

The problem of human dignity in its theological connotations under the conditions of the war of the Russia against Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The author draws attention to the problem of human dignity as the basis of civilizational coexistence of subjects of different religious and secular beliefs. It is shown that neither international legal documents nor theological concepts provide a clear definition of the term "dignity". Different readings refer to the meaningful, structural, dynamic meaning of this term. Based on the religious principles of tolerance, non-involvement and objectivity, this article examines human dignity in its theological connotations in view of the challenges of modern Ukrainian realities. The current positions of religious organizations, which traditionally enjoy the considerable trust of Ukrainian society, are articulated. Based on the generalization of the theoretical material and the statements of religious leaders of various denominations, the author concludes that in the conditions of the impossibility of political dialogue in the context of reconciliation with the aggressor, the idea of interreligious dialogue also needs urgent reconstruction, in particular, in particular, a direct answer to the question of whether dialogue can be the mission of the Church, conducted by it at the cost of truth and, at the same time, indulging human dignity, is needed.

KEYWORDS

human dignity, liberal theology, illiberal theology, freedom, personal autonomy

Introduction

The entire history of Ukraine's statehood is a struggle for the rights of its people, the defense of its own identity, and it appears as a kind of marker of an appeal to human dignity. Despite the restoration of the independence of the Ukrainian state, the 21st century was no exception.

Religious organizations have never stood aside from difficult historical trials and the struggle for freedom and democratic rights of Ukrainians, took an active part in the Revolution of Dignity, called to prevent bloodshed due to the ambitions of authorities at the time, looked for a compromise version of the development of events, and their leaders repeatedly met with representatives of the authorities, trying to convince the latter to take into account the constitutional rights of the Ukrainian people regarding peaceful expression of will. The unprecedented unity of representatives of various Churches and religious organizations in a single urge to preserve human life without compromising their dignity was reflected in the academic publication "Maidan and Church", which is based on the testimonies of eyewitnesses of those events, religious and secular leaders, and analysis of religious studies scientists (*Fylypovych (ed.), Horkuscha (ed.), 2015*).

During the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, representatives of various religious organizations are defending the honor and dignity of the state and its citizens at the front, providing immediate assistance to the population, actively making statements about the impossibility of Russian aggression, terrorism, war crimes against the civilian population and criminal methods of waging war, testifying to faithfulness to God's word and His earthly deeds.

Research methods

In the discourse of modern sociocultural knowledge, it is unlikely to find a meaning concept which has undeniable priority and, at the same time, ambiguity similar to dignity. Human dignity has become a kind of comprehensive concept that can successfully "cover up" deep theological and philosophical disagreements. Let us note that peculiar anthropologies, each of which has its own concept of a human being and their place in the world, are at the basis of different ways of thinking about human dignity.

International legal documents still do not provide a clear definition of the term "dignity". We have a similar situation in theology. Different understandings refer to the meaningful, structural, dynamic sense of this term. Based on the principles of tolerance, non-involvement and objectivity inherent in religious studies, we consider it our task to study the conceptualization of human dignity, in particular, in its theological connotations. The purpose of our work is the study of human dignity in view of the challenges of modern Ukrainian realities.

The problem of human dignity is constantly in the focus of attention of the world scientific community. Human dignity is considered the basis of human rights and religious freedom. At the same time, scientists note that with the secularization of European consciousness, starting from the 18th century, the justification of human dignity became problematic, which eventually paved the way for the totalitarianisms in the 20th century. The horrors of abuse of people during the escalation of military conflicts today make us search for a common idea of human dignity shared by various religious and secular philosophical traditions. In addition, the problem of freedom of religion

is considered as an example for further thinking about human dignity (Loughlin, 2016). The mission of unifying the world is placed on human dignity, where religious organizations occupy an important place with their own opportunity of dialogue (Davis, 2015), see its powerful educational influence, indicate the presence of humanistic and non-humanistic dignity (Vorster, 2010).

The recent history of Ukraine, and the Russian aggression against its independence have acutely posed the dilemma of the possibility of the coexistence of two types of civilizations, democratic and totalitarian ones, which determines scientific novelty of the study of the human dignity phenomenon in case of force majeure circumstances. In this process, the expression of the position of religious organizations, which traditionally enjoy considerable trust of Ukrainian society, seems to be extremely important. The religious diversity in Ukraine testifies to different social guidelines, the perception of reality and the place of human in it by different religions, draws the attention of researchers to the humanistic paradigm of the concept of human dignity in its religious and doctrinal interpretation and, in turn, acts as a novelty of the scientific work.

Results and Discussion

By its content, dignity is not only a moral or legal category, but also a broader sociocultural concept that expresses the internal state of the self-worth of subjects as free beings, thanks to, or despite the circumstances, as well as their perception of their own significant identity.

The self-identification of a person is always primary, but their identification means the honor that society shows to worthy subjects in the form of respect, recognition, or in the sacred form of honoring. Christ spoke about it that: "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house" (Matthew, 13: 57), "And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith" (Matthew, 13: 58). Sometimes the subject is denied such an honor; in this case, the more values they create, the more they devalue themselves and lose their dignity. Obviously, it is about the conflict of personal and public interests, subjective and objective conditions, democratic and totalitarian thinking, faith and unbelief, ideal and material, freedom and slavery, etc. At the same time, the axiological significance of dignity is so specific that it is placed above any material goods; it is clearly reflected in the phraseology "dignity is more expensive than bread".

In the structural aspect, the subject of dignity is not only the individual, but also communities, namely social groups, peoples, states and humanity in general (so, according to I. Kant, "universal human dignity" should exist). We find a similar reasoning in Hegel's statement about the "spirit of the people" that reigns in the state. According to the philosopher, the "spirit of the people" is formed by laws and traditions, in which people are recognized as free, intelligent beings. Each individual must make themselves worthy of this recognition, and therefore, grant others the full right to freedom and free expression of personal will.

According to Hegel, the concepts of "the people" and "spirit of the people" specify the process of historical development within certain local limits. Actually, "the people" acts as "spirit", "real substance", agent and subject of history, on which its course depends. "The spirit of the people" is the prerequisite and content of all forms of its historical activity, it is reflected through religion, philosophy, morality, art, which exist in a systemic unity. The scientist believed that a specific religion is characterized by a corresponding

form of the state, and vice versa – a separate state has its own religious worldview, original philosophy, art, and morality (Hegel, 1971: 288).

In general, the formation and development of the phenomenon of "dignity" is the dynamics of convergence from abstract to practical humanism. Such a process is too controversial; its problematic is outlined by Hegel's formula "slave and free man", where, according to the status, "slave" ensures survival, and "free man" provides the gradual development of society. At the same time, an alternative point of view assumes that spiritual freedom is independent of social status, not conditioned by it.

Indeed, spiritual freedom is possible in an individual who feels their own human dignity as a quality immanently present in them. Therefore, the figure of the founder of this religious direction, Jesus, who for the first time in the history of culture created himself as an ideal (normative) personality, showed human dignity as a result of self-determination as a self-worth individual, can be considered a humanistic achievement of Christianity. The Christian doctrine of deification only emphasizes the necessity of human dignity as a person's path to God, the disclosure of the best human qualities, the implementation of spirituality as a believer's religious potential (Kulahina-Stadnichenko, 2022).

At the same time, there are voices regarding the significant plasticity of the concept of dignity, the "liberal" and "illiberal" approaches of theologians to its substantive part. This is explained by the fact that theoretically shared theological views on the virtue of dignity as a general human capacity for benevolence are implemented through human actions in different ways. The latter are determined by the unequal place and role of each individual in a specific society, differ due to the influence of traditions, mentality, as well as political characteristics of a certain society.

Thus, the liberal approach, that is the most optimal for the manifestation of human dignity, considers the creation of the same opportunity to implement their own subjective freedom. Instead, the "illiberal" theological theory of human dignity is rooted in the doctrine of theosis, which literally proclaims the protection of "moral norms" from the destructive influence of individual rights that are detached from moral responsibility.

In general, in the Christian doctrine, human dignity is considered through familiarization with the "image and likeness of God", it makes sense when perceiving the idea of God-human communication, since human was created for the purpose of communication with God. However, such a common belief for all Christians does not lead to the same consequences. In addition, the humanistic value of a person is significantly problematized when it is considered through theological optics in terms of form, and not in terms of meaning. In such a case, even the evolutionary-conservative principles of religious teaching are devalued by the protective and repressive methods of its followers.

The conditions of conducting military operations of the Russian Federation in Ukraine significantly actualized the attention to the rhetoric of representatives of various Orthodox confessions regarding their perception of the problem of human dignity.

Thus, one cannot ignore the fact that the social doctrine of the UOC MP and the Russian Orthodox Church exists in a common semantic space, is based on the same religious documents, provokes the same messages, and therefore, its role and significance for both Churches of a pro-Moscow orientation can be identified.

Officially, the Russian Orthodox Church opposes the liberalization of the concept of human rights, as evidenced by a 2008 document entitled “Fundamentals of the Teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church on Dignity, Freedom and Human Rights” (2009). Here, the Russian Orthodox Church tries to support the concept of human dignity, which corresponds to human rights, but emphasizes the difference between the Christian understanding of it and modern liberalism, which it considers atheistic.

Just like other Christian denominations, the Russian Orthodox Church perceives dignity in connection with morality. At the same time, it seems essential that the ROC can practice religious morality at the institutional level in interaction with the state. It is clear that here the Russian Orthodox Church wants to prove its own independence by making the remark: “...but ‘not under the rule’ of the state”. However, for the Caesaropapist, historically established nature of the interaction between Russian Orthodoxy and the secular authorities, this amendment does not seem indicative. Orthodoxy has always occupied a privileged place in Russian culture, which is fairly approved and substantiated by the Russian Orthodox Church throughout the history of the formation of the Russian state.

Paradoxically, the Russian Orthodox Church not only justifies its own social privileges on the territory of the Russian Federation with Russian history and culture, but also considers it the right of the Russian people to be protected from the influence of other nations and “destructive” cults. Such a concept of rights in the interpretation of the Russian Orthodox Church practically supports the official Russian legislation against defamation (humiliation) of sacred symbols or any movement, that can reduce the influence of Orthodoxy on Russian culture. Therefore, there can be no question of any freedom of conscience or any religious freedom in a totalitarian state ruled by the Russian Orthodox Church.

In fact, the subtext of the above-mentioned document denies such an understanding of human rights that can relativize Orthodox morality, because it will open the way to atheistic-humanist versions, or it will threaten the transformation of the Russian Orthodox Church into one of the many voices that sound in the public space. It is clear that in the conditions of the totalitarian Russian empire, such polyphony does not seem possible.

The presence of an illiberal subtext regarding the problem of dignity is confirmed by the statements of individual Russian hierarchs, for example, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk. Reflecting the position of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding the divine origins of human dignity, he notes:

“The idea of responsibility is also present in humanism, but in the absence of absolute moral norms, this principle means limiting individual rights to the freedom of other people. From the point of view of atheistic humanism, the implementation of the potential of freedom is the same as the unhindered implementation by a person of all their desires and aspirations, except for those that prevent the implementation of such desires by other people; or the implementation of rights that do not violate the rights of others. This leads to a relativistic interpretation of all moral norms and spiritual values” (*Papanikolaou, 2021: 134*),

- and therefore, the Russian Orthodox Church, which still has not learned to coexist in the pluralistic world of interfaith communications, is condemned.

In contrast to the narrow-denominational, politically conditioned, conservative, nationalist-involved, monological concept of human rights of the Russian Orthodox Church,

the Orthodox Church of Ukraine took into account and offered for discussion to the general public the document “For the Life of the World. On the Way to the Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church” endorsed and approved for publication by the Synod of Constantinople Orthodox Church in January 2020. This document actively claims the role of the social doctrine of the OCU.

The document notes that regardless of the political conditions in which Christians find themselves, they must master the “language of human rights”, which means the ability to conduct a dialogue on the basis of which all parties can reach a certain common denominator: “This language is intended to heal the division in those political communities where people with very different beliefs must coexist”, it “enables the common practice of honoring the infinite and inalienable dignity of each person, which the Church undoubtedly considers to be an imprint of the image of God in all people” (*For the Life of the World...*, 2020). Therefore, Christians should recognize the “language of social consent”, which is necessary for the preservation and development of a just society, ensures the inviolability of human dignity and freedom.

The Church calls on Christians not to be afraid of cultural and social pluralism, to rejoice in the dynamic combination of human cultures in the modern world, which is recognized as a blessing, one of the greatest achievements of our time, and also certifies its own support for state strategies and laws that promote such pluralism as much as possible, calling peaceful coexistence of world cultures in modern societies a “gracious gift”.

A peculiar reading of the concept of dignity in the context of political theology was proposed by Aristotle Papanikolaou (2021). The researcher considers political theology to be one of the most important issues with which Orthodox theology of the 21st century deals. The relevance of this issue is obvious for the post-Soviet countries, where the relationship between the Church and the nation, culture, and state remains a subject of discussion (*Kulahina-Stadnichenko, 2019*). The relationship between these countries and the European Union exacerbates the issue of political theology even more.

However, it is unfair to claim that Orthodoxy was devoid of political theology in general. The life of Christians has always existed in the political space. Moreover, A. Papanikolaou confidently declares the need for Orthodoxy to “consider” political theology in contrast to the currently widespread notion of a symphony. He sees such an alternative in the Orthodox theory of God-human communication – deification (theosis), which connects all elements of the Orthodox tradition and all Orthodox Christians, from the radical to the most liberal ones. So, A. Papanikolaou concludes that the Church already has its own policy, namely the policy of deification, the essence of which is constant concern about how to learn to love the Other.

Relying on this theological approach in a common, pluralistic, public political space, the Orthodox Church should not appeal to the privileges of history or culture for the legislative imposition of specific moral norms specific to it on society. Instead, the Church is obliged to use its influence for the sake of expanding, improving, and deepening the democratic public sphere. In other words, the ecclesiological imperative must lie in public ecclesiology.

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, considering the concept of human dignity, supports all international acts aimed at protecting human rights. In particular, it supports the UN Charter (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights (1948), the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (1992). The UGCC recognizes the international community's principle of respect for human dignity and its rights as a mandatory and indisputable factor in the development of the individual, considers dignity to be the basis of its social concept, by analogy with I. Kant's teachings, perceives the autonomy of the individual and freedom of will as its important manifestations, emphasizes that all people are equal in their dignity (Moroz, 2015).

At the same time, the UGCC points to the need to adapt the concept of human dignity to Ukrainian realities, which acquires special significance, makes it possible to perceive human dignity not only as an existential-valuable, but also a practical-meaningful concept during the time of the military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine.

The main condition for implementing the value-meaning potential of human dignity is the ability to distinguish between good and evil, which is very important for a person of faith. This means to call a spade a spade, to be faithful to God, not to political slogans, to defend one's own religious identity on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, to be truthful and consistent in faith in the age that has already been called the age of "post-truth".

However, in the conditions of the Russian military attack on Ukraine, it is sometimes difficult for the Churches to call things by their proper names, it seems more characteristic for them to "avoid names" and to lag behind in adequate assessments of events compared to secular structures and mass media. Such ignoring of reality poses a critical question to the Churches about the very possibility of seeing spiritual decline as clearly as physical destruction. War categorically dilutes semantic concepts along the lines of morality, reminding one of Christ's appeals to be either hot or cold and not to seek a middle way with the policy of pacifying the aggressor: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. If you were cold or hot! And since you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth..." (Ohiyenko, 1962, URL).

Therefore, human dignity and freedom are interrelated. Currently, it is not about freedom of choice, but about human autonomy, which deeply reflects the idea of self-determination, the ability to responsibly perceive norms and values, and predict the consequences of one's own activities. Being an autonomous being, the individual has the right to express their own attitude to religious matters, to have a religious experience, to decide whether to remain a believer or not.

In other words, to talk about the autonomy of a person means to indicate the most essential, meaningful, important worldview decisions that they have to make. The totality of these decisions constitutes a person's moral identity. As emphasized earlier, in the doctrinal approach of Christianity, human dignity is too dependent on moral narratives, which, in turn, correspond to the religious instructions of the respective Churches.

Turning to the topic of human dignity, UGCC theologians believe that the position of John Paul II, who relied on Kantian theory in his thoughts, is most consistent with the Christian tradition (Moroz, 2015). According to the latter, autonomy is the basis of human dignity and any intelligent being. Here, I. Kant understands human autonomy as a non-relative substance, which means existence as an end in itself. However, human existence becomes an end in itself only when it has a moral dimension; their humanity is a sign of dignity. This approach is inconsistent with

A. Schopenhauer's point of view on dignity, as the opinion of others about our value, by which the scientist practically refutes the idea of the subject's autonomy, their moral self-worth (посилання).

Common to all Christians, human dignity is primarily an ethical category that is somehow integrated into social processes. However, unlike Orthodoxy with its inherent historical inertia of "escape from the world", Christian Churches of Western orientation actively consider the manifestation of human dignity through social processes. This tendency became too active after the Second Vatican Council, gave an impetus to theological personalism, but was criticized within the RCC, because, according to Pope Benedict XVI, excessive anthropocentrism harms theocentrism and is a consequence of secularism (Yarotsky, 2013).

Currently, the UGCC recognizes that, similar to international acts, its teaching lacks a comprehensive definition of the concept of human dignity. However, the Church provides an understanding of human dignity through the coverage of specific problems of social existence, in addresses, letters, speeches, and messages of hierarchs. According to the Head of the UGCC, S. Shevchuk, a society in which people are despised has no future. In view of human dignity, the individual is the ultimate goal of society. The priority of respect for the dignity of a person in all spheres of social activity, the inviolability of their rights, which they already possess as a result of their existence, attests to the functioning of society on the basis of justice. At the same time, an important sign of dignity is the subject's activity and responsibility for their own development.

The topic of human dignity has become dominant when considering the options for building a civil society, and was reflected in the documented speeches of representatives of churches and religious organizations on February 13, 2008 on the topic: "The experience of Christian churches in building a civil society". In their Address to Christians and all people of good will, the leaders of the Christian Churches connect the observance of human rights and freedoms with the formation of civil society in Ukraine and claim that such processes inspire hope for the creation of conditions that will more effectively protect the dignity of a person, help them in self-implementation. In this context, the Christian experience of nurturing human dignity, liberation from everything that burdens the conscience and restricts freedom, prevents living a full life and communicating with others, acquires special importance. Churches emphasize that the Christian community has always been the environment where people learned to use their freedom, to live worthy of the image of God, to responsibly use their own freedom to establish harmonious relations between members of the community. The condition, the main factor of this is the awareness of freedom not as permissiveness or arbitrariness, but its perception through responsibility for the act, respect for one's own dignity and the dignity of each person (Lange, 2008).

Conclusions

It would seem that only the recognition of the uniqueness of the Other, their right to exist, and therefore, human dignity, provided by preserving their own religious identity, will allow the Christian Churches not to be another source of conflicts in the modern polyphonic, polydenominational world. However, in the conditions of the war waged by Russia on the territory of Ukraine, such tolerance does not seem possible, as it means neglecting the general Christian values in favor of the position of the Russian Orthodox Church. It is no longer

appropriate for religious organizations to remain in the status quo with the call "Peace is more valuable than freedom". Churches should consider the public space, despite the fact that with the presence of left-wing parties in power in some states, we have a new balance of forces, when liberalism requires changes without much unrest, seeks not to go beyond the reached comfort zone.

In addition, the Churches should learn to call things by their proper names, get rid of the "ostrich" position when they do not want to criticize each other, raise important ecclesiological and political topics.

In the conditions of the war, which was unleashed by Russia in Ukraine with the active support of the Russian Orthodox Church, there can be no dialogue in the context of reconciliation with the aggressor. Currently, the "cold war" has already passed into the phase of a threat to the world by a nuclear catastrophe on the part of the Russian Federation, and therefore, the idea of interreligious dialogue needs urgent reconstruction, it requires a direct answer to the question of whether dialogue can be the mission of the Church, conducted by it at the cost of truth which, at the same time, indulges human dignity.

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Проблема людської гідності в її богословських конотаціях за умов війни РФ проти України

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Авторка привертає увагу до проблеми людської гідності, як основи цивілізаційного співіснування суб'єктів різних релігійних та світських переконань. Показано, що ані міжнародні правові документи, ані богословські концепції дотепер не дають чіткого визначення терміну «гідність». Різноманітність стосується змістовного, структурного, динамічного означення цього терміну. Спираючись на релігієзнавчі принципи толерантності, незаангажованості та об'єктивності, людська гідність у цій статті досліджується у її богословських конотаціях з огляду на виклики сучасних українських реалій. Артикульовано сьогоденні позиції релігійних організацій, які традиційно користуються значною довірою українського суспільства. На підставі узагальнення теоретичного матеріалу та висловлювань релігійних лідерів думки різних конфесій авторка доходить висновку, що в умовах неможливості політичного діалогу в контексті примирення з агресором нагального реконструювання потребує також ідея міжрелігійного діалогу, зокрема прямої відповіді на питання про те, чи діалог може бути місією Церкви, вестися нею ціною істини та, водночас, потурати людську гідність.

Ключові слова: людська гідність, ліберальне богослов'я, неліберальне богослов'я, свобода, автономія особи.

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