Human Dignity: The Fundamental Concept in Bioethics

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In December of 2005, the U.S. President's Council on Bioethics met to discuss the topic, "Human Dignity as a Bioethical Concept." The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity is committed to human dignity not just as a bioethical concept but as the fundamental concept in bioethics. Our belief in the fundamental nature of human dignity comes from our view of what human dignity is, where human dignity comes from, and the implications that human dignity holds for bioethical issues.

*Human* dignity is the recognition that human beings are worthy of a particular level of esteem or respect simply because they are human beings. Human *dignity* is the way of expressing the value of human beings. This stands in sharp contrast to the way in which we express the value of things: price.

Human dignity does not arise out of some ability or combination of abilities (i.e., autonomy, rational thought, self-awareness, freedom). Instead, human dignity is an inherent aspect of being human, the result of being created in the image of God. The fact that each and every human being bears the image of God (*imago Dei*) means that each and every human being has equal, inestimable, and irreducible dignity. It is not bestowed and it cannot be taken away; rather, it is recognized.

Connecting the recognition of human dignity to specific issues such as cloning, stem cell research, resource allocation, euthanasia, and the like is the bioethical task. This task requires reflection, interpretation, translation, and application. This is the task to which CBHD has been called. Our efforts at educating, equipping, and engaging involve relating the fundamental concept in bioethics to the specific issues of bioethics.

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