

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The 4th Christian-Muslim Summit
Respect for Human Dignity (*Karamat*):
The Foundation for Peace and Security
Tehran-November 6-9, 2016

Prioritizing the Human Soul over Ideology

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What does it mean to be human?

Where does human dignity come from?

Which one has the priority: human soul or ideology?

Before speaking of human dignity, one must answer the basic religious and philosophical question, “What does it mean to be human?”

In today’s world everyone speaks of human rights and the sacred character of human life, and many secularists even claim that they are the true champions of human rights as against those who accept various religious worldviews. But strangely enough, often those same champions of humanity believe that human beings are nothing more than evolved apes, who in turn evolved from lower life forms and ultimately from various compounds of molecules. If the human being is nothing but the result of “blind forces” acting upon the original cosmic soup of molecules, then is not the very statement of the sacredness of human life intellectually meaningless and nothing but a hollow sentimental expression? Is not human being nothing more than a conveniently contrived notion without basis in reality? And if we are nothing but highly organized inanimate particles, what is the basis for claims to “human dignity”? These basic questions know no geographic boundaries and are asked by thinking people everywhere.

Christianity in the West has sought to answer them on the firm theological basis that “human beings were created in the image of God” (Genesis 1: 26, 27) and it is the immortal soul and the spark of the Spirit within men and women that constitutes the basis for human dignity, the sacredness of human life, and ultimately human rights. In these verses and in the view on human beings that they express we clearly find a criterion that distinguishes man from all other beings. And the criterion, namely man's affinity to the creator, is one that bestows

a special value on us solely because we are human beings. From a religious point of view the fact that the idea of human dignity has its first palpable roots in the Bible means that this idea must ultimately be related to a divine source.

For Islam, likewise, human beings are defined in their relation to God, and both their dignity and rights derive from that relationship. According to the Holy Quran, Muslims believe that God breathed His Spirit into Adam, and according to the famous hadith, "God created Adam in His form," "form" meaning the reflection of God's Names and Qualities. Human beings therefore reflect the Divine Attributes like a mirror, which reflects the light of the Sun. By virtue of being created as this central being in the terrestrial realm, the human being was chosen by God as His vicegerent (*khalifat Allah*).

In the course of history, it has not always been self-evident that there is such a category as "human dignity" at all. In fact, even some contemporary philosophical dictionaries do not have such an entry, whereas others subsume this issue under more general expressions like "humanism". The birth of our dignity, it seems, had to wait for quite a long time in history. An explanation for this could be that it was only at a relatively late point in time that it was felt that the demand for humane (living conditions had to be based on a deeper foundation than the customary social and political arguments. This explanation is substantiated by the fact that the notion of human dignity did not emerge as a result of social or political argumentation, but indeed had a religious ferment and found its first fundamental articulation in Christianity.

In its earliest usage, the term "dignity" or "human dignity" was applied in a twofold way. In one sense it indicated the rank of a person as an autonomous individual in society. In this sense man has dignity or is the bearer of it as much as he is the bearer of a title. In another sense, however, the term stands for the "inner" value of man as a criterion that distinguishes him from all other living beings.

Cicero (1st century BC), as far as we know, is the first European thinker to use the expression "*dignitas*", and he uses it in both the above mentioned senses. Thus he says on the one hand: "Rank [*dignitas*] is the possession of a distinguished office which merits respect, honor and reverence". And, taking it in the second sense, he declares that certain ways of living are not in accordance with the "dignity" of man's nature, which in turn consists in his reason . Even though Cicero thus comes closer to our concept of human dignity when he uses this word, he himself does not seem to have such a concept in mind. Thus, it is not the early Greek or Latin philosophers who coined the notion of "human dignity". Instead, it is Christianity as a religion that initially forged the basis for this idea, since it views man's creation to be an image of God.

A historic survey shows what a many-sided issue the theme of human dignity has been in the course of history. It has been seen in so diverse aspects as

- man's harmony with the world logos (Stoa),
 - man's reason (Cicero),
 - God's image (Christianity and the Middle Ages),
 - God's breath (*rauh*) (Islam)
 - freedom (the humanism of the 14th and 15th century),
 - reason and part of the natural law (modern times)
 - autonomy and moral ability (Kant)
 - moral and emotional majesty (Schiller)
 - recognition of the absolute spirit (Hegel)
 - mutual respect for each other (the early socialists)
 - the superhuman character of the genius (Nietzsche)
 - our existential living conditions (Marcel, Jaspers),
- and finally as
- the realization of our personality (Luhman).

Which one of these interpretations is the most convincing one? Does the variety of attitudes towards this issue suggest that after all there is no real and concrete substance to this principle?

As I mentioned earlier, according to the teachings of Christianity and Islam, Human dignity derives its authenticity from the fact that man was created by God as his vicegerent (*Khalifah*) on earth. The conception of man as the "image of God" so much emphasized in Christianity has its equivalent in such Islamic and Quranic terms as man being the vicegerent of God and being the manifestation of all Divine Names and Attributes, which is a true metaphysical foundation and justification for the idea of theomorphism or deformity of man. Hence if human being manifests in his reality all the Divine attributes it follows that human attributes such as knowledge, science and behavior, should be concordant with other Divine attributes specially his dignity, bearing in mind the fact that *Karamah* or dignity is one of Divine Attributes and *karim* is one of the Beautiful Names of God.

We chose this title (Human Dignity) for the fourth summit, which was accepted by the honorable principals, after discussions and consultations with our friends and colleagues. We came to this conclusion that the main reason for conflict among believers in the Middle East – regardless of the superpowers' intension to make war in the region to achieve their benefits, is prioritizing any ideology over the human soul/ human life.

What is honored and dignified by God, is not our personal ideas and dogmas but our divine souls, which created by Him. We have been created by God's breath (according to the Quran) and made in God's image (according to the Bible), so, Quran confirms that all children of Adam have been dignified by God: (this is regardless of their race, their culture – honored by God because man was set apart by his dignity – independent of faith - for all people)

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

"Verily we have honored the Children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment." (Quran, 17: 70)

However, radical groups like *Daesh* believe that the soul that God has put in man is affected by circumstances and beliefs. They believe that people who do not have our faith, do not have dignity. Now, this question can be raised that whether we have right to kill the person whose belief and faith is different or against our ideology justifying that he or she has not dignity?

The Holy Quran states that all human beings' souls are honored and no one can kill the other. It makes just two exceptions: a killer and a wicked who corrupts the society.

من أجل ذلك كتبنا على بني إسرائيل أنه من قتل نفسا بغير نفس أو فسادا في الأرض فكأنما قتل الناس جميعا ومن أحياها فكأنما أحيا الناس جميعا ولقد جاءتهم رسلنا بالبينات ثم إن كثيرا منهم بعد ذلك في الأرض لمسرفون

"For this reason did We prescribe to the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men; and certainly Our messengers came to them with clear arguments, but even after that many of them certainly act extravagantly in the land." (Quran, 5:32)

Is dignity linked to the human ideology and faith or not? *Daesh* says that the person without faith should be killed. The dignity of the individual is preserved in continuity by extension with the dignity of Adam even after the fall. After the fall, we related to each other as human beings with the honor and the dignity that God had bestowed on us.

The first right of man is the right of life. According to Islam, every individual has rights, inalienable rights. God does not forbid you to have actions with people those who have not made war against you:

لا يَنْهَاكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

"Allah does not forbid you to respect those who have not made war against you and have not driven you from your homes – you show them kindness and deal with them justly, surely Allah loves the doers of justice." (Quran, 60: 8)

So, I would like to come to this conclusion that we should prioritize human soul and life over ideologies and educate and act upon it. We must respect all human beings, for God Himself honored them, regardless of their faith and religion or ideologies. In this way we can restore and preserve human society in peace and security.

Respect to be trusted!

Distrust is the basic element in de-humanizing the other; mistrust is the basis of exclusivism. How can we judge – the moment you start to mistrusting the other – you cut yourself from the other, you cannot relate to that person.

Remember that Prophet Mohammad like the other Prophets made himself ready to die for his people in order to get people to accept the announcements; now, how can we see “his followers” killing others if he was willing to kill himself for the others?

فلعلك باخع نفسك الا يكونوا مومنين

"Then maybe you kill yourself with grief, if they do not believe [in this announcement.]" (Quran, 26: 3)

Life is beyond our thought about it. Souls are created by God, beliefs are created by human minds. We are more than our mind and can experience it with a different dimension of ourselves. With our Soul. With our Heart.

At the end, let me call you to hear this vivific Old Testament verse by your heart: “You shall not kill!” (Exodus, 20:13)

Thank you!