruments (New York, Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1997) 475-6.
53. The Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam, as quoted in: Miklos Maroth, "Human Dignity in the Islamic World," 161. The adjective 'dignified' refers to human rights directly and human dignity indirectly.
54. Further, Article 10 of the Cairo Declaration says: "Islam is the religion of true unspoiled nature. It is prohibited to exercise any form of pressure on man or to exploit his poverty or ignorance in order to force him to change his religion to another religion or to atheism."

55. Ann Elizabeth Mayer, "The Islamic World and the Alternative Declarations of Human Rights," in: Marcus Müweller et al. (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 407-413.
56. Mayer, "The Islamic World and the Alternative Declarations of Human Rights," 412; see also David Johnston, "Maqasid al-Shari'a: Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Muslim Theologies of Human Rights," *Die Welt des Islams* 47 (2007) 149-187; Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics*, 5th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012).
57. Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 5.
58. Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 6.
59. Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 8.
60. Al-Ghazali, *Huquq al-Insan*, 54; Quoted in: Kamali, *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, 22.

Date Received: Oct 2, 2018

Date Accepted: Nov 3, 2018

No of Words: 8840



Our Contributors

Prof. Dr. Rekha Chennattu RA, is an Associate Faculty Member at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth and a Member of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference – Office of Theological Concerns (FABC-OTC). She holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America. She was a participant at the Synod of Bishops on New Evangelization in October 2012. She has authored many books and published more than 100 scholarly articles in journals and books in India and abroad. She is currently the Superior General of the Congregation of the Religious of the Assumption, residing at Paris, France.

J. Charles Davis, a Priest of Jammu-Srinagar Diocese, has specialized in bioethics and had been a Professor of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth. His book “The Ethics of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research: Proposals for A Legal Framework for India” has become authoritative in the field. Currently he is back in Germany doing his habilitation at Albert Ludwigs University of Freiburg with the prestigious Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellowship. Email:davischarlesj@gmail.com.

Dr Kamaladevi Kunkolienker has been teaching “Philosophy” for last 31 years in P.E.S.’ College of Arts and Science, Farmagudi-Ponda-Goa, currently as Associate Professor and Head of the Department, Philosophy. Achieved her doctoral degree in “Philosophy of Mind”. She has been

actively involved in research in Science-Religion Dialogue and have presented research papers at the “World Congress of Philosophy” and have also published several research papers and articles at State, National and International level. Actively involved in bio-ethics field by virtue of being a member of ethics committee of a reputed firm. Email: kaamakhya_k@rediffmail.com

Rt Rev Thomas Menamparampil SDB is currently the apostolic administrator of Diocese of Jowai appointed by Pope Francis on 3 February 2014. He served as the bishop of Dibrugarh for 11 years and the Archbishop of Guwahati for 20 years before his retirement on 18 January 2012. He is a prolific writer and a well-known thinker and activist. Email: menamabp@gmail.com.

Rev Kuruvilla Pandikattu is the Dean of Philosophy at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth and has been actively involved in Science-Religion Dialogue. His areas of interest: meaning of death, anthropology, science and spirituality for human enhancement and life management.

Rev Dr Rudolf Heredia is an eminent scholar, thinker and critic of culture. A sociologist by profession, he has several well-known books to his credit, including *Changing Gods: Rethinking Conversion in India* and *Taking Sides*. Email: rudiheredia@gmail.com

Rev Dr Vadappuram M Jose SJ is a full time professor of pastoral theology at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth and a resident of Papal Seminary, Pune. He has authored numerous articles and books and attended various national and international seminars. His areas of specialization: Liturgy, pastoral theology, social involvement. Email: vmjose@gmail.com.

On Dialogue

“If there is one word that we should never tire of repeating, it is this: dialogue. We are called to promote a culture of dialogue by every possible means and thus to rebuild the fabric of society. The culture of dialogue entails a true apprenticeship and a discipline that enables us to view others as valid dialogue partners, to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and people from different cultures as worthy of being listened to. Today we urgently need to engage all the members of society in building ‘a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter’ and in creating ‘a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society’. Peace will be lasting in the measure that we arm our children with the weapons of dialogue, that we teach them to fight the good fight of encounter and negotiation. In this way, we will bequeath to them a culture capable of devising strategies of life, not death, and of inclusion, not exclusion.” — Pope Francis

“I strongly feel that it is only when there is a deep understanding of one’s own religious beliefs and commitments that progress can be made in achieving true understanding and respect for the religious values and beliefs of others. Engaging in interfaith dialogue does not in any way mean undermining one’s own faith or religious tradition. Indeed, interfaith dialogue is constructive only when people become firmly grounded in their own religious traditions and through that process gain a willingness to listen and respect the beliefs of other religions. ” — David R. Smock,

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Inter-Religious Dialogue

"I cannot engage in dialogue if I am closed to others. Openness? Evenmore: acceptance! Come to my house, enter my heart. My heart welcomes you. It wants to hear you. This capacity for empathy enables a true human dialogue In which words, ideas and questions arise from an experience of fraternity and shared humanity."
Pope Francis (1936-)

"The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor is a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth."
Swami Vivekananda (1863 - 1902)

