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Benedict XVI, Human Dignity, and Absolute Moral Norms

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Abstract

Pope Benedict XVI often uses the concept of the dignity of the human person in his discourse. This article firstly attempts to present a synthesis of Benedict XVI's understanding of human dignity. The result is a multidimensional understanding of human dignity based on the belief that the human person is created in the image of God. Human dignity is constituted by the given-ness of human existence, the capacities inherent in being human—freedom, reason, love and community—and the telos of human existence, namely, spiritual union with God and the practical realisation of a peaceful and mutually edifying human coexistence. Based on this understanding of human dignity, Benedict XVI develops a normative morality. The second part of this article asks whether interpretations of this normative morality that would claim that some of these norms are absolute moral norms are in fact correct. Particular attention is paid to the apparent equation or reduction of human dignity to the dignity of life. The conclusion is, though it is possible to read Benedict XVI's normative morality as advocating absolute moral norms, such an interpretation would be usually incorrect in light of Benedict XVI's more comprehensive understanding of human dignity.

Keywords

Benedict XVI, dignity, human dignity, right to life, moral

This article raises questions regarding the normative moral language that one finds in the discourse of Pope Benedict XVI and how this language relates to the seemingly rich and multidimensional vision of the dignity of the human person that Benedict XVI appears to advocate. Of particular interest are those statements made by Pope Benedict XVI where the potential exists for them to be interpreted as referring to absolute moral norms that may not, under any circumstances, be contravened.

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Importantly, with regard to method, this article restricts itself to discourses made by Pope Benedict XVI during the first two years of his pontificate. This means that this is not an analysis of the thought of Joseph Ratzinger on matters of morals and human dignity, but rather, very specifically, the current pope. The two should not be treated in the same way, because, while Joseph Ratzinger was an influential and prominent theologian, he had a very specific role as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that would have accordingly influenced much of his writing. Similarly, as Pope Benedict XVI, his role in the life of the Church is different and this is likely to affect how he speaks theologically.[1] This lesson was learned during the fallout surrounding Benedict XVI's academic lecture at Regensburg.[2] The negative response that it received in many quarters was precisely because it was said by the pope and not by Joseph Ratzinger.

In addition, the method used here makes no distinction between the relative 'authority' of various kinds of papal discourse. Therefore, a statement in an encyclical is as important with regards to this analysis as an address to an ambassador, a general audience or a homily. The reason for this approach is that, again in light of Regensburg, the distinctions that knowledgeable Catholics might make regarding the authority of various statements made by the pope are not relevant in a world of soundbites. As far as the media, the non-Catholic audience, and I suspect also a large number of Catholics are concerned, whatever the pope says is important because he is the pope, not just an academic theologian.[3]

Benedict XVI's views on morality and how it relates to human dignity are of particular importance to a wider audience in that the concept of human dignity lies at the root of an increasing number of ethical and legal instruments in today's world.[4] Furthermore, as the

[1] Others who prefer to make a distinction between the thought of Ratzinger and Benedict XVI include Eamon Duffy, "Benedict XVI and the Eucharist," *New Blackfriars,* 88, 1014 (2006): 195–212, and David N. Power, "Contrast and Complementarity: Two Approaches to the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church,* 5, 3 (2005): 256–264.

[2] See Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," Lecture to the Representatives of Science (University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006).

[3] I am not suggesting that we should necessarily accept this 'creeping infallibility.' It is important that we continually point out the relative 'authority' of particular documents and statements. Nevertheless, I also maintain that the Catholic Church, like any media savvy organisation, should be aware that any statements may be interpreted as authoritative or representative. This article proceeds with this possibility in mind.

[4] See Mirko Bagaric and James Allan, "The Vacuous Concept of Dignity," *Journal of Human Rights*, 5 (2006): 257–270, for a useful list of instruments that contain references to the notion of the human dignity.

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leader of a global organisation that claims over one billion adherents, one cannot deny that what Benedict XVI says will be relevant to believers and non-believers alike. Therefore, what follows will first present a synthesis of Benedict XVI's apparent understanding of the concept of the dignity of the human person. Based on this understanding of human dignity, Benedict XVI then seems to outline a normative morality, often using the language of human rights. Aspects of this normative morality will then be analyzed in relation to Benedict XVI's understanding of human dignity.

1. Benedict XVI's Vision of the Dignity of the Human Person

Pope Benedict XVI used the word dignity, or variants thereof (e.g. dignified), 328 times on 189 separate occasions during the first two years of his pontificate, i.e., up to the end of April 2007.[5] He does not always connect the term with the human person; for example, he speaks of the dignity of Christ,[6] or the dignity of cardinals.[7] This research primarily takes into account those references to dignity that appear to be connected with the notion of the dignity of the human person.

Many of Benedict XVI's references to the dignity of the human person are brief. The dignity of the human person is referred to in a way that suggests that it is a normative criterion.[8] This is understandable when one realises that this is precisely how Benedict understands the dignity of the human person. For example, Benedict acknowledges the importance of human rights, but insists that they are founded on the dignity of the human person: "a stable, not relative, not optional foundation."[9]

[5] This number includes the mention of the appropriate equivalent of dignity in another language where no English version of the document is available. The source of all references to Benedict XVI's discourses is the official Vatican website available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/index.htm. This choice of the website as the primary source is based on the methodological presuppositions outlined above.

[6] See Benedict XVI, General Audience (26 October 2005).

[7] See Benedict XVI, General Audience (22 February 2006).

[8] For example: "For Christians it is a matter of learning to know one another ever more deeply and to respect one another in the light of the dignity of the human being and his eternal destiny." Angelus (2 July 2006). See also, among others, Homily (20 April 2005); Homily (24 April 2005); Regina Caeli (1 May 2005); General Audience (24 August 2005); Letter to Honourable Mr Pier Ferdinando Casini, President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Republic (18 October 2005); Message for the 14th World Day of the Sick (8 December 2005); Urbi et Orbi (25 December 2006); Address to the New Ambassador of Costa Rica (10 February 2007); Address to the Members of the Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue (1 February 2007).

[9] Benedict XVI, Angelus (1 January 2007).

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It would be a mistake, however, to think that this usage implies that Benedict's understanding of human dignity is in any way one-dimensional. Instead, the contemporary relevance of this supposedly stable, not relative, not optional and therefore normative foundation lies in its multidimensional nature that expresses the many aspects of what it means to be human. When Benedict's discourses as pope are taken together, a much richer meaning of the dignity of the human person is revealed, a meaning that endeavours to capture the fullness of the tradition that precedes it. So it is that traditional concepts like *imago Dei,* reason, freedom, natural law and conscience all find their way into Benedict's understanding of human dignity. This endeavour to capture the tradition is also what gives the term its potential import as an ethical criterion, because the term carries with it the fruits of many thousands of years of thought by great thinkers who have grappled with the problem of what it means to be human. I propose that it is this multidimensional richness of the dignity of the human person that allows Benedict to say that the protection of human dignity is "the first and last of the fundamental rights" and should be "the criterion that inspires and directs all . . . efforts."[10]

For Benedict, the basis of the dignity of the human person is the belief that the human being is created in the image of God, *imago Dei*.[11] To be created in the image of God says something about what the human person is (1.1), what the human person is capable of (1.2), and what the human person's purpose is, the end or telos for which the human person is created and to which the human person should direct his or her actions (1.3). The latter can be achieved by taking the first two aspects properly into account, from which Benedict derives a normative morality (2).

1.1. Given

For Benedict, as a consequence of the human person being created in the image of God, the dignity of the human person is a 'given given': dignity is a gift and a fact. One might call this an ontological dimension of dignity as it has to do with human *being* and the *cause*

[10] Benedict XVI, Message to Mr Jacques Diouf, Director General of FAO on the Occasion of World Food Day 2005 (12 October 2005).

[11] See, among others, Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005) n. 30b; Homily (5 February 2006); Letter to participants of the XII Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (27 April 2006); Greeting to a Delegation from B'Nai B'Rith International (18 December 2006); Homily (1 January 2007); *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007) n. 89.

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of this being. The following deals with the two facets of this givenness of human dignity.

1.1.1. Gift

Benedict calls the dignity of the human person a gift.[12] "As one created in the image of God, each individual human being has the dignity of a person."[13] To be created is to be given something from nothing. We did not exist and then we did. Thus, the first aspect of the gift is *existence* or *being* itself, i.e., the fact that we are alive.[14]

We are not, however, only given life, we do not only exist, but we exist with capacities that are ours precisely because they are godlike when compared with the rest of creation. Human capacities and potential, as facets of human dignity, will be discussed further in section 1.2. For now, we return to the first aspect of the gift, namely human *being*.

1.1.2. Fact

First, one is someone not something. One is a subject that "can not be disposed of at will."[15] The "*can* not" should really read "should not," because even a superficial glance at a newspaper on any given day will reveal that people do indeed seemingly dispose of themselves and others at will. In discussing the question of equality, Benedict provides the key to how it is that this is so, and why human beings should not be disposed of at will. Since all human beings have dignity, all are equal. Benedict uses two important words in the original text—transcendental and essential. He speaks of a "common transcendental dignity" and an "essential equality."[16] The use of these words suggests that Benedict sees a need to speak of a dignity that is not necessarily apparent in lived experience, i.e., the dignity of all and therefore their equality. In lived reality, human beings are more often unequal and undignified.

Therefore, for Benedict, it would appear that there is an aspect of dignity that transcends lived experience, proceeding from the belief that human beings are made in the image of God; there is a

[12] See Benedict XVI, "The Human Person, the Heart of Peace," Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (1 January 2007) n. 2.

[13] *Ibid*. Related to the idea of being created in the image of God is that of being children of God; see Homily (31 December 2005); Homily (28 May 2006).

[14] "...respect the sacredness of the human person and his dignity, because his life is a divine gift." Common Declaration by His Holiness Benedict XVI and His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece (14 December 2006).

[15] Benedict XVI, "The Human Person...," n. 4.

[16] See *Ibid*., n. 6.

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fundamental,[17] inalienable,[18] inherent,[19] innate,[20] essential[21] dignity in all human beings regardless of what we may be able to observe. For Benedict, then, human dignity is, in this aspect, a fact.

1.2. Capacity

Being created in the image of God also means that one is gifted with capacities associated with God. Benedict identifies four qualities of human beings—the crowning work of God's creation[22]—that confer dignity on the human person: freedom, reason, love and community. One is capable of self-knowledge (reason) and self-possession (freedom) and one is capable of "free self-giving [(love)] and entering into communion with others [(community)]."[23] The word 'capable' is used by Benedict in the text cited. In this case then, an aspect of the gift is one's potential, all that one is capable of. These capacities contribute to making one a subject, not just an object. One is able to consciously 'do'.

1.2.1. Freedom

To be created in the image of God means that the human being is free. Human freedom, and the protection thereof, is thus essential to human dignity.[24]

[17] See Benedict XVI, Letter to Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran on the Occasion of the Colloquium organized by UNESCO in Paris (24 May 2005); Message to Mr Jacques Diouf; Address to H.E. Mr Frank de Coninck, Ambassador of Belgium to the Holy See (26 October 2006); Address to the Members of the "Pro Petri Sede" and "Etrennes Pontificales" Associations (30 October 2006); Address to the Diplomatic Corps to the Republic of Turkey (28 November 2006); Message for the 41st World Communications Day (20 May 2007).

[18] See Benedict XVI, Letter to Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran; Address to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Croatia on their "Ad Limina" Visit (6 July 2006); Address to his Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece (14 December 2006); Greeting to . . . B'nai B'rith; "The Human Person . . . ."

[19] See Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants at the 20th International Conference Organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care on the Theme of the Human Genome (19 November 2005); Address to Mr Sten Erik Malmborg Lilholt, Ambassador of Denmark to the Holy See (1 December 2005).

[20] See Benedict XVI, Address to Mr Francis Martin-Xavier Campbell, Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Holy See (23 December 2005); Address to H.E. Mr Amitava Tripathi, New Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Holy See (18 May 2006); Letter to the . . . Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

[21] See Benedict XVI, Address to H.E. Mr Elchin Oktyabr Oglu Amirbayov, Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Holy See (16 June 2005); Address to H.E. Mrs Anne Maree Plunkett, New Ambassador of Australia to the Holy See (18 May 2006); Address to Mr Maratbek Salievic Bakiev, Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Holy See (14 December 2006).

[22] See Benedict XVI, Homily (28 May 2006).

[23] Benedict XVI, "The Human Person . . .," n. 2.

[24] See Benedict XVI, Homily (28 May 2006); Homily (9 July 2006); Address to the Members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (6 November 2006); Homily (18 March 2007); Address to the New Ambassador of the Ukraine (30 March 2007).

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> "Freedom, we can say, is a springboard from which to dive into the infinite sea of divine goodness, but it can also become a tilted plane on which to slide towards the abyss of sin and evil and thus also to lose freedom and our dignity."[25]

1.2.2. Logos

God is *logos,* reason. The human being's capacity to reason is, of course, one of Benedict's favourite topics.[26]

Being made in the image of God, human being's share in that aspect of God which is the divine *logos*, reason.[27] "'It is in accordance with their dignity that all men, because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will . . . , are both impelled by their nature and bound by moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth.'"[28]

Their ability to reason also means that human beings have the capacity to distinguish good from evil and right from wrong, and thereby to embark on the morally appropriate course of action.[29] It is thus, partly through reason, and partly through grace, that human beings are able to achieve the good ends inherent in their being created in the image of God.[30]

1.2.3. Love

Again, beginning from the belief that dignity is based on being the image of God, when Benedict cites 1 John 4:8, "God is love", he is also affirming that an important element of human dignity is the human person's capacity to love God and others. So it is that he concludes that the "highest vocation of every human person is love. In Christ we can find the ultimate reason for becoming staunch champions of human dignity and courageous builders of peace."[31]

[25] See Benedict XVI, Homily (18 March 2007).

[26] See for instance Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University".

[27] See Benedict XVI, Address at the Conclusion of the Meeting with the Bishops of Switzerland (9 November 2006).

[28] Benedict XVI, Angelus (4 December 2006) quoting *Dignitatis Humanae,* 2. The missing portion in the quote from *Dignitatus Humanae* states, ". . . and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility . . . ." See also: "*Les croyants jouissent dans votre pays de la liberté religieuse, qui est une dimension essentielle de la liberté de l'homme et donc une expression majeure de sa dignité*." Address to the New Ambassador of the Ukraine.

[29] See Benedict XVI, "The Human Person . . .," n. 3 and 4.

[30] "It is worth thinking a bit about these words of Origen, who sees the fundamental difference between the human being and the other animals in the fact that man is capable of recognizing God, his Creator, that man is capable of truth, capable of a knowledge that becomes a relationship, friendship. It is important in our time that we do not forget God, together with all the other kinds of knowledge we have acquired in the meantime, and they are very numerous! They all become problematic, at times dangerous, if the fundamental knowledge that gives meaning and orientation to all things is missing: knowledge of God the Creator." Benedict XVI, General Audience (11 January 2006).

[31] Benedict XVI, "The Human Person . . .," n. 16. See also *Deus Caritas Est,* n. 10.

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Flowing from the belief that God is love, and, therefore, that an integral element of the dignity of the human person is his or her ability to love, Benedict has a very definite view concerning the relationship of violence to dignity. Violence has no part in Benedict's anthropology,[32] though he acknowledges that human beings are capable of violence.[33] This is because Benedict rejects "conceptions of God that would encourage intolerance and recourse to violence against others."[34] Since God is love, there is no place for violence in the concept of human dignity.

1.2.4. Community

The fourth capacity inherent in Benedict's understanding of human dignity is that the human person, and therefore his or her dignity, is always situated in relation to others. The dignity of the human person only makes sense if we accept that the human person, as a creature, is related to God, the Creator, and the rest of God's creation.[35] The human person is thus always already in community. Human beings "... live with others, we were created together with others and only in being with others, in giving ourselves to others, do we find life."[36]

1.3. Telos

Having briefly considered how the notion of the dignity of the human person in Benedict's thought tells us something about what the human person *is* and *is capable of*, we turn to the *purpose* of human life. Our dignity is not only derived from the fact that we were created, but that we were created with a purpose in mind. In this sense, dignity is also a task as much as it is a gift;[37] human beings are called to do something, to become something, to find fulfilment in the correct use of their potential, i.e., the capacities with which they have been gifted—freedom, reason, love and community.

[32] See Benedict XVI, "The Human Person ...," n. 10. See also Address to H.E. Mr. Kagefumi Ueno, Ambassador of Japan to the Holy See (13 November 2006).

[33] Benedict XVI refers negatively to the human being's "destructive capacities." See "The Human Person ...," n. 9.

[34] *Ibid.*, n. 10.

[35] Benedict XVI's Trinitarian theology also points to the necessity of this. God, as Trinity, is a community of Love. Therefore, the human person, as image of God, has dignity based on his or ability to love *in community.* C.f. "The human person is the event or being of relativity." Joseph Ratzinger, "Retrieving the Tradition: Concerning the notion of person in theology" *Communio* 17 (1990): 439–454.

[36] Benedict XVI, Homily (18 March 2007).

[37] See Benedict XVI, "The Human Person ...," n. 2.

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At the centre of Benedict's vision of the purpose of human existence is the God who is love. Human beings, created in God's image are called to freely respond to that love, which is always first given by God.[38] "We are called to look towards this divine reality, to which we have been directed from our creation. For there we find life's ultimate meaning."[39]

Thus, the telos of human dignity is ultimately the same as the telos of God, the human person's creator, namely, the redemption of humanity and the realisation of the kingdom of God. Benedict's thought in this regard, appears to contain two aspects: a spiritual and a practical. The spiritual aspect entails (re)union with God and the practical aspect entails peaceful and mutually edifying coexistence with one's neighbour. One could say then, that the telos of human dignity is the same as the telos envisioned in the commandment to love God and to love one's neighbour. Human dignity will only ultimately be fulfilled when both have been achieved by all human beings.

Benedict seems to argue that the two aspects of the telos, i.e., the spiritual and the practical ends, are mutually enriching such that as one engages in one so the other will follow as a consequence. In this way he presents a relatively open vision of the telos, which allows him, on one hand, to affirm the truths of Christian doctrine, for example, those concerning the value of Christian baptism, while on the other hand, leaving open the possibility that those who remain outside the church can still work towards and even realise the telos of human dignity. The following analysis will demonstrate this.

"If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God."[40] If we accept that "the image of God" is synonymous with the dignity of the human person, then, without a relationship with God, one cannot appreciate and respond to the dignity of the human person in the other. In this way, Benedict affirms his belief that a relationship with God is part of the telos of human dignity, for without it, one cannot be self-giving in community. He thereby opens the door to the specifics of Catholic Christianity, without making them conditional. Indeed, he goes on to warn against the danger of just 'loving God': "But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be 'devout' and to perform my 'religious duties', then my relationship with God will also grow

[38] See Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est,* 1.
[39] Benedict XVI, Homily (28 May 2006).
[40] Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est,* n. 18.

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arid. It becomes merely 'proper', but loveless."[41] Thus, loving the other, the image of God, is also necessary, if one is truly going to have a relationship with God. The community of love is then also part of the telos.

Because the human person is the image of God, and we are all called to become more like the perfect model of the image of God, namely, Jesus Christ,[42] we can love God by loving our neighbour, which in turn makes us better appreciate how we are loved by God. The result is a positive spiral of love.[43] Whichever one we choose to love first, be it God or the human person, we will learn through this experience to love the other one. This in turn will only increase our willingness to love the first. "Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me."[44] The result is that one matures in "the ability to love and to contribute to the progress of the world, renewing it in justice and in peace,"[45] for "where God's will is done Heaven already exists, a little bit of Heaven also begins on earth, and where God's will is done the Kingdom of God is present."[46]

Having dealt with the telos of human dignity, namely, spiritual salvation on one hand and building the kingdom of God in the present reality on the other, we are left with the question of how does one do it? How does one translate the 'given given' and the capacities of the human person into realised human dignity? For this, Benedict proposes a normative morality.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] "It is in lowering ourselves, together with Christ, that we rise up to him and up to God. God is Love, and so the descent, the lowering that love demands of us, is at the same time the true ascent. Exactly in this way, lowering ourselves, coming out of ourselves, we reach the dignity of Jesus Christ, the human being's true dignity." Benedict XVI, Homily (15 May 2005).

[43] See Philip McDonagh, "The Unity of Love: Reflections on the First Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI" *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture,* 10, 1 (2007): 16–31, who reaches a similar conclusion in his reflection on *Deus Caritas Est,* n.14, ". . . our two loves, of God and of neighbor, by definition advance together," p. 25; See also Avery Dulles, "Love, the Pope, and C.S. Lewis," *First Things,* 169 (2007): 20–24, who states in a brief commentary on *Deus Caritas Est,* "In their highest expression, the two types of love reinforce each other. Contemplation of the divine gives us the spiritual strength to take upon ourselves the needs of others. Pope Gregory I explained how Moses, by engaging in dialogue with God in the tabernacle, obtained the power he needed to be of service to his people. Similarly, to become sources from which living waters flow, we must drink deeply from the wellsprings of life. The more deiform we become, the more capable we will be of agape. Conversely, the more concerned we are with service to others, the more receptive will we be to the gifts of God."

[44] Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est,* n. 18.

[45] Benedict XVI, "The Human Person . . .," n. 2.

[46] Benedict XVI, Homily (5 February 2006).

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2. Normative Morality

In *Deus Caritas Est* the dignity of the human person is identified with the belief that the human person is made in the image of God. In order ". . . to live in a way consonant with that dignity,"[47] one must act in a morally good way.

In the thought of Benedict XVI, the norms of moral behaviour are often articulated in the language of human rights.[48] The protection of human dignity is "the first and last of the fundamental rights" and should be "the criterion that inspires and directs all . . . efforts."[49] In this way, Benedict appears to affirm that human dignity, in all its rich complexity, is the source and end of human moral behaviour.

For Benedict, human rights are objective truths that can be discerned from stable and permanent human nature.[50] This discernment is possible because God created an ordered and harmonious universe that reflects God's *plan*.[51] Therefore, there is a "body of rules for individual action and the reciprocal relationships of persons in accordance with justice and solidarity . . . inscribed on human consciences."[52] Benedict XVI cites *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), n. 16: "man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged."[53]

[47] Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est,* n. 30b; See also Address to the Members of the Episcopal Conference of Chad on Their "Ad Limina" Visit (23 September 2006); Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy (25 September 2006).

[48] See Benedict XVI, Letter to Card. Jean-Louis Tauran; General Audience (24 August 2005); Lettera di sua santità Benedetto XVI al Presidente del senato Marcello Pera in occasione del convegno di norcia ≪Libertà e Laicità≫ (15 October 2005); Letter to Card. Walter Kasper on the occasion of the Second Conference on Peace and Tolerance, organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in conjunction with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation (4 November 2005); Letter to Card. Rivera Carrera on the occasion ofthe Meeting on the "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" (19 November 2005); Letter to the Patriarch of Moscow and of All the Russias (17 February 2006); Homily (9 July 2006); Address to H.E. Mr Pedro Pablo Cabrera Gaete, New Ambassador of Chile to the Holy See (8 September 2006); Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority; Address to Mr. Lars Møller Ambassador of Denmark to the Holy See (14 December 2006); Common Declaration . . . His Beatitude Christodoulos; Homily (1 January 2007); "The Human Person . . .," n. 16; Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care (22 March 2007).

[49] Benedict XVI, Message to Mr Jacques Diouf.

[50] Benedict XVI, Audience with the Participants in the Congress Promoted by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) (24 March 2007).

[51] See Benedict XVI, "The Human Person . . . ."

[52] *Ibid.,* n. 3.

[53] Benedict XVI, Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life (24 February 2007).

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The human person, thus, has a conscience and is able, through reason, to discern good and bad, right and wrong. "This law has as its first and general principle, 'to do good and avoid evil'."[54]

Benedict then names particular principles which flow from this broad general principle. He names five specifically: "respect for human life from its conception to its natural end"; "the duty to seek the truth"; to work towards harmony by allowing one's freedom to be subject to the *lex naturalis*; to do justice by giving to each his own; to expect solidarity, i.e. help from others. These principles "precede any human law".[55] Every human law should therefore be answerable to these norms. The result of enforcing these norms would be a society in which everybody's right to dignified living conditions is met, i.e. "the satisfaction of primary needs and the possibility of achieving [one's] aspirations . . .."[56]

Apart from the duty to respect human life from its conception to its natural end, however, the five principles mentioned above still remain fairly vague, as do the "primary needs" and "aspirations". However, based on his vision of the dignity of the human person, its 'given-ness', its potential and its end, Benedict articulates much more specific norms that he maintains are inherent in the natural law accessible to human reason and conscience, and are therefore objective and, more importantly, non-negotiable. By living in accordance with these norms, society will, according to Benedict, attain the peace it deserves, and dignity will be respected.[57]

These norms,[58] which are the means to ensure human dignity and the adherence to which is the best criterion of whether human dignity is respected in a society,[59] are (1) the right to life from conception to its natural end,[60] (2) the right to freedom of religion,[61] (3) the duty to respect and protect the institution of marriage between a man and

[54] Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the International Congress on Natural Moral Law (12 February 2007).

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] Benedict XVI, Angelus (1 October 2006).

[57] See Benedict XVI, "The Human Person . . .;" Address to . . . Congress on Natural Moral Law.

[58] Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I-II, 94, 2.

[59] See Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2006 (29 September 2005).

[60] See, among others, Benedict XVI, Letter to Card. Jean-Louis Tauran; Letter to Card. Walter Kasper . . . with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation; General Audience (16 November 2005); Message for Lent 2007 (21 November 2006); Common Declaration . . . His Beatitude Christodoulos; "The Human Person . . .," n. 4; Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr Alfonso Rivero Monsalve Ambassador of Peru to the Holy See (16 March 2007).

[61] See Benedict XVI, Address to His Beatitude Archbishop Christodoulos; "The Human Person . . . ."

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a woman,[62] (4) the right of such a married couple to have a family[63] and (5) to educate their family.[64] These norms, and the threat that modern society, plagued by relativism, poses to them, seem to form the mainstay of Benedict's ethical concerns.

> I cannot refrain from expressing . . . my anxiety for the laws that concern those very sensitive issues such as the transmission and defence of life, sickness, the identity of the family and respect for marriage. On these topics and in the light of natural reason and the moral and spiritual principles that derive from the Gospel, the Catholic Church will continue ceaselessly to proclaim the inalienable greatness of human dignity.[65]

An important question remains regarding the normative morality that Benedict appears to be advocating, namely, are these norms that need to be qualified in the light of other potential criteria and goods or are they absolute, i.e. may they never be contravened under any circumstances? If the latter is the case, then how do these absolute norms relate to the criterion of human dignity that Benedict himself maintains is the criterion by which all behaviour should be evaluated? What follows will address these questions based on statements made by Benedict XVI that could potentially be understood as referring to absolute moral norms.

2.1. The Ideal Family, the Bastard and the Trouble with Absolute Norms

Benedict XVI considers "the right to form a family, based on . . . love and faithfulness and established between a man and a woman . . . [and] the right to educate children in accordance with the ideals with which their parents have desired to enrich them[, a right which] is implicit in the family as a natural institution," to be objective norms of human moral behaviour.[66] Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that

[62] See Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (17 March 2006); Address to . . . the Episcopal Conference of Chad. See also Benedict XVI, "Europe and its Discontents," *First Things* 159 (2006) 16–22.

[63] See Benedict XVI, Address to . . . Ambassador of Chile.

[64] Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of the European People's Party on the Occasion of the Study Days on Europe (30 March 2006); Address to . . . Ambassador of Chile.

[65] Benedict XVI, Address to H.E. Mr Juan Gomez Martínez Ambassador of Colombia to the Holy See (9 February 2007).

[66] Benedict XVI, Address to . . . Ambassador of Chile; See also Benedict XVI, Message for 40th World Communications Day (24 January 2006) n. 3; Address to H.E. Mr Martin Bolldorf, New Ambassador of Austria to the Holy See (18 September 2006); Address to . . . Ambassador of Colombia.

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"to recognize and assist [the institution of indissoluble marriage between man and woman] is . . . the best means of ensuring the dignity, equality and true freedom of the human person."[67]

If one were to interpret what Benedict XVI has said here with regard to marriage and the family in an absolute way, i.e., if one were to claim that these were absolute norms that could, therefore, never be sacrificed for some other good, then one would be guilty of a certain lack of pastoral sensitivity to the human condition, and would, moreover, in an attempt to stave off the threat of relativism, be undermining the criterion of the dignity of the human person.

For example, Benedict has stated that "the family . . . is the setting where men and women are enabled to be born with dignity, and to grow and develop in an integral manner."[68] This sentence appears to preclude the possibility of a person being born with dignity outside of the 'normal' family, i.e. based on the indissoluble marriage between a man and a woman. If that is so then it undermines arguments for the universal dignity of the human person. It reintroduces the idea of a bastard, an illegitimate person, someone born without dignity because his parents are unmarried.

Furthermore, if the indissolubility of marriage were to be accepted as an absolute moral norm, then this could mean that other values are put at risk, including the dignity that Benedict so ardently seeks to protect. What if a marriage is abusive, violent, and loveless? Pastorally speaking, if one were to insist that such a marriage continue because it is the "best means of ensuring the dignity, equality and true freedom of the human person," then one would be being pastorally blind and ethically foolish, because dignity would no longer be "the criterion that inspires and directs all . . . efforts."[69] Instead, dignity would have been made subordinate to an absolute moral norm, regardless of the implications that applying this norm would have for human dignity.

Since it seems unfathomable that the pope would support such a notion in light of his other comments on the dignity of human persons, I shall interpret his use of the word dignity here as favourably as possible, namely, that it is in community that dignity flourishes and the family is still, in most cases, since "[n]one of us gave ourselves life or singlehandedly learned how to live,"[70] the primary community that the child comes in to contact with. Thus, in the *ideal* family, it is here that a child will not only become aware of his inherent

[67] Benedict XVI, Homily (9 July 2006); See also Address to . . . the Episcopal Conference of Chad.

[68] Benedict XVI, Homily (9 July 2006).

[69] Benedict XVI, Message to Mr Jacques Diouf.

[70] Benedict XVI, Homily (9 July 2006).

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worth, but will also develop and realise his dignity by contributing to the dignity of others in the community; children learn to responsibly exercise their moral freedom and to love on the basis of their having been loved.[71] This interpretation, then, would not preclude the possibility of a child realising the fullness of his or her dignity if he or she were born outside of a 'traditional' family, only that the family is the 'best', i.e. optimal according to the principles of natural law, locus for this.

This subtle nuance, which Benedict himself introduces (he uses the word 'best' in the second quote in the paragraph at the beginning of this section) is an important one, because it means that while Benedict can still claim that marriage and the traditional family are normative, this normativity is not absolute and remains subject to the rich and multidimensional criterion of human dignity. Those who would interpret the pope's comments in an absolute way, would, I maintain, be in error, because the 'absolute norm' may sometimes ultimately undermine human dignity to the extent that its 'given-ness' is not respected, it's potential is not nurtured and its telos is never achieved.

2.2. Dignity of the Human Person vs Dignity of Life

As in the case of the danger of absolutising the moral norms of marriage and family, Benedict XVI's language regarding the right to life from conception to natural end is such that it also runs the risk of being interpreted to mean that the right to life supersedes human dignity as the primary criterion for the ethical, dignified life. Alternatively, and this seems more likely from the evidence below, human dignity is reduced to human life. In other words, human life becomes the ultimate good of human existence and not dignity, even though that is tantamount to saying that the telos of life is life.

Consider the following quotes from Benedict's discourses. The quotes that are used here are not chronological, so in that way, the apparent shift that seems to take place here is somewhat synthetic. Nevertheless, there is a shift towards equating, superseding or even merging the dignity of the human person with the dignity of human life, and the quotes have been put in this order to illustrate this shift as clearly as possible.

"... the heart of the economic, social and cultural development of each community is a proper respect for life and for the dignity of every human person."[72] In this quote Benedict has put respect

[71] See *ibid.*

[72] Benedict XVI, Letter to Card. Walter Kasper ... with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

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for life and respect for dignity alongside one another as values that must be upheld in order for communities to flourish. This flourishing, as described earlier, could be synonymous with aspects of the telos of human dignity. But at this point, the values appear to be distinct from one another.

However, Benedict is apparently concerned that the flourishing of society is at risk: "In a certain number of countries, we are actually seeing the appearance of new legislation that calls into question respect for human life from its conception until its natural end at the risk of exploiting it as an object for research and experimentation, and thereby striking a serious blow to the fundamental dignity of the human being."[73] Again, we have two values, but life from conception to natural end is subordinated to dignity. The fact that a threat to life is a threat to dignity, does not exclude other things from being a threat to dignity that may not be a threat to life, for example, an unloving marriage or a society in which one's religious freedom is curtailed.

In response to this threat, Benedict XVI points out that "the Church wants to make her own contribution to serving the human community by shedding more and more light on the relationship that unites each person to the Creator of all life and is the basis of the inalienable dignity of every human being, from conception to natural death."[74] The Church thus calls on human beings to "respect the sacredness of the human person and his dignity, because his life is a divine gift. We are concerned to see that some branches of science are experimenting on the human being, without respect for either the dignity or the integrity of the person in all the stages of his life, from conception to his natural end."[75] So, the dignity of the person, from conception to natural death, is affirmed. There are those who may contest this on various grounds, but that is not the point here. The point is that the fact that life, which is a gift from God, who in turn wants to be in relationship with the created gift, the human person, is the basis of the 'given given' of human dignity, from which, as shown in part 1 above, an entire anthropology unfolds that is about far more than just living life; it is about living a purposeful, meaningful, fulfilling, dignified life.

Now, in a further criticism of the sciences, the slippery slope of absolute norms seems to appear in Benedict's discourse. "In fact, this research advances through the suppression of human lives [i.e. human beings who already exist, even though they have not yet been born] that are equal in dignity to the lives of other human individuals

[73] Benedict XVI, Address to . . . "Pro Petri Sede".
[74] Benedict XVI, Letter to Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran.
[75] Benedict XVI, Common Declaration . . . His Beatitude Christodoulos.

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and the lives of the researchers themselves."[76] What is remarkable here is that the unborn are not equal in dignity to the researchers, but the *lives* of the unborn are equal in dignity to the *lives* of the researchers. Is this just a stylistic slip of the tongue? Further quotes show that this may not in fact be accidental. In the following quotes, it is the dignity of life that Benedict apparently sees threatened, not the dignity of the human person: "Sadly, the modern world is marked by an increasing number of threats to the dignity of human life;"[77] "When faced with the demand, which is often expressed, of eliminating suffering even by recourse to euthanasia, it is essential to reaffirm the inviolable dignity of human life from conception to its natural end;"[78] "[The Church] feels in duty bound to insist that science's ability to predict and control must never be employed against human life and its dignity . . ."[79]

Thus, Benedict seems to be saying that life is an absolute value, and an end in itself, and no longer the means by which human beings realise their dignity by loving God and loving their neighbours.

In what follows, I briefly discuss one of the possible ways in which Benedict may have come to this apparent blurring of dignity and life and then discuss some the implications if this apparent blurring is accepted.

In his 2007 message for the World Day of Peace, Benedict asserts that the dignity of the human person means that "the person can not be disposed of at will".[80] In the same speech, Benedict then seemingly translates this assertion into an obligation to respect the fundamental rights of the person, in other words, those things that a person requires as the bare minimum in order to fulfil his or her dignity. Two rights are emphasised: life and religious freedom. That is, one has a right to life because it is through living one's life that one realises the potential inherent in one's dignity. Likewise, the right to religious freedom ensures that one can live out one's dignity by appropriately responding to God, which in Benedict's thinking ought to culminate in receiving Christian baptism in the Roman Catholic Church. However, the language of rights here seems inappropriate, because Benedict XVI does not seem to view them so much as human rights as God's rights: "life is a gift which is not completely at the disposal of the subject," and "religious freedom places the human

[76] Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the Symposium on the Theme: "Stem Cells: What Future for Therapy?" Organized by the Pontifical Academy for Life (16 September 2006).

[77] Benedict XVI, Letter to H.E. Mr. Roh Moo-hyun, President of the Republic of Korea (15 February 2007).

[78] Benedict XVI, Letter to the Italian Bishops on occasion of the 55th General Assembly held in Assisi (10 November 2005).

[79] Benedict XVI, Address to . . . the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

[80] Benedict XVI, "The Human Person . . ." n. 4.

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being in relationship with a transcendent principle which withdraws him from human caprice."[81] In other words, this could be interpreted as implying that it is God's right to decide who lives and dies and God's right to call the human person to relate to Him spiritually. Thus it is God's rights that should not be trodden on by either society, from which negative rights normally defend the human person, nor by the human person himself. Thus, the dignity of the human person, as free, reasonable, subject, is superseded not by a 'right' to life, but by a dignity of 'life', a sanctity of life. Life in absolute terms becomes more valuable than individual dignity, because it is a precondition of dignity, it is the primary gift of God, and therefore God's right. It would seem then, that the ultimate criterion for Benedict is thus no longer the dignity of the human person, or even the will of God, discernable in revelation and the natural law, but instead, God Himself. Human beings, and their laws, have no right to interfere in domains of existence that are rightfully God's.

What are the implications of making life an absolute value based on a criterion that essentially consists of not wanting to offend God by treading on God's domain?

Among other possible problems, two related issues are discussed here. First, any value that the dignity of the human person has as an ethical criterion is undermined, and second, the ethical argumentation that replaces it is no longer accessible to all people of goodwill: it is increasingly dogmatic rather than reasonable.

The value of the dignity of the human person as an ethical criterion lies in the comprehensive anthropology that it points to. Properly understood, and I think that Benedict's understanding of dignity as presented above is a fairly good example of this, in such a comprehensive understanding, the dignity of the human person provides us with a means to understand human moral behaviour and to evaluate it in various circumstances. So, for example, in the case of an abusive marriage and unhealthy family life mentioned above, the criterion of human dignity helps us to consider how and why the human person was created, what capacities he or she has, and how she is expected to realise these capacities. When these are properly taken into account in particular circumstances, then we may be able to find sufficient justification to 'sacrifice' the good of indissoluble marriage in favour of the good of the dignity of all parties involved. This analysis is admittedly superficial, but it serves our purposes in being able to give at least some insight into the value of a rich understanding of dignity as an ethical criterion.

What happens when the language that Benedict uses seems to indicate an absolute norm of life, language that could be interpreted

[81] See Benedict XVI, "The Human Person . . ." n. 2.

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as equating dignity and life, is that dignity is then reduced to a one-dimensional concept, stripped of the richness described above. Human freedom, flourishing, purpose, love and justice no longer play a role. The dignity of the human person simply means that the life of the human being is inalienable because it is God's right to give and take life. It is this reduction of human dignity to a one-dimensional concept that leads some authors to conclude that "dignity is a vacuous concept".[82] Vacuous concepts are, quite rightly, of little value in forming ethical judgments. For example, with regard to end of life decisions, one-dimensional understandings of the dignity of the human person lie at the root of arguments both for and against choosing to die. Those against would use dignity in the way that Benedict has used it: Dignity of the human person (i.e. life) is inalienable from conception to its natural end and therefore one may not choose to die. Those arguing in favour of the right to choose to die would use another aspect of the dignity of the human person which has already been discussed above, namely, they reduce the rich concept of the dignity of the human person to the one-dimensional notion of human freedom. The human being is autonomous and this right to autonomy supersedes all other goods. Therefore, no law may dictate how one must dispose of one's own life.

What is interesting is that Benedict goes to great lengths to counter the reduction of human dignity to human freedom. Yet, ironically, and perhaps even as a result of his own arguments against this, he seems to be in danger of doing the same thing by reducing human dignity to human life. The following summarises one of Benedict's homilies that addresses the relationship between life and freedom.

We all yearn for life and freedom. Most people think of life in the same way as the Prodigal Son does: the ideal life is one free of burdens and full of abundance. He ended up living with pigs and was neither free nor truly alive.

The life of abundance is, instead, to be found by giving one's life for others and by living in communion with the living God, the source of life.

The Prodigal Son thought freedom meant being able to do whatever he liked. His desires were the only criteria by which he acted. "The inevitable consequence of this concept of freedom is violence and the mutual destruction of freedom and life."

True freedom, is, according to scripture, analogous to sonship. Unlike slaves, heirs have the responsibility to preserve and administer their property. Their freedom entailed responsibility. "The son, to whom things belong and who, consequently, does not let them

[82] See Bagaric and Allan, "The Vacuous Concept of Dignity."

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be destroyed, is free." Thus, true freedom dictates that one protect what one has inherited, namely, the gift of life from God.[83] So it is that Benedict makes the following argument in a homily one month later.

> In contemporary culture, we often see an excessive exaltation of the freedom of the individual as an autonomous subject, as if we were self-created and self-sufficient, apart from our relationship with others and our responsibilities in their regard. Attempts are being made to organize the life of society on the basis of subjective and ephemeral desires alone, with no reference to objective, prior truths such as the dignity of each human being and his inalienable rights and duties, which every social group is called to serve.
> The Church does not cease to remind us that true human freedom derives from our having been created in God's image and likeness. Christian education is consequently an education in freedom and for freedom. "We do not do good as slaves, who are not free to act otherwise, but we do it because we are personally responsible for the world; because we love truth and goodness, because we love God himself and therefore his creatures as well. This is the true freedom to which the Holy Spirit wants to lead us".[84]

The latter is a good argument in favour of the right to life and the need to appreciate and preserve one's own life, because it implies that true freedom is responsible freedom. The problem is that in interpreting this statement, one might very easily slip into the idea that one's ultimate responsibility is to *preserve* what God has given one, doing nothing with it. Dignity is reduced to life itself and the only requirement of dignity is that one protects life.[85] I do not think that this is what Benedict is trying to say, but one can see how this logic can be arrived at. It is possible that his fervent desire to counter 'relativism' has led him to emphasise the one dimension of human dignity over the others, resulting in some of the statements presented above. When this happens, not only does dignity become a 'vacuous concept' but God is also at risk of becoming a vacuous concept. This is the second implication of the apparent blurring of the concepts of life and dignity in Benedict's thought.

By arguing that life may not be disposed of at will because it is a gift from God, Benedict ceases to present an argument that is accessible to all people of goodwill. Instead, the argument is dogmatic, a "thou shalt not," and therefore seemingly at odds with other goods,

[83] See Benedict XVI, Homily (9 June 2006).

[84] Benedict XVI, Homily (9 July 2006) quoting Homily (9 June 2006).

[85] In this regard, it may be useful to reflect on the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). The servant who was given only one talent buried it and then returned it to his master, while the others used their talents to create more. The latter were rewarded, but the servant who only preserved the one talent is called wicked and lazy and cast into the darkness.

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such as human freedom, and the capacity to reason and love for the good of the community. Such apparently dogmatic arguments for absolute norms, should, I think, be avoided, because they only lead to a polarisation or dismissal of the argument, rather than serious reasoned consideration of it.

Polarisation results, as it does in the examples already given of one-dimensional dignity arguments regarding end of life decisions, in two camps, those for and those against, who will equally strongly adhere to their respective dogmatic proclamations of what is right, regardless, or perhaps precisely because, of what the other camp says on the matter. A deadlock is reached that cannot be solved and, in the meantime, real people try to grapple with the real problems they face in their own lives in these matters with no really helpful guidance to help them through it. These dogmatic arguments are only of practical value in that they provide an easy justification on the part of the believer by making the decision for them, regardless of what damage it may cause with regard to the other goods that are inherent in the more comprehensive concept of dignity apparent in Benedict's thought and elaborated above.

Dismissal may indeed be worse than polarisation because the argument is not even seen as being worthy of serious consideration. The argument doesn't even require the forming of an alternative camp. In the end, everybody thinks they know what the Catholic Church says about X, so there is no point in asking. The result is that the potential richness that the Catholic Church has to offer society in ethical debates, for example, a comprehensive, multidimensional understanding of human dignity that could serve as a useful tool in navigating one's way through life's ethical challenges, is lost. When the Church ceases to be able to provide reasonable arguments to reasonable people of goodwill, something which underpins the very logic of a 'natural law' argument, the Church will become nothing more than a group of superstitious fundamentalists in the eyes of the rest of society, and therefore unhelpful in building the kind of society that is, ironically, a society very similar to that which Benedict incorporates into the telos inherent in the richer version of his concept of human dignity.

As an illustration of how the right to life is subordinate to dignity in the Catholic tradition, one can consider martyrdom. Here a person willingly, freely, gives up his or her life for a greater good. It could be argued, based on the model presenting Benedict's understanding of dignity, that the person has given up life in favour of dignity. For if the martyr had chosen to save his or her life, then the following aspects of human dignity would have been undermined: the given-ness of dignity, because it would ignore the fact that dignity is a gift from God and that it precedes life; the capacity inherent in dignity to freely choose to follow the reasoning that leads him

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or her to love God and therefore to be willing to sacrifice him or herself for that love; and the telos of a world united in love and peace. On the other hand, there may be circumstances where choosing the dignity of martyrdom would undermine the dignity of the human person, for example, in cases where the person's responsibility to his or her spouse, family and community may be such that to choose martyrdom would place an unwarranted burden on the survivors. Jesus himself, the perfection of dignity, did not choose martyrdom when it first presented itself (John 10:39). Yet we also know that Jesus had the opportunity to escape death before he was betrayed, and still he went through with it, sacrificing his life. Today, Christians believe that he is the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, God incarnate. How much more dignity could one want?

Concluding Remarks

There can be no doubt that Benedict demonstrates a rich and multidimensional understanding of the dignity of the human person, which is based not only on the person's ontological status, but also the human being's capacity to live life to the full. Benedict thereby avoids the danger of grounding human dignity purely ontologically, in this case, being created by God. The danger of such a one-sided grounding, which can only allow one to affirm some sort of inherent, essential, fundamental dignity in the face of rampant inequality and a lack of lived dignity, is that many people see no value in such an argument, since it is based, in their opinion, on little more than superstition and sentiment. The result is that the dignity of the human person becomes a 'vacuous concept' and therefore of little value in ethical and legal discourse.[86] By incorporating other aspects of being human that are all found in both the religious and secular traditions of dignity, Benedict provides a more supple, yet at the same time more grounded, criterion.

Nevertheless, the risk remains that aspects of Benedict XVI's discourse may be interpreted in a way that would seem to advocate absolute moral norms that either override the goods involved in a comprehensive understanding of human dignity or simply reduce human dignity to a one-dimensional concept. The analysis provided in part 2 of this article has argued against such interpretations by highlighting the contradictions that they entail with regard to an adequate understanding of the dignity of the human person. Furthermore, such absolute norms are, I believe, contrary to Benedict's intentions as

[86] See Bagaric and Allan, "The Vacuous Concept of Dignity", 268.

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evidenced by his understanding of human dignity. Benedict himself seems to make ample use of nuancing terms so as to avoid such absolutism while at the same time affirming the truth that goods such as life, freedom, marriage and family are indeed goods and ought to be protected as norms, and in this sense as ideals, for the good of all.

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