



Jadwiga Guerrero van der Meijden

# The Making of Human Dignity in Christian Antiquity

## The Making of Human Dignity in Christian Antiquity

# Contexts of Ancient and Medieval Anthropology

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# List of Abbreviations

- BP – Bibliotheca Patristica, Edizioni Nardini until 1998, since 1999 – Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna
- BSGR – Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, Teubner–De Gruyter (accompanied by the publication date)
- CCCM – Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, Brepols Publishers
- CCL – Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Brepols Publishers
- CPG – Clavis Patrum Graecorum, Brepols Publishers
- CPL – Clavis Patrum Latinorum, Brepols Publishers
- CSEA – Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiae Aquileiensis, Città Nuova
- DMLBS – Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources, British Academy
- DCOO – Doctoris Ecstatici Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia, Typis Cartusiae Sanctae Mariae de Pratis
- GCS – Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte, De Gruyter
- GNO – Gregorii Nysseni Opera Online, Brill
- HO – Hieronymi Opera, Città Nuova
- L&S – Lewis and Short Latin Dictionary, Oxford University Press
- LCL – Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press
- LSJ – Liddell Scott Jones Ancient Greek Dictionary, Oxford University Press
- NRSV-CE – New Revised Standard Version of the Bible Catholic Edition, National Council of Churches
- OCT – Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford University Press (accompanied by the publication date)
- OECS – Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford University Press (accompanied by the publication date)
- OLD – Oxford Latin Dictionary, Oxford University Press
- PG – Patrologia Graeca, ed. J.P. Migne, Imprimerie Catholique
- PL – Patrologia Latina, ed. J.P. Migne, Imprimerie Catholique
- PTS – Patristische Texte und Studien, De Gruyter
- SBO – Sancti Bernardi Opera, Editiones Cistercienses
- SBSO – Sancti Bernardi Senensis Opera Omnia, In Aedibus Andreae Poletti
- SCh – Sources Chrétiennes, Institut des Sources Chrétiennes, Cerf
- SGL – Scrittori Greci e Latini, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore (the series does not number volumes, therefore, I add the year of publication)
- SRSA – Sous la Règle de saint Augustin, Brepols Publishers
- STAC – Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, Mohr Siebeck

- TLL – Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften  
VL – Vetus Latina. Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel, ed. Roger  
Gryson, Herder  
WGRW – Writings from the Greco-Roman World, Society of Biblical Literature

All other abbreviations correspond to S. Schwertner (ed.), IATG<sup>3</sup>. Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete, De Gruyter, Berlin<sup>3</sup> 2014.

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Last but not least, I would like to dedicate this book to my brother, Adam—the *conditio sine qua non* of my interest in antiquity and Latin, a guide in comprehending the dignity of the excluded, and a prime figure behind my interest into history, including the history of Christmas.

# Forgotten Christian Antiquity

This chapter discusses the purpose of the entire book and argues as to why there is an urgent need for a study of late ancient Christian approaches to human dignity. I present the scope of the study and the relevant ancient Greek and Latin terminology describing human dignity. The chapter also summarizes the research methodology, lists the key questions of the study, and outlines the overarching thesis as well as the development of the arguments made in each chapter of the monograph.



## 1.1 The Purpose of the Book

The purpose of this book is to investigate the late ancient history of one pivotal concept in contemporary culture, that of human dignity, with a view to identifying the moment in history when European culture worked out a systematic category for human axiological status that we use today; that is, *human dignity*. In this study, I examine the writings of a number of Christian thinkers representing both Greek and Latin traditions; thus, it is relevant to both Eastern and Western European traditions of thought. Why is there a pressing need to perform such a study?

## 1.2 Why Study the Late Ancient Christian Conception of Human Dignity?

Since World War II, the concept of dignity has become of great interest to contemporary culture: many countries' international laws and constitutions employ it as their principal guiding notion, as do many philosophies and social theories.<sup>1</sup> Multiple societal and cultural debates analyze the concept, and

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1 Legal documents are the following: *United Nations Charter*, 1945; *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948; *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 1949; *Geneva Conventions*, 1949; *European Convention on Human Rights*, 1950; *Constitution of the Republic of Poland*, 1997; *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 2000. Philosophical

significant scientific efforts have been devoted to writing its history.<sup>2</sup> However, while the notion of dignity in both Greek and Roman antiquity or in modern and contemporary times is well-researched, its distinct meaning and history in the writings of the late ancient and medieval Christian authors are often overlooked or reduced to one single idea, and even downplayed.

Let us start with it being overlooked. In response to the need to understand the roots of this precious concept, histories were written in the last decade, from a diachronic perspective, in which typically one chapter was dedicated to the Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> If ancient Christianity was referenced at all, its analysis

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works incorporating dignity include, among others, the following: G. Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de dignitate hominis*, 1486; B. Pascal; *Pensées*, 1670; D. Hume, *Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature*, 1741; id., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1738–1740; I. Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1785; K. Wojtyła, *Osoba: podmiot i wspólnota*, 1976; id., *Człowiek jest osobą*, 1976.

- 2 P. Becchi / K. Mathis (eds.), *Handbook of Human Dignity in Europe*, Basel 2019; E. Sieh / J. McGregor (eds.), *Human Dignity: Establishing Worth and Seeking Solutions*, London 2017; S. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability*, Cambridge 2009; R. Debes (ed.), *Dignity: A History*, New York 2017; M. Düwell / J. Braarvig / R. Brownsword / D. Mieth (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity*, Cambridge 2014; J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Human Dignity in the Writings of the Church Fathers and the Doctors of the Church*, in: ead., *Person and Dignity in Edith Stein's Writings: Investigated in Comparison to the Writings of the Doctors of the Church and the Magisterial Documents of the Catholic Church*, Boston 2019, 265–308; P. Gilaber, *Human Dignity and Human Rights*, Oxford 2018; J. Griffin, *On Human Rights*, Oxford 2008; M. Lebeck, *On the Problem of Human Dignity: A Hermeneutic and Phenomenological Investigation*, Würzburg 2009; J. Loughlin (ed.), *Human Dignity in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition: Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Perspective*, London 2019; S. Müller, *Concepts and Dimensions of Human Dignity in the Christian Tradition*, in: JRAT 6 (2022), 22–55; M. Rosen, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning*, Cambridge 2012; U. Volp, *Die Würde des Menschen: Ein Beitrag zur Anthropologie in der Alten Kirche*, Leiden 2006; E. Weber-Guskar, *Würde als Haltung: Eine philosophische Untersuchung zum Begriff der Menschenwürde*, Münster 2016; J. Waldron, *Dignity, Rank, and Rights: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Oxford 2009. Consider also older studies: H. Baker, *The Image of Man: A Study of The Idea of Human Dignity in Classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance*, New York 1961; R.C. Dales, *A Medieval View of Human Dignity*, in: JHI 23 (1977), 557–571.
- 3 Debes (ed.), 2017; Düwell et al. (eds.), 2014; Rosen, 2012. Rosen, who does not claim expertise on each historical period, offers an overview of the history of the concept from which Christian Antiquity, as well as the Middle Ages, are entirely absent except for the inclusion of Pope Gelasius, whose quote serves to show that “the Christian era” criticized the social sense of dignity. He also mentions the utterance of a centurion to Jesus (*Domine, non sum dignus*), which apparently proves that Christianity bestowed dignity on people only provided they thought themselves unworthy (p. 11–14). A sizable edited volume by Düwell et al. offers a great chapter on meritocratic and civic dignity in Greco-Roman pagan antiquity, after which a valuable chapter on the twelfth to fourteenth centuries follows (which briefly mentions Augustine and Boethius on p. 65 and 67), and as a result, the Patristic Period is omitted. Debes' edited volume contains a chapter on the Christian Latin writes, which mentions

formed an element of an investigation into the medieval period, not a separate study.<sup>4</sup> What is striking, however, is that attention was given in these efforts to a few Latin figures only, typically of the high scholastic period, completely overlooking Greek Christian voices, specifically of the ancient Roman Empire.<sup>5</sup> Valuable research pertaining to the Greek tradition, functioning independently, plays no part in these diachronic studies.<sup>6</sup> With the exception of one study dedicated to the Judeo-Christian tradition as such, which included an introductory chapter on Christian antiquity, and one monograph unavailable in English, the topic is not discussed at length.<sup>7</sup> Major English attempts in this field fall short of noticing the Greek Christian voices, even though the so-called *lumen orientale*, “the eastern light,” constituted an authoritative source for the Latin West for centuries to come. This ignoring of the Greek antiquity goes so far as quoting the Latin pope’s famous appeal to “recognize one’s dignity” without ever observing that Leo the Great was repeating the call of a Greek philosopher living a century earlier in Cappadocia, namely Basil the Great.<sup>8</sup> Precious Greek contributions to understanding human dignity, such as a unique fourth-century encomium of human nature praising this nature’s special axiological

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Augustine and Leo the Great as well as the text of Vulgate (p. 73–98), yet judges the Latin writers’ discussion of human dignity to pertain to an alienable and limited good.

- 4 As indicated above, I discuss the three mentioned English publications. There is, however, a valuable monograph available in German published twenty years ago, which tackles the topic in reference to the biblical texts, ancient pagan philosophies and a selection of Christian writings up until Augustine of Hippo. It is not quoted in any of the English diachronic studies I have discussed. In the final chapter, I relate to this study and discuss its thesis. See Volp, 2006.
- 5 Baker, 1961; Debes (ed.), 2017; Düwell et al. (eds.), 2014; Rosen, 2012, M. Lebeck, *European Sources of Human Dignity*, Oxford 2019.
- 6 Cf. relevant studies: F.H. Bastitta, *If You Do Not Know Yourself, Beautiful Amongst Women: Human Greatness in Gregory of Nyssa and its Influence on the Quattrocento*, in: G. Maspero / M. Brugarolas / I. Vigorelli (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa, In Canticum Cantorum: Analytical and Supporting Studies*, Leiden 2018, 390–402; F.H. Bastitta, *Filiación divina, dignidad y tolerancia, de Epicteto a Gregorio de Nisa Textes et etudes* in: R.P. Rivs (ed.), *Tolerancia: teoría y práctica en la Edad Media*, Porto 2021; J. Behr, *The Promise of an Image*, in: T.A. Howard (ed.), *Imago Dei: Human Dignity in Ecumenical Perspective*, Washington 2013, 15–36; E. Garin, *La dignitas hominis e la letteratura patristica*, in: La Rinascita. Rivista del Centro Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento 1 (1938), 102–146; J. Loughlin, *Human Dignity and Human Wretchedness from Irenaeus to Pico della Mirandola*, in: id. (ed.), 2019, 99–120; L. Sozzi, *La dignitas hominis dans la littérature française de la Renaissance*, in: A.H.T. Levi (ed.), *Humanisme in France*, Manchester 1970, 179–198; G. Verbeke, *La dignité de l’homme dans le traité De hominis officio de Grégoire de Nysse*, in: Roczniki Filozoficzne 27 (1979), 139–155; Volp, 2006, 108–199.
- 7 Loughlin, 2019; Volp, 2006.
- 8 Lebeck, 2019, 68; Loughlin, 2019, 104; B. Kent, *In the Image of God: Human Dignity after the Fall*, in: Debes (ed.), 2017, 75.



status, have not been observed. In addition, some Latin axiological conceptions, such as an Augustinian hierarchy of beings that favors angelic nature over human nature, are proclaimed to be characteristic of the patristic as well as medieval period in general.<sup>9</sup> In fact, most Greek Fathers not only did not share these ideas, but they also presented views directly contradicting them, and later medieval masters often followed the Greeks. The earliest and hence exemplary Christian conception of dignity, that of the Greeks, has thus been overlooked.

The other thread that is typically omitted in the diachronic histories of human dignity, both recent and older, is the ancient female voice. This constitutes a gap in current scholarship, which thus overlooks figures such as Faltonia Betitia Proba or Egeria—to name just a few Latin intellectuals. Proba's or Egeria's writings are some of the earliest surviving Latin texts produced by a woman, and yet they remain completely absent from the diachronic histories of human dignity.

There is, however, an even more fundamental misconception about Christian antiquity, often also related to the Middle Ages. It is sometimes said that Christian antiquity and the medieval times accentuated human insignificance, and that it was during the period of the Renaissance when human dignity was properly proclaimed, with Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitate* used as prime example.<sup>10</sup> Some commentators claim even that the patristic and medieval authors have "little to say" about human dignity.<sup>11</sup> This view is supported by the claim that the Patristic Period and, according to some, even the Middle Ages, made use merely of the social sense of *dignitas*, one pointing to offices and ranks, and that *dignitas* was not used to denote the anthropological phenomenon of universal human value until the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> According to some, if ancient Christian thinkers recognized dignity

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9 Kent, 2017, 75.

10 Other examples include Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* and Bartolomeo Facio's *De excellentia ac praestantia hominis*. The two Renaissance treatises on human dignity written in Cracow: *De natura ac dignitate hominis* by Jan of Trzciana from 1554 and *Oratio de praestantia et excellentia humanae naturae* by Mikołaj Dłuski from 1564, are worth mentioning here; however, they have not yet been subject to extensive international studies.

11 Kent, 2017, 75. Kent acknowledges that the patristic and medieval literature discusses the image of God, yet not that it has much to say about universal human dignity.

12 Debes (ed.), 2017, 1–4. Debes claims that *dignitas* did not have an anthropological meaning until the early nineteenth century, stating that "until a little over a century ago, dignity connoted *social* status of the kind associated with nobility, power, gentlemanly comportment, or preferment within the church—not some fundamental, unearned, equally shared *moral* status among humans." To make clear he includes Latin *dignitas*:

at all, it was the dignity of Christians only, not the anthropological phenomenon of universal human dignity common to all. On the basis of those assumptions, some attempts downplay the patristic era as well as the medieval period as simply irrelevant to the history of human dignity.

However, even a brief study of the late ancient as well as medieval source texts contradicts these theses. Throughout the fifteen centuries preceding modern times, late ancient and medieval Christian writers discussed human axiology and applied the notion of human dignity (*dignitas*, ἀξία, ἀξίωμα, and τιμή, also εὐγένεια and εὐπρέπεια, as deemed applicable universally) in an anthropological context of human nature, not in a societal meaning pertaining to ranks, offices, and titles.<sup>13</sup> Their understanding of human dignity is varied and rich, ingrained in cultures as diverse as those of the ancient Roman civilization with its multi-lingual patristic centers and writers, the Western Empire's fall and *Völkerwanderung*, Carolingian and Ottonian Renaissances, synchronic eastern Byzantine culture, early, golden, and late scholasticism, as well as the sixteenth century: historically speaking post-medieval, yet academically often entirely scholastic.<sup>14</sup> However, a multifaceted historical analysis of this substantial period of European history (which begins in Christian antiquity) in terms of its understanding of human dignity has yet to be written.<sup>15</sup> This volume is an attempt at describing the beginnings of this history; specifically, at identifying the moment in history when European culture—insofar as it has its roots in the ancient Roman Empire—worked out a systematic anthropological-axiological category of human dignity, *dignitas hominis*. There is an academic

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“Until about 1830–1850, neither the English term ‘dignity,’ nor its Latin root *dignitas*, nor the French counterpart *dignité*, had any currency as meaning the ‘inherent or unearned worth of all persons.’” Debes’ observation relies on the reading of legal texts such *Magna Carta*, the United States Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution (see p. 2–3), and a specialist’s opinion on pagan antiquity (p. 16), which explains his overlooking of the ancient and medieval Christian writers. It is important to state that his interest is possibly more conceptual than historical. Rosen (Rosen, 2012, 16) claims that: “the use of *dignity* as an evaluative term of wider application is found in English as well as Latin in the seventeenth century.”

- 13 Loughlin argues that Renaissance’s ideas of human dignity are marked by continuity with ancient and medieval Christianity and could be seen as “their high point.” He also identified the nineteenth century anti-clerical and anti-Catholic historiographers who first framed Renaissance as a rapture from the Middle Ages. Cf. Loughlin, 2019, 99–102.
- 14 This period is called by some the Long Middle Ages, cf. J. Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction*, London 2006; K. Emery / R.L. Friedman / A. Speer (eds.), *Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages*, Leiden 2011; J. Le Goff, *Un long Moyen Âge*, Paris 2022.
- 15 At the time of writing, the publications planned in the international patristic project led by Karla Pollman, Alfons Fürst, and Anders-Christian Jacobsen were unavailable.

consensus pertaining to the fact that this happened somewhere in the first ten centuries of our era, yet the identification of this moment has either not been investigated or relies on a number of commonly known ancient sources that recur in all the English diachronic studies. With the exception of one extensive volume that proposed a hypothesis concerning the beginnings of the concept of human dignity, the question has not been addressed in detail.<sup>16</sup> The source material presented in this study points out some figures never before described in this respect in English studies, and unravels the earliest stages of the process of identifying the category of human dignity.

Finally, apart from overlooking or downplaying, many existing attempts at writing a history of the concept of dignity simplify ancient Christianity, as well as the Middle Ages, by reducing them to one single idea: humans are dignified by virtue of their creation in God's image and likeness.<sup>17</sup> Firstly, such an approach necessarily blurs the distinctiveness of both Judaism and Christianity, which each have their respective original approaches to—and anthropologies of—human dignity. Secondly, let us ask, would it not be a wonder of history if some fifteen centuries of human thought amounted to one single idea? Perhaps, but it is simply not the case that both the ancient and medieval Christian understandings of human dignity can be reduced to one theological conception of *imago Dei* (εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ), which was known to ancient Judaism and to Egyptian as well as Mesopotamic cultures, and is the one aspect of ancient and medieval thinking that is indeed a subject to various studies. In fact, quite the contrary.

Let us consider a handful of examples. In the fourth century, a Greek philosopher and theologian, Athanasius of Alexandria, formulated a rule concerning the origins of human dignity (τιμὴ) that links it strongly to God's incarnation and God's love of humans.<sup>18</sup> Athanasius' idea resonated in the Latin West, to be repeated and discussed by Hilary of Poitiers.<sup>19</sup> In the same century, Basil of Caesarea, another Greek thinker, formulated an appeal to recognize one's own dignity (ἀξία interchanged with τιμὴ and ἀξίωμα), which sought the foundation of human value in redemption.<sup>20</sup> Similar appeals to recognize one's dignity or value were repeated by many ancient Christians, including Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon and, most famously, the fifth-century Latin pope, Leo the Great. Leo is in fact the only one of the listed writers ever researched in this

16 Volp, 2006.

17 Debes (ed.), 2017; Düwell et al. (eds.), 2014; Rosen, 2012.

18 Ath., de inc. 34.2.

19 Hilar. Pict., trin. 2.25.

20 Basil. Caes., Ps. 48.8.

respect. His imperative to recognize one's dignity (*dignitas*) was frequently uttered by him during Christmas celebrations, for it also links human dignity to incarnation, as was done by his secretary, Prosper of Aquitaine. Jerome's appeal, one to implement the exact phrase *dignitas hominis* for the first time in the Latin West to the phenomenon of universal human axiological status, has never been identified in any history of human dignity—and it is based on Origen of Alexandria's conception of human deification.<sup>21</sup> Augustine of Hippo's late fourth- and early fifth-century philosophical texts include a use of dignity (*dignitas*) not only in the context of the image of God but also of the ontological hierarchy of natures.<sup>22</sup> In the Greek East, a Christian philosopher thus far given little attention by contemporary scholars, Nemesius of Emesa, wrote a praise (ἔγκωμιον) of human nature glorified, according to him, by virtue of being a microcosm: a unity of various dimensions of the created world.<sup>23</sup> This unique ancient ode to human dignity (called by Nemesius both εὐπρέπεια and εὐγένεια and deemed applicable to all human creatures and descriptive of their universal greatness and being of great origin) opens his later popular anthropological treatise.

Even more examples of the complexity of the Christian approach to dignity can be found in the medieval period, which adopted the patristic tradition. In the Carolingian Renaissance, Johannes Scotus Eriugena understood human nature to be dignified by virtue of it being a microcosm.<sup>24</sup> In the twelfth century, a Cistercian, Bernard of Clairvaux, offered conceivably the first definition of human dignity in European history that equated the concept with free will.<sup>25</sup> Later medieval analyses followed, reaching a decisive form in the high scholastic period, a form that is present in European culture today and makes no explicit reference to the notion of *imago Dei*. Instead, it links dignity strongly with personhood. The anonymous thirteenth-century definition of the person, which was very popular at the time, sums up the person through a “property pertaining to dignity” (*persona est hypostasis proprietate distincta ad dignitatem pertinente*),<sup>26</sup> remaining silent of the notion of the image. This definition

21 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.1–2.

22 August., civ. 8.11.

23 Nemes., nat. hom. 2.65 (BSGR 1987, 15). Greek: M. Morani (ed.), *Nemesii Emeseni de natura hominis*, Leipzig 1987, abbreviated as BSGR 1987. Earlier edition available in: PG 40, 504–817.

24 Eriug., Periphyseon 2.4–5.

25 Bern. Cl., De diligendo Deo 2.

26 I.e., “*Person is a hypostasis distinguished by a property pertaining to dignity.*” The authorship of the definition is unknown; it appears for the first time in: Alexander of Hales et con., *Summa fratris Alexandri*, 2, inq. 2, sec. 1, q. 1, p. 9.

was to be repeated appreciatively by Albert the Great,<sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas,<sup>28</sup> and Bonaventure.<sup>29</sup> Notably, other substantial theological ideas regarding human dignity concerned human *capax Dei*—the capacity to be filled with divine life, not just iconicity. Other examples do follow, for, unsurprisingly, historical processes are diverse and manifold.

And yet, despite this evident complexity of the patristic approach (and, inspired by it, the medieval approach) to human dignity, and the alternatives to the doctrine of *imago Dei* understood as the single justification of human dignity, multiple publications discussing human dignity in Christian antiquity as well as the subsequent Middle Ages focus mainly or even solely on this one notion.<sup>30</sup> It might be argued, of course, that the ancient and medieval thinkers acknowledged the iconicity of human nature in their writings and linked it to human dignity—indeed, they very often have. Yet to present this idea as the only late ancient or medieval justification for dignity amounts to an unwarranted reduction and a *pars pro toto* mistake. To overlook the fact that in the very context of human dignity the late ancient and medieval Christian thinkers adhered to other anthropological notions (such as microcosmic nature, *capacitas Dei*, personhood) and other justifications of dignity (such as incarnation or redemption) does not do justice to intellectual historical writing, but most of all to the riches and complexity of late ancient and medieval Christian thought.

The lack of an in-depth understanding of the late ancient and medieval history of dignity not only forms a blind spot in the history of ideas, but can lead to later ideas and cultural currents being misinterpreted. Ignoring the influence and complex character of the early Christian thought on the development of the European understanding of human dignity precludes any adequate assessment of the origins of later conceptions, including contemporary

27 Alb. M., *Summa Theologiae sive de mirabili scientia Dei* 1. trac. 10, q. 44, cap. 2: *Persona est hypostasis distincta incommunicabili proprietate ad dignitatem pertinente*; and, *Persona est hypostasis incommunicabili proprietate determinata ad dignitatem pertinente*. Id., *Commentarius in Librum IV Sententiarum Petri Lombardi* 1, d. 25, a. 1: *Persona est hypostasis proprietate distincta ad dignitatem pertinente*.

28 Thom. de Aquino, *Sth* 1, q. 29, a. 3, ad 9, ad 2; id., *Sth* 1, q. 40, a. 3, ad 1; id., *Scriptum super Sententiis* 1, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1. ad. 8.

29 Bonaven., *Commentaria in librum primum Sententiarum*, dist. 25, a. 1, q. 2, concl.: *Persona est hypostasis distincta proprietate ad nobilitatem pertinente*, in: ibidem, *Collegium a St. Bonaventura* (ed.), Florence 1882, 441.

30 Debes (ed.), 2017, 73–98, Düwell et al. (eds.), 2014, 64–84. Rosen mentions briefly one medieval thinker, Thomas Aquinas, with one quotation of the thirteenth-century thinker. Cf. Rosen, 2012, 16–17.

ones. In effect, they are often misapprehended as being suddenly invented in the Renaissance or even Enlightenment, as if from an intellectual vacuum.

The very roots, however, of the Anglo-Saxon name for human axiological status, *dignity*, take us back to Christian antiquity, during which the anthropological use of *dignitas*, denoting human high axiological status and not a social phenomenon of ranks and offices, was used in a systematic manner as a common anthropological category. Therefore, the history of human dignity in Europe, insofar as it is a history of a concept of “dignity,” begins in Christian antiquity with its chief representatives who worked out an axiological-anthropological category *dignitas hominis*.

Other major characteristics of the contemporary idea of dignity also stem from Christian Antiquity. It was in this period that *dignitas* was for the first time linked to a pre-existing anthropological egalitarianism, present in Judaism and some Hellenistic schools, and henceforth came to be understood more broadly as universal, i.e., common to humanity, not linked to social status or birth, but resulting from the simple fact of possessing human nature. The ancient Christians challenged the axiological hierarchies built on the criteria of social standing, for “there is no favoritism in God” and “there is no longer Jew or Gentile,” and proposed notions of human worth applicable to all human creatures. They, moreover, spelled out and justified the idea of human dignity surpassing all possible estimations and thus being priceless, contrary to the presumptions evident in the Greek and Roman social order. Although overall Christian voices on the matter of slavery differ, and the process of the application of the newly born idea of human dignity to practice of slavery has not been widespread, there were innovative stances among leading Christian intellectuals who criticized the Aristotelian belief that slavery was natural, and they upbraided the practice, in regard to adults as well as children. Guided by these principles, many ancient Christians called for and initiated humanitarian actions on behalf of the most vulnerable. Interestingly for the twentieth-century legal function of dignity, ideas of the dignity of the poor, the sick or other social outcasts (e.g., widows) were topics frequently raised by the ancient Christian writers and leaders, to mention only Lawrence of Rome, who reportedly called the poor “the treasures of the Church.” Late ancient thinkers also stressed the obligations of third parties to the subjects of dignity, specifically the discriminated, and the moral consequences of disregarding such obligations. Finally, significant contemporary cultural trends, such as a link between the concept of dignity and the liturgy of Christmas celebrations (in Catholic and some Protestant churches), can be explained only by going back to the ancient Greek East and the influence it had on the Latin West.

All the aforementioned ideas pertaining to what we today call “human dignity” influenced subsequent centuries. Hence, an in-depth, careful analysis of the Patristic Period is *conditio sine qua non* for an adequate understanding of the modern and the contemporary notions of dignity—and hence a *sine qua non* condition for understanding the culture we live in.

### 1.3 The Scope of this Study

The present inquiry is not dedicated to the study of all the allusions to dignity in European history throughout some fifteen centuries of ancient antiquity and the Middle Ages, inclusive of the Syrian, Coptic, Armenian, Jewish, and Arabic contributions. Nor is it an investigation into all the ancient Greek and Latin anthropologies, pagan and Christian. Such a project would necessarily exceed the limits of any volume-length investigation. It would also remain partially irrelevant to the leading question posed at the beginning of this chapter concerning the coining of *dignitas* as an anthropological category. Instead, this book is dedicated to the beginnings of the history of the concept of human dignity in European culture; that is, to Greek and Latin Christian antiquity, which respectively influenced the coining of and—most importantly—worked out the category *dignitas hominis*. Insofar as the direct influences of the patristic conceptions and terminological choices are identifiable in the subsequent centuries, these are included as well.

In this book, I therefore investigate a number of prominent ancient Christian thinkers, whose writings were copiously copied, broadly distributed, widely read, and frequently cited throughout the Greek East and Latin West. These thinkers, having occupied leading roles in ancient societies, such as bishops or notable philosophers and theologians, played significant roles not just in intellectual life but also in political or social history, and in effect were widely known and read. The historical process of the formulation of their ideas inevitably includes historically less significant texts and figures of ancient Christianity, which therefore are included in this investigation. Their omission would rupture the continuity of the intellectual process because they often constitute a link between the transmission of prominent ideas or their inspiration and, as such, are an inherent part of the history of the idea. The selection of texts and authors is, therefore, based on the three criteria: (1) dedication to the topic of human dignity (understood as universal human axiological perfection), (2) use of the ancient dignity-related notions, and (3) the influence of these texts on the later European culture. By analyzing the ancient texts thus

selected, I unravel the development of the patristic axiology of a human being, in which the idea of universal human dignity was coined.

The scope of investigation stretches, therefore, from the ancient Greek East, which initiated the Christian debates over human axiology (Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyon,<sup>31</sup> Origen of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Nemesius of Emesa, John Chrysostom), to the ancient Latin West, which worked out the anthropological category of human dignity that influenced the later ages (Minucius Felix, Lactantius, Cyprian of Carthage, Hilary of Poitiers, Faltonia Betitia Proba, Ambrose of Milan, Chromatius of Aquileia, Jerome of Stridon, Augustine of Hippo, Leo the Great, Prosper of Aquitaine, Master of Verona). The emphasis is placed on the Golden Age of patristic literature. I also discuss late-patristic figures illustrating the change in discourse, namely Boethius, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great, Ildefonsus of Toledo, and Julian of Toledo as well as various authors of the late fifth-century collection of sermons called *Eusebius Gallicanus*, and the anonymous treatise *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*, comprising a part of a medieval pseudepigraph, *De dignitate conditionis humanae*. Insofar as they show the influence of patristic writers, the Carolingian Renaissance, as well as the early, middle, and high scholastic periods, are considered in this investigation (Hincmar of Reims, William of Saint-Thierry, Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of Saint Victor, Godfrey of St. Victor, Peter Cantor, Gerard Iterius, Thomas Aquinas, the anonymous author of *De humanitate Christi*, Catherine of Siena, Denis the Carthusian). This volume is thus an attempt at unraveling the heretofore-neglected origins of the Christian conception of human dignity, thereby proposing an answer to a simple but fundamental question: since when, in European culture, is “dignity” used as an anthropological category expressive of human universal positive axiological status?

To properly address this question, it is helpful to draw the following two distinctions. First, in order to challenge the idea that *dignitas* in Christian antiquity had merely the social meaning of a rank, a title, or an office,<sup>32</sup> I distinguish between its two meanings: one referring to social standing (at times personalized in order to mean a person holding a particular rank) and the other,

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31 Irenaeus was a Greek-speaking intellectual born in Smyrna in Asia Minor who became a bishop of the western diocese of Lugdunum (contemporary Lyon in France). Despite his occupation, in the histories of the patristic period, he is associated with the Eastern Greek tradition because of his language.

32 Debes (ed.), 2017, 1–2.



anthropological meaning pertaining to human beings in general and referring to their positive axiological status. Because of its origins in the Roman culture and predominant presence in the late ancient Roman legal documents, I call the first one *dignitas Romana*, indicating the phenomenon of a socially relevant place in a hierarchy of ranks (as in the title of the Roman administrative document, *Notitia dignitatum*, describing hierarchy of rank and called by some historians “that most Roman of documents”).<sup>33</sup> To differentiate this use of *dignitas* from an anthropological category expressive of universal human value, I refer to the latter with Jerome of Stridon’s expression: *dignitas hominis*, the dignity of a human being or—to simplify—*human dignity*.<sup>34</sup> The distinction between *dignitas Romana* and *dignitas hominis* is a tool that allows me to formulate historical observations with precision and simplicity, primarily in relation to the Latin tradition. A parallel differentiation can be detected in ancient Greek, for example, in the social and universally anthropological uses of ἀξίωμα, ἀξία, and εὐγένεια, and an analogous distinction applies to some other languages, such as Polish and Russian (with both social and anthropological meanings of “godność” or “dostoinstvo”).

At times, when relevant, other subtle meanings of *dignitas* can be spelled out using a similar tactic, such as when I identify *dignitas Christiana*, relating to the specific dignity or virtue of Christians, or *dignitas sacerdotalis*, descriptive of the priestly nobility. The fundamental distinction here, which allows me to detect the change in European Latin discourse and describe the subjects of particular texts using the noun *dignitas*, is that between *dignitas Romana* and universal *dignitas hominis*.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, to identify the change in anthropological discourse and the forming of fixed and universal terminology expressive of human axiological status, one cannot research only the texts that mention the concept of dignity. By doing so, one would first necessarily overlook the complex process of the formation of the axiological–anthropological problematic and its search for a notion to name its main subject. Second, such a strategy would be based

33 R.I. Ireland (ed.), *Notitia dignitatum*, Munich 2002; J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, London 1989, 467.

34 Some Latin nouns, such as *fastigium*, also have both a socially and anthropologically relevant meaning referring either to a rank or a human value: *fastigium consulatus* and *fastigium mortale* respectively.

35 I specifically do not call human dignity *dignitas humana* because an adjective, *humana*, was used less frequently in reference to dignity than the genitive of *homo*. Cf. also an existent practise in: Garin, *La dignitas hominis e la letteratura patristica*, in: *La Rinascita. Rivista del Centro Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento* 1 (1938), 102–146; L. Sozzi, *La dignitas hominis dans la littérature française de la Renaissance*, in: A.H.T. Levi (ed.), *Humanisme in France*, Manchester 1970, 179–198.

on a historically simplifying and often unrealistic presumption that the alterations in intellectual history are sudden and do not have ground laid for them by previous traditions and influences. Rarely can we identify such a decisive breakthrough in the history of a concept. In reality, most changes in intellectual history result from a slow process of the crystallization of various relating conceptions, trends, and traditions, from which the new category is minted and that thus make the change possible. This is, as I will argue, the case with the axiological category of human dignity, the verbalization of which is conditioned by a number of relevant anthropological and axiological standpoints. Such factors need to be observed if one is to understand why and how the notion of human dignity became an anthropological–axiological category in European culture.

In addition, focusing solely on the texts that use the concept of human dignity would make it impossible to identify the terminological choices that preface the popularization of the investigated notion and yet are descriptive of human positive axiological status. This is why I investigate patristic axiology that predates the occurrence of dignity as an anthropological category, reaching about a century back, and in some cases even earlier than that.

To avoid the simplifications I have mentioned, I distinguish between (1) the axiological problematic explicated with terminology different from the contemporarily relevant concept of human dignity and (2) the discussion of human axiological status named “dignity.” In my previous study of the history of the idea of human dignity, I drew a similar distinction and worked out terminology describing it. I differentiated the concept, term, and notion, defining the *term* as a linguistic formula (a word or a phrase) with one clearly defined meaning relating to it, *concept* as a linguistic formula (a word or a phrase) with many different meanings associated with it in different contexts and uses, and *notion* as a semantic field of a specific meaning occurring without one word traditionally attributed to it as its typical name.<sup>36</sup> This allowed me to identify descriptions of human positive axiological status in texts that did not use the concept “dignity” but used expressions synonymous with it. For reasons of stylistic flexibility allowing the interchange of *concept* and *notion* as synonymous expressions, I will not implement this terminology here, but I accept the rationale behind it. In particular, I differentiate the axiological problematic expressed without naming human status “dignity” from the ones that do implement the concept of human dignity. In other words, at times I identify

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36 J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Person and Dignity in Edith Stein's Writings: Investigated in Comparison to the Writings of the Doctors of the Church and the Magisterial Documents of the Catholic Church*, Boston 2019, 40–44.

the discussion of human axiological status in which the concept of dignity is not used and differentiate it from the discussions of human axiology that implement the concept of dignity. This allows me to detect the changes in the axiological discourse leading up to the occurrence of the commonly applied anthropological category of human dignity.

This necessarily brings me to the question of the terminology used by the ancient writers that is relevant to the contemporary notion of human dignity. We need to make clear what we take to be human dignity in the ancient Christians' respective languages and cultures; for Europe never was a homogeneous culture.

Before I discuss this, let me add again that, having drafted the scope of my research, that the outlook on the patristic axiology of a human being provided in this volume should be deepened by considering Syrian, Coptic, and Armenian texts. This investigation, however, is an attempt to identify the coining of the term *dignity* as an anthropological–axiological category and thus to draw the reader's attention to a few significant strokes in the landscape of early European thought concerning dignity. It is, therefore, dedicated to the forefront of late ancient culture, in which dominant debates were held in Greek and Latin. In particular, it is dedicated to intellectual authorities who, because of their role in history and their significant influence over the later centuries of medieval Christendom, had an effect on the way European culture debates human axiology.

#### 1.4 Ancient Greek and Latin Terminology

Let us return to the topic of terminology. What do I take to be human dignity in the languages the ancient authorities wrote in, namely ancient Greek and Latin?

Without doubt, *dignitas* constitutes the Latin reference for human dignity. Even if ancient Romans understood *dignitas* primarily as an office, rank or status (hence later: esteem, prestige, or reputation), *dignitas* was eventually used in Europe in the meaning expressive of the contemporary use of English “dignity,” Spanish “dignidad,” Italian “dignità,” Lithuanian “orumas,” Polish “godność,” Dutch “waardigheid,” Norwegian “Menneskeverd,” German “Würde,” or the Hebrew expression literally meaning “the glory of man” but used as a translation of “dignity” in international legal documents, that is, “kwod ha-Adam.”<sup>37</sup> When we today use these expressions, we refer to human

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37 Cf. L&S; TLL, DMLBS for *dignitas*.

universal positive axiological status or, in other words, an existential perfection of a human being present in each human subject. Latin *dignitas* has been used in this way for centuries in reference to a human being, and this investigation unravels many of these uses, as well as the process of the social meaning of *dignitas* (*dignitas Romana*) giving way to its anthropological meaning (*dignitas hominis*), universally applied to all human beings. Naturally, *dignitas* had non-anthropological and even socially irrelevant meanings as well; for instance, that of a logical principle.<sup>38</sup> What is important for this study, however, is that in late antiquity *dignitas* started to function as the concept referring to universal human greatness, value, worth or dignity—the topic of this study. The history of this process is described in this volume.

In some cases, *dignitas* occurred interchangeably with other expressions that are semantically close to it (such as *honor* and its alternative form *honoris*, *praestantia*, *excellantia*, *gloria*, *honestas*, *nobilitas*) as well as periphrastic expressions, which we might, therefore, also consider in this investigation. Yet the word itself remains the most important point of reference for the study of the concept of human dignity in Latin traditions. There is little to no scholarly debate about this.<sup>39</sup>

The Latin expression sets forth the basis for investigating medieval Italian and Spanish, in which dignity is *la dignità* and *la dignidad* respectively. In modern English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, or Italian “dignity” is also rooted in this Latin word.

There is no such easy solution with ancient Greek, however, which influenced the coining of the Latin category, *dignitas hominis*. As already indicated, the Greek ideas that were transmitted to the western Christian writers played a critical role in the Latin discussions of human axiology and influenced the Middle Ages. Which Greek texts, however, describe human axiology?

The debate over what could be the linguistic reference point for dignity in ancient Greek is more nuanced and should consider at least the five following Greek nouns.

On one hand, ἀξία—a value, worth or price of something,<sup>40</sup> and another derivative form of ἀξιος (“worthy”), that is ἀξιωμα, when discussed in reference to a human being, establishes a relevant field of study for our investigation.

38 This is visible in medieval translations of Aristotle's logical works, e.g. apo., 75a38–75b3 or 76b13–15 in the edition *Aristoteles Latinus*.

39 P. Becchi / K. Mathis (eds.), *Handbook of Human Dignity in Europe*, Basel 2019; M. Lebeck, *European Sources of Human Dignity*, Oxford 2019; Debes (ed.), 2017; Düwell et al. (eds.), 2014; Dales, 1977; J. Domański, *Z dawnych rozważań o marności i pogardzie świata oraz nędzy i godności człowieka*, Warsaw 1997; TLL; ODL; L&S; DMLBS.

40 LSJ for ἀξία.

Indeed, some scholarly studies treat the Greek concept ἀξία as the single most relevant word in the debate over human dignity in the Greek tradition.<sup>41</sup> The argument for doing so points to the fact that ἀξία and ἀξιώμα were translated by Greek-speaking Latin translators as *dignitas*, a practice visible, for instance, in editions such as *Aristoteles Latinus* or *Patrologia Graeca*, which accompany the Greek texts with the Latin translations. This includes also the non-anthropological meaning of both ἀξία and *dignitas* understood as a “principle” (as in the case of logical principles called by Aristotle ἀξίαι or ἀξιώματα and translated into Latin as *dignitates*). This word was used by the ancient Greeks living in the Roman Empire and Byzantium in an anthropological context.

On the other hand, ancient Greek culture is known to place a significant importance on the τιμή of free men—their dignity, honor or esteem, and on the moral imperative to oblige with the rules of honoring τιμή.<sup>42</sup> Plutarch described Solon taking care not to offer either too little or too much τιμή to the Athenians.<sup>43</sup> The Homeric description of the affront that Agamemnon caused to Achilles during the Trojan War when he took Achilles’ rightfully earned war prizes, inclusive of Achilles’ concubine, Briseis,<sup>44</sup> demonstrates how grave were the consequences of dishonoring (ἀτιμάζω) a free man’s dignity for the archaic Greeks. In the archaic period depicted in Homeric prose, the act of disrespecting a hero’s honor required compensations to be made, including material ones; thus, Agamemnon offers to Achilles seven cities, among other precious things, such as the hand of his daughter, while honoring him in his heart as his own son, Orestes—all as means of restitution for the affront caused to the hero’s τιμή.<sup>45</sup> Even though its meaning altered between archaic and the classical period due to the changing political context (ἀτιμία in Greek democracy meant a loss of civil rights and the disgrace connected to it), the role of τιμή remained central to ancient Greek culture and ethos.<sup>46</sup> Later Greek Christians adopted some elements of the classical and archaic Greek culture, and used τιμή and its etymological derivatives, for instance the adjective ἔντιμος, dignified or worthy, in anthropologically relevant and at the same time universally human contexts. Similarly to ἀξία, τιμή also carries a non-personalist meaning of a price of something. Τιμή was translated into Latin as *honor*, less frequently

41 J. Lössl, *The Pre-Christian Concept of Human Dignity in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, in: Loughlin (ed.), 2019, 45 (favours ἀξία, though mentions ἀξιώμα and τιμή); Lebeck, 2019, 12 (singles out ἀξία and ἀξιώμα).

42 K. Korus, *Godność i wolność: Greckie źródła tożsamości europejskiej*, Cracow 2019.

43 Plu., Sol. 18.4. Τιμή is translated as “dignity” in LCL 46, 453.

44 Hom., Il. 1.140–141; 1.181–182; 1.205–206.

45 Hom., Il. 9.260–261; 19.137–138.

46 Korus, 2019, 60–62; Pl., r. 8.

as *dignitas*, but it is its meaning, not etymological similarity of a translation, that we are after here.

The use and meaning of *τιμή* in the writings of later Greek Fathers, their understanding of this archaic Greek name for honor, is, therefore, also relevant to this inquiry. Given the importance of *τιμή* for the classical Greeks, whose intellectual heritage the Greek Fathers adopted, it would be limiting to omit its use in the writings of the Greek-speaking patristic writers.

Finally, two other Greek words constitute a relevant field of research, for even though their classical meaning did not designate human dignity, they came to be applied in this meaning in the unique Christian encomium of human nature. In its most common meaning, *εὐγένεια* describes nobility of birth or being well born, but it was also used to name nobleness of mind or bodily excellence.<sup>47</sup> There are, however, identifiable uses of this noun in the fourth century, describing the general property of human nature and not a socially relevant characteristic of nobility of blood. In this, the meaning of *εὐγένεια* mirrors to some extent that of *dignitas* with its two meanings, *dignitas Romana* and *dignitas hominis*. *Εὐπρέπεια*, meaning “comeliness” or “goodly appearance,” started to express more generally “majesty” or “dignity” from the third century on.<sup>48</sup> Similar to *εὐγένεια*, *εὐπρέπεια* is a word that a Christian fourth-century writer—Nemesius of Emesa—reached for in his axiological debates over universal human axiology, applying it to human physical composition.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, in this book I identify the anthropologically relevant uses of *dignitas* as well as of *ἀξίωμα*, *ἀξία*, *τιμή*, *εὐγένεια* and *εὐπρέπεια*, examining their occurrences, inclusive of the occurrences of their etymological derivative forms, in the preserved writings of the selected Greek and Latin Christian writers. Due to the overarching research question pertaining to the moment in history in which Europe developed a name for human dignity, I focus on the Greek tradition insofar as it led to the coining of the Latin *dignitas hominis* or *dignitas humana*, from which the contemporary European notion of human dignity derives.

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47 LSJ for *εὐγένεια*.

48 LSJ for *εὐπρέπεια*.

49 It is worth noting that the Greek term *δόξα* carries not only a sense of belief or judgment but also the meaning of reputation, including positive connotations of credit, honor, or glory, and negative associations, as in “ill-repute.” See LSJ on *δόξα*. This meaning is evident in Plato’s *Apology* (34e), in which Socrates defends his actions by highlighting the reputation that he aims to maintain and which compels him to make righteous but challenging choices. The use that Socrates advocates is not in principle applied universally to all individuals, but only to those who are morally virtuous, similar to the concept of reputation.

## 1.5 Research Methodology

The study taken up in this volume assumes the methodology of the history of ideas, as it is developed by the Cambridge School of Intellectual History, as well as by an older tradition of the German *Begriffsgeschichte*, and—more recently—the History of Ideas Research Centre of the Jagiellonian University. The Cambridge School's famous conceptualization of the deceitful mythologies typical of naïve history of ideas today comprises an indispensable methodological tool for intellectual history writing. A chapter of my previous lengthy comparative research on human dignity in the works of Edith Stein and the ancient and medieval Christian tradition is dedicated to laying out this methodology as well as a distinction between the concept, notion, and term.<sup>50</sup>

In short, I understand the history of ideas to be the interdisciplinary study of not just linguistic but also non-verbal cultural objects, yet in this volume I consider written sources only. They are all analyzed in their original form with the full employment of modern linguistic methods of textual criticism and hermeneutics. In order to accommodate the reader, I provide the English translation alongside the original dignity-related terminology, basing my reconstruction and translations on the original texts. This allows the reader to make observations regarding the lexical usage as well as literary and textual features of the sources. When the original Greek text with its terminology is the subject of explicit investigation, I provide an English translation in the main body of the text and Greek in the footnotes. When the semantics of the text are clear from previous parts of the investigation, I present a translation with crucial original concepts and phrases inserted in brackets. As some Greek concepts listed in the methodological part of this Chapter are central to this research, I use them in their original form, except for in the final chapter, which contains the synthetic conclusions of the investigation. The Latin tradition originated the etymological and conceptual roots of the contemporary concept of human dignity, and therefore, in order to facilitate further studies in the area, I provide both the original and the translation in the main body of the text. This is due to the role the Latin texts played in the formative period of European culture, the Long Middle Ages.

As indicated above, I limit the scope of the study to the selected Greek and Latin notions, exploring them in the most influential Greek patristic texts and almost all available Latin patristic sources, and—in terms of their rich reception—in the medieval Latin tradition. The reconstruction of the ancient and to some extent medieval intellectual history of the concept of human

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<sup>50</sup> Guerrero van der Meijden, 2019, 24–48.

dignity is further supplemented by a critical diagnosis of the period studied. In the conclusions, I consider the inter- and extra-textual relations between the studied works. In order to put forward not just an unrelated list of standpoints, but a mature synthesis of the standpoints existent in the studied period, I raise the seven leading questions of the study.

## 1.6 The Key Questions of the Study

These questions, leading the critical analysis of particular ancient standpoints, concern the character and meaning of the concept of dignity or the axiological theory. This facilitates the basic aim of the book: to offer not just a reconstruction of the intellectual facts in this period in the history of European culture, but also a careful, scholarly diagnosis of this period. Such a diagnosis offers an estimation of the character and the role of the concept studied, leading the investigation far beyond a mere recapitulation of ancient texts. It also allows me to achieve the fundamental research aim stated at the beginning of this introduction: to identify the moment in history when European culture worked out a name for human axiological status that we use today, dignity.

Hence, the research is oriented according to seven key questions, apart from the overarching discussion of the question of the origins of the systematic category of human dignity. Raising them makes it possible to identify the presence of a common denominator of all the conceptions studied, the main differences between them, their overall character and, most importantly, the relevance of the theories studied to the contemporary culture and the understanding of dignity we share today. The seven questions leading the analyses of the source material in the course of this investigation are as follows:

1. How did the patristic writers conceptualize human dignity (*dignitas*, τιμή, ἀξία, ἀξίωμα, εὐγένεια, εὐπρέπεια applied to human nature)? In other words, in the context of which problems did they address the topic of human dignity? How frequently did they use the concept of dignity in the anthropological context? What other terminology did they use to describe human value?

2. How did the ancient Christian thinkers justify human dignity, specifically, what foundations for human dignity did they point to? Is human dignity, according to them, rooted in human nature, achieved by actions, justified by the human *telos*, or by some other anthropological or metaphysical principle? What constitutes the ontological foundation of human dignity?

3. Did the patristic writers understand dignity as unchanging or as capable of growth or diminishing? If the latter, what are the criteria of altering dignity, either positively or negatively? Can dignity be erased?



4. What common characteristics of dignity did the ancient Christians point to? For example, is dignity one in a human subject, or are there many dignities in one person? Can dignity be estimated in finite terms, or is it described as priceless? In other words, could there be any equivalent of the worth of human dignity, or does human dignity exceed all possible compensations? Is it an absolute or finite category? Is dignity autonomous in a human being or understood relationally (through a reference to another being)? Is dignity inherent in human nature and essential to it, or can there be human nature deprived of dignity? What is the list of characteristics of dignity in response to the questions posited, and are they common to all studied conceptions, or do they vary in each?

5. Did the ancient Christians distinguish between different kinds of dignity, such as natural, i.e., inborn; or bestowed, i.e., bestowed upon a person by the society or by God; individual, i.e., belonging exclusively to one subject and unavailable to others? Additionally, if kinds of dignity were differentiated, is human dignity nevertheless common among humans and identical in each, or is it different?

6. Is dignity a purely descriptive concept or a normative one, in particular, one that creates certain norms or obligations? If so, how is the dignity-bearer obliged by their human dignity and how are those who face the dignity-bearer obliged by their dignity?

7. What is the scope of reference of the concept “dignity”? Is it universal among human beings? Is the concept applicable to creatures other than humans? Does it apply to all persons, including slaves and outcasts? Can the discussed conceptions of dignity be applied outside the realm of persons, for example to animals, like some contemporary legal solutions assume? If not, what are the assumptions of early Christian thought that limit the use of the concept of dignity to the realm of persons? Do they justify the dignity of mentally or physically disabled?

Asking these questions makes it possible to study not only historical phenomena, but also the philosophical truth about human dignity as it was discovered by those who first conceptualized it.

## 1.7 The Thesis

The overarching thesis formulated on the basis of the consideration of these questions in reference to the selected source material argues that, in the period studied, Christianity developed a rich and multifaceted understanding of universal human dignity, justified by a number of factors, such as:

God's participation in human nature (incarnation),  
 the redemptive act of paying the infinite price for the human being,  
 human creation in the image and likeness of God,  
 God's love and kindness (φιλανθρωπία) towards a human creature,  
 human deification,  
 final positioning of making of a human being in the act of creation,  
 human *capacitas Dei* (viz., a design of nature as being a vessel of divine life),  
 human participation in God's glory, and  
 human microcosmic nature.

Among these factors, incarnation and redemption play key roles in patristic writings and, when compared with the creation of human beings in God's image, they overshadow it, yielding dignity greater than the one bestowed upon a human being during creation.

The category of human dignity, referring to human positive axiological status, was minted of a number of views relating to anthropology and is a result of a process of the following factors coinciding:

- challenging the hierarchies designed on the basis of factors such as birth, office, and wealth;
- verbalization of the notion of equality of human beings;
- pointing out the value of the poor and the normative consequences of mistreating human beings, specifically the poor;
- naming the infiniteness of the price of a human being (i.e., spelling out the impossibility of finding an adequate price for the human being in the created world);
- assuming a privileged position for human beings in relation to other entities in the universe (including angels);
- popularization of the idea of human deification;
- adopting the idea of God's respect for the human creature;
- reinterpretation of the ancient maxim of self-knowledge in an axiological context; and
- creation and popularization of Christmas celebrations.

These are the leading factors that must be observed if one is to understand why and how the notion of human dignity became an anthropological–axiological category in European culture.

The patristic descriptions of human axiological status use a variety of Greek and Latin terminology until the late fourth century, when a number of prominent Greek and Latin Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon) initiated the practice of not only describing human axiology, but also appealing to the wider public to recognize human dignity or value. In these appeals, the expression *dignitas hominis* was used by Jerome of Stridon and functioned henceforth as an anthropological category to be popularized,

systematically applied, introduced to the public celebration of Christmas, and thus broadcasted among all levels of the ancient society in the fifth century by Pope Leo the Great. Despite the fact that the pope's use of the notion is, without doubt, the one to have influenced the later generations of Christians most broadly, he is wrongly identified as an inventor of the concept.<sup>51</sup> The notion used as a specialized category of philosophical or theological anthropological reflection emerged in the heretofore-undiscovered fourth- and fifth-century tradition of formulating appeals urging humankind to know their dignity.

The Greek Christian thinkers who initiated the axiological reflection over the human being, largely adopted by the Western writers, continued to use a variety of names for human axiological status in their writings, unlike the Latin writers who with time favored one concept: *dignitas*. The Greek axiological reflection, with its less systematic axiological nomenclature, nevertheless comprises not only a reference point but also an inspiration for the majority of Latin claims concerning human dignity, including their form. To name one example, the coining of the Latin category of human dignity was inspired by close reading of Origen of Alexandria's homilies on the Psalms, a text discovered only recently.<sup>52</sup> *Lumen orientale* has thus shone on the West, illuminating and guiding the Latin writers in their axiological considerations. Greek East is, therefore, *spiritus movens* of the coining of the European concept of human dignity even if the term itself is Latin. The omission of Greek contributions to history of the notion results in an unwarranted misapprehension of the role of the Latin writers, such as ascribing the authorship of originally Greek ideas to them.

The propagation of the anthropological category of human dignity in the Latin West, *dignitas hominis*—or, less frequently, *dignitas humana*—was facilitated by three important cultural phenomena. The first of these is the mentioned transformation: that of the ancient maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν (“know thyself”) into a cognitive imperative urging one to observe, recognize, or know human dignity. Adjusting the form of an imperative of self-knowledge to the axiological status of the human being (thus, knowledge of one's dignity) played the crucial role in the broadcasting of the category of human dignity and the change in the theretofore-anthropological discourse. This is because in Greek and Roman antiquity the Greek inscription from the forefront of the temple in Delphi enjoyed both general interest, visible in its presence in art forms, and philosophical attention. The appropriation of an already widely recognized

51 E.g. by Domański, 1997, 76–77.

52 L. Perrone, *Discovering Origen's Lost Homilies on the Psalms*, in: T. Piscitelli (ed.), *Auctores Nostrī*, Naples 2012, 19–46.

maxim, accomplished by the Christian writers in the late fourth century, tapped into this interest and facilitated the propagation of the category of human dignity contained in the axiological appeals. The axiological imperatives thus formulated enjoyed rhetorical force as well as desirable simplicity, which partially explains their increasing popularity in ages to come. Even though the ancient Delphic inscription was subject to many studies, the development of the axiological version of these appeals was never researched.<sup>53</sup> Documenting the history of such axiological appeals accomplished in this volume—including its first unknown uses by Basil the Great, Ambrose of Milan, and Jerome of Stridon—provides sufficient grounds to demonstrate that ancient Christianity not only observed and knew the phenomenon of human dignity, but in fact also demanded that it be known.

The second phenomenon that contributed to the popularization of the anthropological use of *dignitas* is the authority of the thinkers who used it: figures at the very forefronts of late ancient Christian culture, widely read, copied and, most of all, listened to. Among them, the Latin pope Leo the Great, loved among the Romans for his successful negotiations with barbaric invaders of Rome, stands out as the most influential for the propagation of the notion of human dignity, but not—significantly—its invention. Factors that explain Leo the Great's immense impact on the history of the notion must include his exceptionally long and appreciated papacy and his accentuating the notion of human dignity during the most frequented public celebrations such as Christmas festivities. During these holidays, the pope celebrated not only the birth of Christ but also the ultimate elevation of human nature in consequence of God's incarnation in that nature.

And this brings us to the third factor contributing to the popularization of "human dignity" in European culture: the creation of Christmas holidays in the fourth century and their almost immediate spread throughout the Roman Empire. Christmas soon became one of the three major Christian celebrations, and due to Leo's influences in the fifth century, the liturgy of this holiday utilized the notion of human dignity, thus promoting this concept among numerous generations of worshippers.

Among the intellectuals to have popularized the anthropological use of *dignitas* are some never before considered in any history of human dignity, even though their writings constitute milestones of the historical process and despite the fact that they are some of the most popular ancient Christian thinkers.

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53 I first discussed major points of this transformation in: J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Późnostarożytne apele o rozpoznanie godności ludzkiej: Bazyl z Cezarei Kapadockiej, Ambroży z Mediolanu, Leon Wielki, Mistrz z Werony*, in: *Vox Patrum* 83 (2022), 141–162.

The one to have first discussed human privileged status by means of the exact phrase *dignitas hominis* is, as mentioned, none other than Jerome of Stridon, one the most popular Christians in the world's history. Nevertheless, he has never been discovered as a pioneer of using the category in an anthropological reflection.<sup>54</sup> A similar case is that of Ambrose of Milan, whose axiological reflection does not use the anthropological meaning of *dignitas* systematically, yet contributes notably to the tradition of formulating axiological appeals to recognize one's greatness that, with time, developed one fixed name for the phenomenon of dignity.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the earliest to formulate the call to know one's dignity is Basil of Caesarea, whose call is strikingly similar to Leo the Great's. This is why the possible transmission of Basil's texts is investigated in this volume, reaching a hypothesis of a possible influence of Basil on Leo via Ambrose of Milan. Many other Christian writers—Athanasius of Alexandria, Nemesius of Emesa, Prosper of Aquitaine, and Gregory the Great—conceptualized “human dignity,” and yet some leading English-language studies of the history of this concept never mention them.

All the ancient Christian approaches to human axiology show a varied and complex understanding of human dignity; however, they manifest considerable consistency in two aspects, described in the following.

Firstly, consistency is shown through the continuity of the discussion of the subject, since an understanding of human axiological status is present in the earliest Christian texts discussing anthropology and reappears in the writings of significant Christian writers, specifically of the Golden Age of Patristic Era, when it acquires a later standard name, *dignitas hominis*. The Golden Age is a period during which, following the ages of persecution, Christians could publicly express and discuss their beliefs. Within this continuity, one can observe subtle terminological shifts, such as a relatively unsystematic use of terminology descriptive of human axiology among the Christian writers until the late fourth century, a state of affairs which is altered in the early fifth century.

Secondly, there was a consistency—throughout Greek and Latin texts—of some justifications of human dignity, such as referencing redemption or incarnation, human deification, and the ancient doctrine of iconicity. There were also less wide-spread argumentative lines indicative of human dignity, referencing human *capacitas Dei*, human microcosmic nature, the final positioning

54 I discussed Jerome's use of *dignitas hominis* in: J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Utworzenie kategorii godności człowieka (dignitas hominis) przez Hieronima ze Strydonu*, in: *Vox Patrum* 87 (2023), 135–154. The only study that mentions Jerome is Volp, 2006 (227–229), yet it does not identify Jerome's use of *dignitas hominis*.

55 Ambrose's contribution is investigated by Volp (2006, 220–226), yet the bishop's appeals to know human worth are omitted in that study.

of the making of human being during the act of creation, human participation in God's glory, and God's love and respect for the human creature.

Nonetheless, as will be argued in the subsequent chapters, human iconicity is just one of a number of factors foundational for human dignity, and the factor that is heavily transformed by the Christian authors in the light of the doctrine of redemption. Creation was not considered by the Christians to be an early and closed chapter of human history, but rather one to be complemented by the so-called "second creation", overshadowing the first in the dignity it granted to human beings. Therefore, to simplify the history of human dignity in Christian antiquity as referring primarily or solely to the idea of human creation as *imago Dei* amounts to two significant simplifications.

The first is a *pars pro toto* mistake, which flattens the complexity of the various Christian standpoints; the second is a reductive tendency to make uniform the two monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism, which have their common denominator in Old-Testamentary anthropological claims, yet each with an independent reflection of it, which would have to be carefully examined in any historical analysis.

To reveal the intricacy of manifold early Christian approaches to human dignity, as well as affinities between them, is the task I have set out to accomplish in this volume. This constitutes the main purpose of the subsequent deep plunge into ancient Christian culture.

## 1.8 Summary of the Chapters and the Development of the Argument

I will arrive at these conclusions in the course of an investigation that takes the following form. In Chapter Two, subtitled *Lumen Orientale*, I examine the ancient Greek voices on human dignity, such as Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Nemesius of Emesa, and John Chrysostom. I show that the authors mentioned sought the foundation of human dignity both in the fact of God's incarnation, understood as the second creation, and in the redemptive act of Christ. They considered human dignity resulting from redemption as necessarily overshadowing the dignity of creation. In arguing for it, I discuss the metaphysical difference between the relation of resemblance, that any icon of God enjoys, as well as the relation of originating from, that any God's creature has, and the unity of nature introduced by incarnation. In this chapter, I also reveal the Greek origins of the famous Latin call to recognize one's dignity, and discuss Basil of Caesarea's influences. Finally, I analyze the unique ancient Christian encomium of human

nature, written by Nemesius of Emesa, which praises this nature's design as a microcosm and the dignity resulting from this design.

In the third chapter, I consider the synchronic Latin West, with Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon, Chromatius of Aquileia, Augustine of Hippo, and Faltonia Betitia Proba as examples of a non-systematic Christian use of the concept of dignity (*dignitas hominis*). Latin authors are scrutinized in respect to their descriptions of human axiology and use of *dignitas*, specifically *dignitas hominis* and *dignitas Christiana*. I identify a trend to transform the ancient tradition of writing calls inspired by the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν (“know thyself”) into specifically axiological calls urging one to “know one’s dignity.” Among appeals thus formulated, these written by Jerome of Stridon around the year 397 in Bethlehem urge one to know *dignitas hominis*. The analyses of the terminology used by the Christian authors therefore reveal an anthropological use of *dignitas*; one, however, that is interchangeable with other Latin expressions. In contrast, Latin texts written in the fifth century use the concept of dignity as a systematic anthropological category, when the question of human value arises. This comparison serves to illustrate a terminological shift in the fifth century.

In Chapter Four, dedicated primarily to pope Leo the Great, I look into his fully developed theory of human dignity, influenced by the Greek approach and strongly linked with Christmas celebrations. Because the figure of the pope is typically reduced in the histories of dignity to his appeal to recognize one’s dignity, I document all five versions of this appeal, and argue for the heavy reliance of the pope on the text by Basil of Caesarea. I also discuss all other deliberations of dignity in Leo’s preserved orations, as well as the relevant texts by the pope’s secretary, Prosper of Aquitaine. Leo’s appeal is ingrained in a conception of dignity so far unresearched, yet one to have influenced the Latin liturgy, as well as numerous later thinkers, whose reception of Leo’s thought is traced throughout late antiquity and medieval times. This investigation of Leo’s reception (from the late fifth-century *Eusebius Gallicanus* to Catherine of Siena) documents a history of over a dozen appeals to know one’s dignity formulated by the leading Christian authorities following Leo up until the fourteenth century. In addition, biblical and ancient Greek and Roman inspirations of the axiological appeal are identified. In conclusion, I consider the hypothesis that Leo’s use of *dignitas* is a watershed in the popularization of the concept in European culture, for it was during his papacy that *dignitas* was propagated as a systematically applied anthropological category.

In Chapter Five, I consider the end of the patristic era, troubled by *Völkerwanderung*, the instability of intellectual institutions, and the consequent decline of intellectual life. The analysis of the use of *dignitas hominis* in

a late fifth-century collection of sermons called *Eusebius Gallicanus*, the anonymous *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*, the writings of the Boethius, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great, Ildefonsus of Toledo, and Julian of Toledo illustrates the spreading of Leo's influences to varying degrees. Some late patristic axiological descriptions approach the category in a systematic manner and, characteristically, they remain linked to Leo the Great, either institutionally or geographically. These texts demonstrate the reception of the idea of human dignity developed in the Golden Age and indicate that the late patristic body of texts sufficed to transmit the ancient idea to the Middle Ages.

In the last chapter, Chapter Six, I propose a broad synthesis of the material researched and a critical discussion of the existent ideas about the role of the Patristic Period in the history of human dignity. I offer a synthetic description of the intellectual history process through which *dignitas* emerged as an anthropological category in European culture and defend the thesis that it was the patristic era that coined the axiological-anthropological category of human dignity, not Cicero. The book ends with the defense of the thesis presented earlier, in which I claim that the multifaceted, rich, and multilingual late ancient approaches to human dignity rest on a number of divergent ideas that all, nevertheless, manifest a lasting, deeper core. Here, the notion of *imago Dei* plays a role of being an element of a more complex structure, a structure in which Christian doctrines of incarnation and redemption stand at the forefront as the main figures in a previously lightly sketched landscape of the early European history of human dignity.





## Ancient Greek East. *Lumen Orientale*

This chapter examines the ancient Greek patristic voices on human dignity, such as those of Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Nemesius of Emesa, and John Chrysostom. I show that, on the whole, the authors mentioned sought the foundation of human dignity both in the fact of God's incarnation, understood as the second creation, and in the redemptive act of Christ. They believed that the human dignity resulting from redemption necessarily overshadows the dignity of creation. In arguing this, I discuss the metaphysical differences between the relation of resemblance (that any image of God enjoys), the relation of originating from (that any of God's creatures has), and the unity of nature introduced by the incarnation. This chapter also reveals the Greek origins of the famous Latin call to recognize one's own dignity and discusses Basil of Caesarea's influences. Finally, I analyze the unique ancient Christian encomium of human nature, written by Nemesius of Emesa and praising this nature's design as microcosm and the dignity that results from it.



The earliest Christian approach to human dignity, the ancient Greek one, is not what a typical diachronic introduction to the history of human dignity would lead you to believe. Insofar as a standard introduction, in respect to Christian antiquity and the Middle Ages, focuses on the conception of human creation in the image and likeness of God, with an occasional reference to the human microcosmic nature, it remains silent about the fact that this earliest and hence archetypical approach places less emphasis on the iconic creation than it does on the incarnation and redemption as major justifications and sources of specifically human dignity. As I argue in this chapter, human creation in the image and likeness (an idea stemming from the Book of Genesis, common to both Christianity and Judaism and familiar to Near East ancient cultures, Egyptian and Mesopotamic, long before Christianity came into play) is a part of the early Christian approach to human axiology; an important part,

perhaps the second most important part, but still—a part only.<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, redemption, to which incarnation is a prelude, is accentuated in the Greek approach as a second creation, one which yields a stronger sense of human dignity than the first. This carries with it significant theoretical and cultural consequences, including some for the doctrine of iconicity, which I will point out in the conclusion. As we will also see, significant Latin writers will follow in the footsteps of the Greek Christian thinkers.<sup>2</sup>

We have pressing reasons to investigate ancient Greek Christian heritage—*lumen orientale*, as the later Western thinkers called it.<sup>3</sup> Elements of the later history of dignity would remain incomprehensible had this connection between dignity and incarnation leading to redemption been overlooked. It is, for example, due to these factors that human dignity later became a permanent theme of Christmas celebrations, as will become clear in Chapter Four. The connection between dignity and the Christmas Feast is still present in Christian liturgy today, and the reason for this is to be found in the Greek Christian East. One of the earliest preserved Christian sermons spoken during Christmas, written by Gregory of Nazianzus, formulates such a connotation—and the idea was repeated throughout centuries to come, not only in Eastern, but also Western culture.

Had we overlooked the ancient Christian Greeks, we also could not adequately identify the sources of later famous formulas describing human dignity. As I will demonstrate, Greek thinkers are the original source of the idea of the appeal to recognize one's own dignity, insofar as it was they who developed the premises put forward in the Gospel (e.g., 1 Pet 1:19; 1 Cor 6:20) into such appeals. As we will see, it is not Leo the Great who ought to be recognized as the origin of the most famous Christian call concerning dignity ("Recognize, o Christian, your dignity!"),<sup>4</sup> but a Greek Cappadocian Father living two

1 For a study of the idea of the image see: A. Altmann, "Homo Imago Dei" in *Jewish and Christian Theology*, in: JR 48 (1968), 235–259; P. Sands, *The Imago Dei as Vocation*, in: EQ 82 (2010), 28–41; J.R. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The "Imago Dei" in Genesis 1*, Grand Rapids 2005, 93–184; C.L. Beckerleg, *The "Image of God" in Eden: The Creation of Mankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24*, in: id., *Light of the mīs pī pīt pī and wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt*, MA Thesis, Cambridge 2009; H. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, Philadelphia 1974, 159–165.

2 R. Debes (ed.), *Dignity: A History*, New York 2017; M. Düwell / J. Braarvig / R. Brownsword / D. Mieth (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity*, Cambridge 2014; M. Rosen, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning*, Cambridge 2012.

3 W. Seńko, *Jak rozumieć filozofię średniowieczną*, Cracow 2001, 42; P.A. McNulty / B. Hamilton, *Oriente lumen et magistra Latinitas: Greek Influences on Western Monasticism (900–1100)*, in: *Le Millénaire du Mont Athos, 963–1963: Études et Mélanges* 1, Wetteren 1963, 181–216.

4 Leo. M., trac. 21.3 (CCL 138, 88).

generations earlier than that Latin Pope. Typically, and correctly, this clarion call is attributed to Pope Leo I; he, however, uttered a version of this imperative that was first spoken by Basil of Caesarea. It is only when we understand why the Greeks connected human worth with the act of redemption that we can later explain why Leo cried out in the Latin West “Recognize, o Christian, your dignity!” or “Wake up, o human being, and realize the dignity of your nature!”<sup>5</sup> during Christmas celebrations, putting emphasis on the incarnation, not just on human creation as an icon. The Greek influences are therefore fundamental inasmuch as they established an archetypical approach to human dignity that remained a reference point for later thinkers, as well as for the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches.

Finally, the first use of the anthropological–axiological category *dignitas hominis* formulated in the Latin West appears in a text highly influenced by a Greek thinker, Origen of Alexandria—so much so that, before Origen’s text was discovered in 2012, some scholars considered the Latin homily based on it to be a translation of his Greek speech.<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that this is not the case, Origen authored a reflection that, upon repeating and rethinking, prompted the Latin writer, Jerome of Stridon, to utter an appeal to observe human dignity (*vide hominis dignitatem*)<sup>7</sup>, hence formulating the anthropological category *dignitas hominis* for the first time in European history.<sup>8</sup> An earlier Greek thinker, Theophilus of Antioch, was the first Christian to use the concept of human dignity, ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, in a universal sense. As this demonstrates, the roots of the critical facts of the history of human dignity reach back to the Greek East.

As established in Chapter One, this investigation focuses on the terminology ascribing ἀξία, τιμή, and ἀξίωμα to the human being, specifically in the Golden Age of Patristic Literature. Additionally, since in that time the ancient Greek Christian culture developed a unique ode to human nature—an encomium praising human εὐγένεια (being well born, taken to be a general property of human nature) as well as human εὐπρέπεια (majesty, dignity, comeliness)—we shall also reference the application of these terms in a discussion of human axiology. As stated, except for a few selected exceptions, the research of these

5 Leo, M., trac. 27.6 (CCL 138, 137).

6 V. Peri, *Omèlie origeniane sui Salmi: Contributo all’identificazione del testo latino*, Vatican 1980; id., “Corruptores immo corruptores.” *Un saggio di critica testuale nella Roma del XII secolo*, in: IMU 20 (1977), 19–125; Orygenes / Hieronim, *Homilie o księdze psalmów* (St. Kalinkowski trans.), Cracow 2004.

7 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.1 (HO 9/1, 230).

8 Augustine’s uses from *De libero arbitrio* discuss the levels of dignity in various natures, not *dignitas hominis*.

concepts in anthropological contexts takes us directly into the most vibrant chapter of the patristic era, the Golden Age of patristic literature, a period that stretched from the Edict of Milan to the Council of Chalcedon.

This period is called the Golden Age, due to the fact that after the Edict of Milan issued by Constantine the Great in 313, Christianity became legal and tolerated by the Roman rulers, to eventually be proclaimed the official religion of the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century. The first ecumenical councils could thus be organized, a free exchange of thought became possible, and patristic literature flourished. The earlier centuries, developing gradually from the apostolic spoken tradition into the phase where the Christian message was passed on via written forms, were the centuries of Christian persecution and martyrdom in the Roman Empire, peaking in its brutality in the third century. After the Edict of Milan, the theoretical implications of the Scriptures became dogmatized in magisterial documents during the first councils: in Nicaea in 325 (where one common creed was agreed upon), Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451.<sup>9</sup> After the Council of Chalcedon, the vibrant formative period of the Christian doctrine came to an end, despite the fact that many discussions were not yet concluded.<sup>10</sup>

Although the eastern Greek tradition in the Patristic Age includes many interesting authors, few can match the widespread influence of the writers of the Golden Age: Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Athanasius and Basil are in fact broadly recognized in the tradition as “the Great,” while Gregory of Nazianzus is also known as “the Theologian” in the Orthodox tradition (the definite article “the” points precisely to his special character among all theologians). Basil’s younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa, completes the list of the most significant fourth-century Greek Fathers, even though no particular title accompanies him in the tradition. Among their many achievements—such as reforms of and contributions to the liturgy, pioneering coenobitic monastic life and composing rules for it, founding care centers for the sick, and intellectual efforts in apologetics, theology and philosophy—nothing seems as significant as their voices in the debates over the triune character of God and the nature of Christ, inclusive of the doctrine

9 L.D. Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology*, Collegeville 1990, 33–206.

10 J.A. Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View*, New York 2006, 43–63; J. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, New York 1978, 3; J. Quasten, *Patrology 3: The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature: From the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon*, Notre Dame 1991, 1–5; A. Hamman, *The Turnabout of the Fourth Century* (P. Solari trans.), in: A. Di Berardino (ed.), *The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature: From the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (P. Solari trans.), Notre Dame 1990, 1–32.

of God's incarnation. Their contributions to the formulation of the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas secured their place at the very heart of the history of Christian doctrine for good.<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, these mentioned fourth-century masters chronologically predate the leading Latin authorities of the Golden Age, which partially explains many Greek influences in the synchronous Latin West. Athanasius of Alexandria was born around 295–300; Basil of Caesarea, around 329; his student friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, also around 329; and Gregory of Nyssa was born a little later, around 335. The most recognized fourth-century Latin writers, the so-called Four Great Latin Doctors, were born some decades after the Greeks: St. Ambrose, around 340; St. Jerome, around 347; St. Augustine, in 354; and Pope Gregory I, much later—around 540. Hilary of Poitiers, the only early-born leading Latin authority of the fourth century (his birth is dated towards the beginning the century), was baptized at the age of 30 and therefore in his Christian writings remained under the influence of Greeks who by then were already well-established: Athanasius the Great and the much earlier Origen.

Two generations after Athanasius, another leading Greek intellectual was born in the Greek East. John Chrysostom entered the stage a little too late to be involved in the dogmatic debates surrounding the first ecumenical council in Nice. Yet, as a bishop of Constantinople and reformer of liturgy, he nevertheless gained substantial authority that is still visible today in the Orthodox and Catholic Church, where he is recognized as one of the Three Great Hierarchs, and as one of the four Great Greek Doctors of the Church, respectively. Although chronologically closer to the four Latin Doctors, and younger than Athanasius by two generations, his example will be included in this Chapter in order to broaden our outlook on Alexandrian and Caesarean circles with an example of a Constantinopolitan figure. Given the roles these four thinkers played in the communities they led, and their widespread impact in the Roman Empire as well as many generations of Byzantine theologians, this will enable some general observations concerning the Greek East in the fourth century and beyond.<sup>12</sup>

11 Athanasius Alexandrinus, e.g. in *De Decretis, Epistulae ad Serapionem*; Basil. Caes., *contr. Eun.* 1.5–14 (SCh 299, 168–225); ep. 38; 52; Gregorius Nyssenus, *Contra Eunomium*; *Gr. Naz.*, or. 31.

12 On the role of the Council of Nice: M.C. Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius*, London 2009, 104–127; for biographies and roles of the Greek writers: K. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, London 1998, 207–213; P. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, Berkeley 1998, 1–28.270–313; B.E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, *The Early Church Fathers*, London 2006, 1–59; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose and John Chrysostom: Clerics between Desert and Empire*, Oxford 2011, 113–132.265–276.

The axiological ideas expressed during the Golden Age, which employ the listed dignity-related terminology, had their earlier inspirations. Among numerous anthropological conceptions formulated in previous centuries, these by Theophilus of Antioch (*fl.* second century), Irenaeus of Lyon (born around the year 140), and Origen of Alexandria (born around 185) remain directly relevant as the sources of the fourth-century anthropological-axiological reflections on human worth. Theophilus and Irenaeus used the dignity-relevant Greek concepts we have outlined in anthropological contexts, and the Alexandrian exegete was, as stated, directly involved in the coining of the European Latin phraseology of “human dignity” (*dignitas hominis*)—surprising as this might sound. This makes Origen’s ideas highly pertinent to any history of human dignity.

Finally, besides the leading figures of the Greek East of the Golden Age, there is one more Greek who should not be omitted in the history of the conceptualization of human dignity. It is a curious historical phenomenon that a unique Greek ode to human nature written toward the end of the fourth century made relatively little impact on the ongoing anthropological fourth- and fifth-century debates, yet substantially impacted the later Latin medieval masters. Although its somewhat mysterious author, Nemesius of Emesa, is yet another figure never mentioned in currently available English-language diachronic studies of the history of human dignity, his reflection comprised an early chapter in the history of the concept. Therefore, it must play an indispensable part in this investigation, as well.

All of these thinkers will be investigated in a chronological order, with the exception of the second- and third-century Theophilus’s, Irenaeus’s, and Origen’s ideas, the analysis of which forms a part of the research into the background of either Athanasius’s axiological reflection on human deification, which led him to formulate a rule regarding the origins of human dignity, or the Cappadocian School’s axiology, which developed a philosophical understanding of human worthiness, ἀξίωμα, first named by Theophilus.

## 2.1 Athanasius of Alexandria

Athanasius’s achievements are typically summarized as his discussion with Arianism (which resulted in numerous conflicts with the emperor and a total of seventeen years of exile during the forty-five years of his patriarchate in Alexandria)<sup>13</sup> and the conceptualization of God’s incarnation. His most

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13 A. Muszala / R. Woźniak, *Ojcowie naszej wiary*, Cracow 2019, 116.

significant and widespread writing is *De incarnatione Verbi*, an early speech, the popularity of which is eclipsed only by a biography he wrote of Anthony the Great, a personal master and friend of his, and a Desert Father.<sup>14</sup> Born to a pagan family, Athanasius converted following an encounter with Egyptian monks, whom he joined and by whom he remained highly influenced. Most of his life was spent in leading the Alexandrian Church, and at the age of thirty he became its bishop.<sup>15</sup>

Given the theological orientation of his writing around the doctrine of incarnation and its heterodox formulations, Athanasius's works discuss anthropology less often than these of Basil, Gregory of Nyssa or Gregory of Nazianzus. Athanasius was, nevertheless, a master of the Cappadocian Fathers, who followed in his footsteps in defending the Trinitarian doctrine, and in other topics, including their approach to human worth. What is significant, from the point of view of the ancient Greek terminology pertaining to human dignity, is that Athanasius's most widespread writings that include allusions to human dignity are dedicated to the mystery of God's taking on human flesh in order to save humanity, which thus became a relevant context for the topic of human dignity. We will analyze these passages and offer a philosophical interpretation of their assumptions. What are these writings and their implications for human dignity?

### 2.1.1 *The Deification Formula*

Athanasius authored a widely-known *bon mot* from *De incarnatione Verbi* that makes use of a clever play on words: Ἀὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν,<sup>16</sup> which could be translated as: "He [God] became human, so that we could become divine." The rule expressed in this line is most often quoted in the form "God became a man so that man could become God", and the logic expressed in it is sometimes described as "the golden rule of patristic

14 Athanasius Alexandrinus, *Vita Antonii*.

15 T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, Cambridge 1993, 34–93; H. Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford 2001, 227–239; U. Heil, *Atanasio di Alessandria*, in: S. Döpp / W. Geerlings / C. Noce (eds.), *Dizionario di letteratura cristiana antica*, Vatican 2006, 107–115; J. Quasten, *Athanasius*, in: id., 1991, 20–22; M. Starowieyski, *Atanazy Wielki*, in: M. Starowieyski / J.M. Szymusiak (eds.), *Nowy słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa*, Poznań 2022, 122–128; A. Camplani, *Atanasio di Alessandria*, in: A. Di Berardino (ed.), *Nuovo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, Genova 2006, 614–635.

16 Ath., *de inc.* 54.3 (Sch 199, 458).



soteriology.”<sup>17</sup> According to this golden rule, human deification mirrors God’s incarnation, and incarnation facilitates deification, which is why the rule is also referred to as “the exchange formula.”<sup>18</sup> I shall also refer to it as “the deification formula,” accentuating the axiologically relevant part of the rule. This short line comprises one of the most famous theological claims of Christianity (specifically Eastern Christianity), one that explains the purpose of God’s incarnation: human deification.

Early Greek Fathers operated with similar phrases, most bearing some similarity to a line of St. Peter (“so that through them [scil. precious and magnificent promises] you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire”)<sup>19</sup> or to a phrase of St. Paul, which has an apparent axiological undertone (“though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich”).<sup>20</sup> The logic of these passages inspired the so-called exchange formula, the earliest version of which is to be found in Irenaeus of Lyon.

#### 2.1.1.1 Irenaeus of Lyon

The earliest version of the exchange formula occurs in Book Three of Irenaeus’s *Adversus haereses*, and significantly, it does not express the idea of “becoming divine.” It reads: “This is why the Word became a human being and He who is the Son of God became the Son of man, so that man, combined with the Word and partaking in the adoption, might become the son of God.”<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus repeated the rule in a similar form in the same book of *Adversus haereses*, and also twice in Book Five, each time in a slightly different form.<sup>22</sup> The last of

17 International Theological Commission, *Theology, Christology, Anthropology*, 1981, E 1; J. Naumowicz, *Wcielenie Boga i zbawienie człowieka. Złota reguła soteriologii patrystycznej*, in: *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 13 (2000), 17–30.

18 D. Edwards, *Athanasius: The Word of God in Creation and Salvation*, in: E.M. Conrardie (ed.), *Creation and Salvation 1: A Mosaic of Selected Classic Christian Theologies*, Münster 2012, 44.

19 2 Pet 1:4 (NRSV-CE trans.). Here and elsewhere, I quote the English translations of the Bible after the *New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition* (NRSV-CE), unless I use my own translation. If that is the case, it is always indicated. Cf. the Greek original: ἵνα διὰ τούτων [τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἐπαγγέλματα] γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως, ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθοράς.

20 2 Cor 8:9 (NRSV-CE trans.). Cf. the Greek: δι’ ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν, πλούσιος ὢν, ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε.

21 Iren., haer. 3.19,1 (SCh 34, 332). The Greek taken from Theodoret of Cyrus’s *Dialogues* reads: Εἰς ταῦτο γὰρ ὁ λόγος ἄνθρωπος καὶ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἵνα ὁ ἄνθρωπος χωρήσας τὸν Λόγον καὶ τὴν υἰοθεσίαν λαβῶν γένοιτο υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ.

22 Iren., haer. 3.16,3 (SCh 34, 282): *Filius Dei, hominis Filius factus, ut per eum adoptionem percipiamus, portante homine et capiente et complectente Filium Dei*. Cf. Iren., haer. 5.16,2 and 5 praef.

these formulations introduces an axiological description of a human being, for it reads:

Therefore, this was truly manifested when the Word of God was made a human being, assimilating Himself to the human being and the human being to Himself, so that through the similitude to the Son, the human being becomes precious [*pretiosus*] to the Father.<sup>23</sup>

The Greek text of this passage, as presented in a late Byzantine florilegium *Sacra Parallela*, offers τίμιος as the Greek adjective translated into Latin as *pretiosus* (i.e., “precious”).<sup>24</sup> Τίμιος (meaning “valuable”, “precious”, “respected”, “honored”) has clear axiological connotations, and it specifies the aim of incarnation as elevating humans’ axiological status in the eyes of God, who recognizes His own Son in the human creature. As we shall see, Athanasius built on this idea, developing the axiological implication of this idea further. In doing so, he echoed an idea contained in another of Irenaeus’s versions of the exchange formula, one contained in an introduction to Book Five. This version identifies God’s reason for the incarnation: His immense love for the human creature. In a formula echoing St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Titus,<sup>25</sup> Irenaeus argued that it was due to God’s immense love (*propter immensam suam dilectionem* or διὰ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν αὐτοῦ ἀγάπην) for the human creature that God pursued the mission of incarnation leading up to human deification.<sup>26</sup>

#### 2.1.1.2 Origen of Alexandria

After Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria composed similar lines expressing the logic and purpose of incarnation.<sup>27</sup> Apart from Origen’s preserved versions of the exchange formula, his writings provide an important discussion of human deification (θεοποίησις, though ever since Gregory of Nazianzus, Greek writers used the noun θέωσις as a standard Byzantine name for deification).<sup>28</sup> Arguably, deification comprises the central idea of the golden rule.<sup>29</sup> As stated, it is Origen’s discussion of the subject

23 Iren., haer. 5.16.2 (SCh 153, 216): *Tunc autem hoc verum ostensum est, quando homo Verbum Dei factum est, semetipsum homini et hominem sibimetipsi assimilans, ut per eam quae est ad Filium similitudinem pretiosus homo fiat Patri.*

24 Iren., haer. 5.16.2 (SCh 153, 218; τίμιος in line 25).

25 Eph 3:19: γινῶναί τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Tit 3:4.

26 Iren., haer. 5 praef. (SCh 153, 14–15).

27 Clem. Al., protr. 1.8,4; Or., Cels. 3.28.

28 N. Russel, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford 2004, 340–341.

29 Russel, 2004, 167–168.

that led his Latin reader, Jerome of Stridon, to formulate the anthropological-axiological category of human dignity (*dignitas hominis*) for the first time in European culture. Soon after, Rufinus of Aquileia translated a passage of Origen's *De principiis* employing the category *dignitas imaginis*—the dignity of an icon.<sup>30</sup> We will, therefore, briefly focus on Origen's discussion of human deification and his understanding of human iconicity, before completing the analyses of the golden rule in Athanasius's *De incarnatione Verbi*.<sup>31</sup>

Discovered only in the year 2012, Origen's *Homiliae in psalmos*—and not *Contra Celsum*—are the very last works of the Alexandrian exegete, written shortly before he was arrested and tortured during the Decian persecution in 251. The homilies comprise the largest preserved Greek text by Origen, whose works were mostly destroyed following the Origenist Crises. Significantly, the homilies on the Psalms offer the earliest account of the Christian publicly-preached exegetic speeches.<sup>32</sup> The existence of Origen's homilies was known about long before this, mentioned in ancient and medieval sources; nonetheless, the original text had been lost.<sup>33</sup> It was only in 2012 that the Greek text, contained in a twelfth-century codex previously wrongly catalogued, was discovered during a thorough inventory of the Bavarian State Library in Munich.<sup>34</sup>

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30 Or., princ. 3.6,1 (GCS 22, 280).

31 Origen's ideas on human dignity comprise the main area of interest of an ongoing international patristic project, led by Prof. Karla Pollman with Sara Contini and Ilaria Scarponi, and Prof. Alfons Fürst with Anders-Christian Jacobsen. As the outcomes are simultaneously being published but unavailable as of yet, I do not discuss Origen's ideas in detail, but merely highlight some specific points. Much debate pertaining to Origen and human dignity is ongoing, such as the most radical view, i.e., a hypothesis that Origen conforms to the notion of racism, cf. M. den Dulk, *Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism as a Theological Problem*, in: JThS 71 (2020), 164–195. For a response to the accusation of racism towards Origen, cf. J. Solheid, *Origen of Alexandria and Human Dignity*, in: ZAC 27 (2023), 226–256. My reaction to the idea that Origen is a racist is that, regardless of historical context, den Dulk's criteria of racism (which developed as a concept much later) pertain to cases which in principle it cannot, and thus the theorem's function is too broad. On the complex reception of Origen in the Latin tradition, cf. A.-C. Jacobsen (ed.), *Origeniana Undecima: Origen and Origenism in the History of Western Thought*, Leuven 2016. Concerning the idea of Origen's individualistic and at the same time social notion of the self, contained in his commentary to psalm 81, a book is being published by Fürst in the Munich Adamantina series.

32 J.W. Trigg, *Introduction*, in: Origen, *Homilies on the Psalms: Codex Monacensis Graecus 314* (J. Trigg trans.), Washington 2020, 3–10.

33 Eus., h.e. 6.24,2; Hier., ep. 34 1.

34 L. Perrone, *Discovering Origen's Lost Homilies on the Psalms*, in: Piscitelli (ed.), 2012, 19–46.

This exciting finding led to the publication of the transcribed text in a critical edition in 2015.<sup>35</sup>

The central anthropological idea of Origen's homilies is precisely that of human deification, a conception described best in the homily on Psalm 81 (the last one in the collection).<sup>36</sup> The opening line of psalm 81 discusses a gathering of gods (συναγωγὴ θεῶν) among whom God stands—and Origen interprets “gods” to mean human beings who have achieved the aim (τέλος) of their existence.<sup>37</sup> The plural form, θεοί, provides evidence that, in the patristic view, deification does not diminish the numeric identity of the transformed human beings. Another assumption of the doctrine of deification, as presented in Origen, is that human nature is equipped with the potentiality to become divine. Since that nature is threefold in Origen's conception, comprised of body (σῶμα), soul (ψυχή), and spirit (πνεῦμα), the speech discusses how human beings in their entirety can undergo deification.<sup>38</sup>

According to the Alexandrian exegete, the human spirit is divine by nature due to its kinship (συγγένεια) with God.<sup>39</sup> Yet the soul and the body, not equipped with such kinship, can also become divine, and that is because of the incarnation. As we stated, according to the exchange formula, human deification mirrors God's incarnation, and that incarnation facilitates deification. Thus, the deification of the soul and the body is achieved through their unity with the incarnated God, the second person of the Trinity. Origen's description of this process is quite detailed, for he names particular acts, categorized—after Paul—as “of the flesh,” which are to be “put to death” in one's life, and only then does God-Logos “come into being in the soul” (γένηται ἐν ψυχῇ).<sup>40</sup> The Alexandrian exegete criticizes favoring people according to worldly hierarchies and honors, such as riches, rather than divine criteria, such as justice, and he argues that precisely such an attitude, “favoritism of persons” in biblical terms, prevents the soul's deification.<sup>41</sup>

35 L. Perrone / M.M. Pradel / E. Prinzivalli / A. Cacciari (eds.), Origen of Alexandria, *Die neuen Psalmenhomilien: Eine kritische Edition des Codex Monacensis Graecus 314*, Berlin 2015.

36 For an introduction to Origen's idea of deification reconstructed based on other writings, see Russel, 2004, 140–153.

37 Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 509).

38 Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 512).

39 Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 512).

40 Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 512).

41 Or., in ps. 81.3 (GCS 19, 514). Favoritism of persons is criticised in Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Jas 2:1, 2:9; cf. Jude 1:16. I summarize the five uses in their original forms in: Guerrero van der Meijden, 2019, 5.

As for the body, its becoming divine is achieved through it becoming a part of Christ's body, one that enters the heavens. Unity of the soul and body with the incarnated God comprises the human telos, described by Origen as being not only "a god from God" (ἀπὸ θεοῦ θεός) but "a christ from Christ" (ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ χριστός ἐστίν).<sup>42</sup> This phrase illustrates the Christ-centrism of his deification model. In other words, the doctrine of the incarnation of God-Logos plays a central role in his idea of deification, which leads to a proper balance between an individual and social aspect of salvation. The homily proposes, therefore, a teleological understanding of human nature as directed towards an aim: overcoming its own nature and becoming a god through unity with Christ.

This idea of teleological orientation of an icon resembles the biblical understanding of human nature as essentially iconic; that is, one taking on its character from some other, archetypal being. Even though the idea of human iconicity is not mentioned in the homily at all, it assumes—in Origen—a coherent anthropological model. As Origen writes regarding human iconicity, during their first creation (*conditio prima* in Rufinus's translation),<sup>43</sup> the human being was endowed with the dignity of an icon (*dignitas imaginis*),<sup>44</sup> which is visible in their self-determination, yet it is only through proper actions that the human being can develop a perfection (*perfectio*) of that icon, i.e., a proper determination of the iconic nature.<sup>45</sup> These actions are categorized as an imitation (*imitatio*)<sup>46</sup> of the divine archetype, leading to the completion of human iconicity and dignity.<sup>47</sup>

However, in the homily on Psalm 81, in order to illustrate the dynamic character of human nature self-determining itself, Origen reaches not for the idea of an icon but for a physical and theatrical Greek category, πρόσωπον (a face or countenance since Homeric epics, but later also a character in a play). Using the metaphor of an actor's role, he describes how human beings take on different characters—a character of God (πρόσωπον τοῦ θεοῦ), a character of the Devil (πρόσωπον τοῦ διαβόλου), a character of the Antichrist (πρόσωπον τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου), a character of sadness (πρόσωπον λύπης), or even a character of sexual immorality (πρόσωπον τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς πορνείας)—all by acting in a

42 Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 509).

43 Or., princ. 3.6.1 (GCS 22, 280).

44 Or., princ. 3.6.1 (GCS 22, 280).

45 Or., princ. 3.6.1 (GCS 22, 280).

46 Or., princ. 3.6.1 (GCS 22, 280).

47 On Origen's idea of self-determination (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον), specifically in how it differs from the Stoic compatibilism, cf. A. Fürst, *Wege zur Freiheit: Menschliche Selbstbestimmung von Homer bis Origenes*, Tübingen 2022.

way resembling the particular being, state, or action.<sup>48</sup> The speech on Psalm 81 therefore illuminates the exchange formula by discussing the trajectory of human development towards the actualization of the aim of human existence: being a god or being a Christ. The homily, likewise, names the possible opposite result of human existence: remaining merely human and dying as an incomplete human being, departed from its telos of becoming divine. Origen makes it clear that all people (πάντες) are called to achieve the aim of divinity, justifying his universal claim with line seven of Psalm 81: “You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you.”<sup>49</sup>

What is of direct relevance to the history of human dignity is the implicit yet evident axiological undertone of this doctrine of becoming divine. As stated, Origen’s homilies were directly involved in the making of the Latin category of human dignity, *dignitas hominis*, for they were closely read by Jerome when he was working on his speeches on the psalms delivered in Bethlehem between 389 and 410. Specifically, when (around the year 397) the Latin monk was preparing his homily on Psalm 81, in which he would coin the groundbreaking anthropological-axiological category, he was following Origen’s just-recapitulated homily on Psalm 81. The Greek text remains, therefore, highly pertinent to the history of the European category of human dignity, as is Origen’s model of iconicity, linguistically connected by Rufinus of Aquileia to *dignitas imaginis*.

### 2.1.1.3 Athanasius of Alexandria

It was Athanasius who shortened the exchange formula into a pithy, symmetrical form. This rule was later integrated into Roman liturgy and theology in various forms: the phrase “God became a human being, so that we could be children of God” serves during some Church celebrations as an introduction to the Lord’s Prayer during Mass. Athanasius’s formula is also quoted by the International Theological Commission, which discusses its Hellenistic

48 Or., in ps. 81.5 (GCS 19, 516).

49 Ps 82:6–7 (NRSV-CE trans.). Cf. Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 511). As mentioned, some earlier passages of Origen’s writings are subject to debate regarding the Alexandrian exegete’s approach to the hierarchy between man and women or between people of various cultures (cf. e.g. princ. 2.9 but also the article by den Dulk, *Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism ...*, 164–195 and Solheid’s response, *Origen of Alexandria and Human Dignity*, 226–256). The hierarchies resulting from paideia in Origen should not contradict *dignitas imaginis*, since human worth, consisting in being an image and aiming at a telos, is ingrained in nature during its creation and secured in the eschatological perspective. As Origen is being considered here primarily as a source for an egalitarian and universal application of *dignitas hominis* by Jerome, I do not discuss his approach to women or various tribes, for they all are images of God.

sources and proper interpretation,<sup>50</sup> and by the contemporary version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.<sup>51</sup> Let us dive into the logic of the golden rule as formulated by Athanasius and its implications for dignity.

Athanasius's deification formula, revealing the logic of redemption in the most concise manner, introduces some idea of human value, for to "become God" (θεοποιεῖν) clearly assumes an elevation of the axiological status of a human being to that of the most perfect being.

In contrast to Irenaeus, Athanasius did not discuss a human becoming "a child of God", but rather "becoming God", θεοποιεῖν, an idea to be found earlier in Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria, although in longer and more nuanced forms.<sup>52</sup> Having added extra rhetorical lift to the phrase by shortening it and making it symmetric, Athanasius, on one hand, simplified the phrase, and on the other, obscured its meaning. Taking into account the context of the expression, the interpretation of the phrase cannot lead beyond a metaphorical understanding of human deification, one that rules out any literal interpretation of human θεοποιεῖν, "becoming God".<sup>53</sup> Similarly to Origen, Athanasius expressed an idea of human transformation through redemption, which, firstly, preserves human identity and secondly, is conditioned not by human powers but only by God's achievements. The elevation of human status to the divine level thus implicitly accentuates humans' inability to achieve redemption by their own means (this is heterodox Pelagianism) and results in human nature being preserved even when elevated to the state of glory. In Athanasius's version, the rule departs from any literally understood deification, such as the most dominant reading of the pagan idea of ἀποθέωσις.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, such deification itself implies the axiological perfection of the human being. If God became a man by taking on human nature, human beings are united with God by sharing one and the same nature, the human nature. This establishes a form of unity between the two that is unrivalled by any other event in humanity's history. The act of creating a human being in the image of God, as acknowledged by Athanasius, introduced two kinds of relationships

50 International Theological Commission 1981, E 1.

51 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican 1992, no 460.

52 Clem. Al., protr. 1.8,4; Or., Cels. 3.28.

53 Russel, 2004, 169–170.

54 Russel observes that among Athanasius's 50 uses of θεοποιεῖω, 20 pertain to pagan ideas criticized by the Greek Father. See: Russel, 2004, 167. The implications of the golden rule for the deification of a human being, a theme popular in Neoplatonist philosophies, are also discussed in Naumowicz, 2000, 17–30; International Theological Commission, 1981, E 1.

between God and His creature.<sup>55</sup> The first is a relationship of originating from God, and the second is the relationship of resemblance between an archetype and its image. In contrast, the unity of one nature introduced by incarnation establishes intimate unity between God and human beings, who are not in some sort of originating or resembling relationship, but are of one nature.

Let us explain the difference between human dignity resulting from creation and dignity resulting from incarnation in philosophical terms. In ontological terms, the dignity stemming from creation means possessing a relational property.<sup>56</sup> Such a property involves the relationship of one being to another, and remains the characteristic of a given being regardless of the continuance or discontinuance of that relationship. Had the human being been made in God's image, they would remain God's icon, and a being genealogically stemming from God, even if the act of creation is finished, and even if—purely hypothetically—God ceased to be. A human being remains an icon stemming from God, and this is rooted in their nature. The property of iconicity is relational insofar as it is not reliant on the human being as such, but requires a relationship to another being during its constitution. Creation, therefore, constitutes two relationships between the Creator and the creature, who each remain of their own respective natures: the first is the genealogical relationship of originating in God, the stemming of one from another; the second is the relationship of resemblance, or one being an image of the other, which serves as the archetype. As stated, after creation in the image and likeness of God, both elements of the relationship of resemblance remain of their own natures. As in the case of a self-portrait on canvas (Athanasius's comparison),<sup>57</sup> there is a genealogical relationship of stemming from the portrayed, and a resembling relationship in the portrait being similar to the portrayed, but the portrait is essentially different to the portrayed: it is a painting on canvas, not a living person. Similarly, God's creature and God are not of the same kind, even though they are linked by the two relationships of one stemming from the another and even though one resembles the other.

In contrast, the sharing of nature achieved by the incarnation is ontologically much more than genealogically stemming from a particular being or resembling a being. It introduces a unity of being of the same nature between the two entities. This means that the two have one common essence and belong

55 Ath., de inc. 3,5–7; 3,11–14.

56 D. Lewis, *Extrinsic Properties*, in: *Philosophical Studies* 44 (1983), 197–200; D. Marshall / B. Weatherston, *Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties*, in: E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition).

57 Ath., de inc. 14.



to one common kind. Not only does one originate from the other or resemble the other (like a model and a canvas with his or her portrait), but both have an identical nature (like one model and another or one canvas and another). They are the same “what” (human nature), instead of one “what” (human nature) being similar to, or originating from, an entirely different “what” (divine nature). Incarnation, a focal point of Athanasius’s theological and philosophical attention, therefore has significant ontological consequences with regard to human unity with God, and thus to human value or dignity. Let us investigate the axiological implications of this conception.

### 2.1.2 *The Dignitarian Formula*

Curiously for the topic of human dignity, Athanasius explained the axiological undertone of his soteriological rule in an earlier passage of his *De incarnatione Verbi*, proposing a beautiful and seemingly paradoxical dignitarian version of his famous line, which we shall call “the dignitarian formula”. As we will examine its language, let us quote it in Greek: “Θαύμαζε τὴν τοῦ Λόγου φιλιανθρωπίαν, ὅτι δι’ ἡμᾶς ἀτιμάζεται, ἵνα ἡμεῖς ἔντιμοι γενώμεθα.”<sup>58</sup> The quotation (which can be translated as: “Wonder at the Word’s kindness towards humans, that for our sake He is undignified, so we may become dignified.”) makes sense of the logic of redemption, exploring its consequences not only for eternal human life, but specifically for human axiological status. Firstly, the dishonoring or undignifying is expressed by the very ἀτιμάζειν, built of an alpha privative prefix, constituting a negation, and a verb τιμάω, to honor or respect, which is hence negated. Τιμάω itself is etymologically linked with the noun τιμή, honor or dignity. The dishonoring that the Son of God, the Incarnated Word, suffered during the trial and crucifixion leads to a human being’s dignity or being dignified (Greek adjective is ἔντιμος, stemming from τιμή). In other words, through God suffering loss of dignity, the human being is brought to dignity.

The original Greek text uses dignitarian terminology (the noun τιμή, the adjective “dignified”, ἔντιμος, and a verb “to dishonor”, ἀτιμάζειν) and a word-play between losing dignity (ἀτιμάζειν) and becoming of honor or dignity itself (τιμή). In its structure, the phrase mimics the line concerning God becoming a human being and the human being becoming God, although in fact it occurs earlier in the text than the golden rule of patristic soteriology. The exchange formula was inspired by the earlier Greek thinkers (Irenaeus of Lyon, Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria), which is why it is likely to be, nonetheless, prior to the dignitarian formula, including for Athanasius. Although equally sharp and perplexing in its content, the dignitarian version of the

<sup>58</sup> Ath., de inc. 34.2 (Sch 199, 386).

formula was never as popular as the deification formula, possibly because it did not have a prior history.

The logic contained in the dignitarian formula is nevertheless even more thought-provoking than the most commonly known *bon mot*, for it operates with a paradox. In almost composing an oxymoron, Athanasius proclaims the establishing of dignity through the act of disrespecting dignity. Why is it so? We find little commentary in Athanasius's text itself. Yet it is fitting, many Church Fathers argued, that because the human being sinned through lack of humility and lack of obedience in paradise, they are rescued by the Son of God perfectly practicing humility and obedience to the Father, to the point of crucifixion.<sup>59</sup> Athanasius, too, observed a kind of symmetry between the nature of human sin and the redemptive act.<sup>60</sup> This is a neat theological argument, but what philosophical assumptions lay behind the paradox?

Apparently, an entirely different being (Son of God) can alter another being's dignity (human, in this case) through the specific act of allowing Himself be treated as if they did not have dignity. For what else is ἀτιμάζειν, dishonoring, than to act towards someone as if they did not have the axiological status called dignity? Dignity as such constitutes norms, for it obliges the one who faces the dignity-bearer to act according to the dignity inherent in its subject. Why does the violation of this principle in respect to one person lead to establishing a dignity once lost by someone else?

The trick of redemption lies not in what oppressors did, or in any obligations they violated, however, but in what their victim did and in the obligations the Savior honored.<sup>61</sup> The Crucified developed His human nature to be perfectly similar to God by acting out God's will fully despite the most trying circumstances, those of humiliation. By preserving His human dignity even during Crucifixion, the Son of God became an exemplary human being, full of dignity, in which others can partake to re-establish their own dignity. The dishonor inflicted on the Son of God was, in a way, circumstantial. It defined the most trying test the Savior had to undergo when performing His calling. That this test involved dishonoring is itself meaningful, suggesting perhaps that disrespect to dignity is the worst kind of test for a human being. What is essential, however, is that the Crucified passed the test, and preserved the dignity of the Son and servant of God. By partaking in this achievement, all other humans are re-dignified, for they partake in the dignity established and preserved by

59 August., trin. 13,13,17.

60 Ath., de inc. 25,1; 38,3.

61 On various approaches to the logic of redemption, see: M. Paluch / J. Szymik, *Dogmatyka* 3, Warsaw 2006, 287–378; G.L. Müller, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, Cracow 2015, 400–407.

the Savior. There is thus no real paradox within the statement that humans are dignified by God's being deprived of dignity. Athanasius was, nevertheless, clever enough to exploit a seeming tension between dishonoring and achieving honor in a catchy wordplay.

The dignitarian formula is based on the topic of redemption, seeking the source of human dignity in it. Ultimately, it points to God's love for the human creature as expressed by the famous term *φιλανθρωπία*, which is love and kindness towards the human creature. In his Epistle to Titus, St. Paul called God's love for human creatures precisely *φιλανθρωπία*.<sup>62</sup> That love for humans, the contemplation of which Athanasius demands of his listeners using an imperative—*θαύμαζε* ("Wonder at!")—remains a deeper justification of human dignity.

The more popular form of the golden rule of soteriology, the deification formula, establishes an implicit link between human dignity (the human being becoming God) and incarnation (God becoming a human being), which the dignitarian formula makes explicit. The justification of dignity is therefore identified by Athanasius both in incarnation and the act of redemption, which are focal points of his writings. On one hand, this understanding of human dignity relies on a kind of unity between God and a human being, established through incarnation. On the other, human dignity reaches its ultimate form in the redeemed human being who is said "to be god". Redemption, to which incarnation is a prelude, is, however, an advanced chapter in the longer history of humanity: how it came to be, what it was, how it lost its dignity and how it regained it.<sup>63</sup>

### 2.1.3 *Human Creation in the Image of God*

This history takes us back to two passages in the Book of Genesis, chapter 1, verses 26 and 27, describing human creation in God's image and likeness. The interpretation of these two lines is a rich and persistent theme in the writings of Jewish and Christian writers in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and beyond. The two verses describing the making of a human being introduce the significant anthropological concept of an image of God (in short, "an icon"), for verse 26 reads: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" and verse 27 adds: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."<sup>64</sup>

62 Tit 3:4.

63 Ath., de inc. 14.

64 NRSV-CE. trans.

At the beginning of *De incarnatione Verbi*, Athanasius explains that the description of incarnation, the focal point of his speech, must start with human creation in God's image and likeness, since the incarnation is a direct consequence of original sin. In the first sin, humanity lost the glory of being an image of the divine archetype. In *De incarnatione*, being an image and similarity to God are associated with human reason which is capable of knowing God. Redemption, initiated by the incarnation, is God's attempt to repaint the exact image on the same canvas, which is the metaphor of human nature. In this metaphor, to be a portrait is a fact of human nature, shaped by the act of creation into an icon, εἰκών, and resembling the one portrayed, God. For this reason, the Savior needed to incorporate this canvas Himself, and repaint it similarly with his actions, this being Salvation. In doing so, the Son of God retrieved the grace of being the image of God for all of humanity, who shares the same nature (the metaphoric canvas) as the Savior. In Athanasius's approach, the incarnated Son of God is the perfect icon through which all other human beings can reclaim the glory of being images, previously distorted by the original sin.<sup>65</sup>

Apart from mentioning living in the grace (χάρις) of being an image of God,<sup>66</sup> Athanasius did not employ any apparent dignitarian terminology in this account of iconicity, which he did in his description of the human deification formula and the dignitarian formula. He did, however, state that such creation in the image and likeness elevates the human being above all creation, including angels, who, according to the Alexandrian thinker, are not made in God's image.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, in *De incarnatione* Athanasius did not clearly distinguish human image from the likeness of the image, differentiated by the biblical text. In some passages, he mentions that sin affects the glory of being an image; in some, the likeness of the image.<sup>68</sup>

The remarks concerning human elevation and standing above angels have obvious axiological implications, yet in tracing the history of human dignity we ought to observe that the explicit dignitarian terminology is used by Athanasius only in the contexts of incarnation and redemption. The dignity associated with these events is incorporated into human nature by virtue of unity with God, and—as such—is common to all people and identical in each human icon. This is arguably indisputable, since redemption pertains to all of humanity. Even in his approach to human iconicity, redemption plays a crucial role of retrieving the lost resemblance.

65 Ath., de inc. 3–6; 8–9; metaphor of the canvas: 14.

66 Ath., de inc. 12.

67 Ath., de inc. 13.7.

68 Ath., de inc., image as disappearing in 6, likeness as lost in 14.

Athanasius's focus on incarnation leading to redemption was adopted in later Greek theology, due to the topics of debate in the Church at the time. Although the Greek Father's most widespread works do not develop the topic of human dignity extensively, the Alexandrian bishop contributed significant passages formulated in the contexts of incarnation and redemption. His remarks stand as evidence that the early Christian writers perceived incarnation and redemption as relevant to any discussion of the human nature, including human dignity.

The remaining parts of this Chapter will demonstrate that observation of the link between dignity and redemption applies also to later Cappadocian Fathers. Athanasius developed a conception of human dignity as not once, but twice received: once during creation, and the second time during redemption. It is the latter which yields a stronger sense of dignity, a common dignity equating humans with gods, a categorization that was not equaled by anything else in the created world.

Athanasius remains the author of the concise and striking phrase expressing this Greek idea: "He was undignified, so that we could have dignity". The axiological message of his phrase could well serve as a motto for the fourth century Greek approach to human dignity.

## 2.2 Basil the Great

Basil of Caesarea, the most widely known Cappadocian Father, was born in a family of many saints and philosophers: Basil's grandmother, Macrina the Elder; his parents, Basil the Senior, an orator and lawyer, and his wife, Basil's mother, Emmelia; Basil's sister, Macrina the Younger, named after her grandmother; Basil's two brothers, Gregory of Nyssa and Peter of Sebaste; and Basil himself, are all declared saints.<sup>69</sup> Few families in history can compete with this one when it comes to proclaimed sanctity, and so they were already legendary during Basil's life: a significant theme in the funeral speech by Gregory of Nazianzus on Basil's death in 379 was the family's exceptional virtue.<sup>70</sup> These many saints only include one Doctor of the Church (in the Catholic tradition), however, and this is Basil the Younger, most commonly known as Basil the Great, or Basil of Caesarea.<sup>71</sup>

69 P. Adamson, *Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds: History of Philosophy without any Gaps* 2, Oxford 2015, 299.

70 Gr. Naz., or. 43 in laud. B. 3–11.

71 Adamson, 2015, 299–300.

Born in 329, most likely at Caesarea (the alternative hypothesis considers his father's homeland, Pontus, his place of birth), where he later became a bishop, Basil studied in Caesarea, Constantinople and finally, before returning to Caesarea, in Athens, where he met Gregory of Nazianzus, his life-long friend.<sup>72</sup> Given such an education, he is not likely to have known any Latin, and his writings, including the references he made to other authors, verify this hypothesis—they are uniformly Greek.<sup>73</sup> This information will prove significant in tracing the history of the clarion call to “recognize one's dignity,” since Basil is the earliest to have formulated it, long before Leo the Great did so during the Christmas celebrations in 440. If Basil repeated it after some other author, it would have been someone Greek. Some arguments can be presented, nevertheless, to defend the hypothesis that it was originally his.

Following completion of his education, Basil served as a bishop of Caesarea. During this time, he contributed greatly to the reforms of liturgy;<sup>74</sup> defended the Trinitarian standpoint in doctrinal debates, in particular concerning the divine nature of the Holy Spirit;<sup>75</sup> distinguished himself in the care for sick and poor by establishing a center of what we would call first hospices, named *Basileias*;<sup>76</sup> and founded coenobitic monasteries, for which he prepared rules.<sup>77</sup> These rules later became an inspiration for none other than Benedict of Nursia, founder of the Benedictines, the first monastic order in the Latin West with fixed rules approved by the Pope.<sup>78</sup> Due to his charitable and social work, in particular the creation of *Basileias*, some specialists call Basil “one of the defenders of human dignity.”<sup>79</sup> As we shall see, Basil's social and theological ideas—in particular, his principle of the incommensurability of human worth—encouraged his younger brother, Gregory, to express fierce criticism of slavery.

Basil's use of the words ἄξια, ἄξιωμα, τιμή, typical in Greek when employed for the meaning of honor and dignity, value, price, or that which is thought worthy, occurs in influential speeches which made history in both Eastern and

72 J. Gribomont, *Basilio di Cesarea di Cappadocia*, in: Di Berardino, 2006, 724–731; Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine* (L'Osservatore Romano trans.), San Francisco 2009, 65–66; J. Quasten, *Basil the Great*, in: id., 1991, 204–236; R.T. Smith, *St. Basil the Great*, London 1879, 12–18; Muszala / Woźniak, 2019, 123–131.

73 Smith, 1879, 12.

74 Gr. Naz., or. 43 in laud. B. 34; Basil the Great, *Anaphora Sancti Basilii*.

75 Basil the Great, *Contra Eunomium*; *De Spiritu Sancto*; *Epistula* 38; *Epistula* 52.

76 Basil the Great, ep. 94; Gr. Naz., or. 43 in laud. B. 63.

77 Basil the Great, *Regulae brevius tractatae*, *Regulae fusius tractatae*.

78 Ben., reg. 73.

79 M. Starowieyski, *Atanazy Wielki*, in: M. Starowieyski / J.M. Szymusiak (eds.), *Nowy słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa*, Poznań 2022, 194.

Western preaching. We will focus first on the contexts pertaining to the ontological reality of dignity and its two major justifications. According to Basil, the dignity stemming from human creation is superseded by the dignity resulting from redemption. I will also discuss an influential excerpt from Basil's writings that formulates the cognitive imperative to know one's dignity, together with its later influence on not just ancient, but also contemporary thought.

### 2.2.1 *Dignity of an Icon*

Let us start the reconstruction with a justification of human dignity that has already been introduced. Basil counts among many who picked up the notion of the icon of God and made use of it, with significant dignitarian implications; unlike Athanasius, however, he employed explicit dignitarian terminology in this context.

One of his most popular homilies is a sermon on the Old Testament words *Be attentive to yourself!* (Deut 4:9).<sup>80</sup> In this sermon, the Cappadocian Father inquires about “the self” of which one is supposed to be attentive.<sup>81</sup> Who I am, he writes, is different from what is mine. Thus, the bishop of Caesarea announces the distinction between the soul and the body, inspired by the Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades I*.<sup>82</sup>

What I am, he explains, is a soul or a mind created in the image of God, and what is merely mine is my body, my perceptions, my virtues and all capacities, as well as the surrounding conditions.<sup>83</sup> It is only the soul (ψυχή), not the body, which is iconic of God, for the body, strictly speaking, is not me, but mine. The soul, however, constitutes an image of God, for it is capable of cognition and ruling the surrounding creation, and it can thus lift itself up to an honor equal to the angels (τῶν ἀγγέλων ὁμοσιμία), via a good life.<sup>84</sup> It is worth noting that in his anthropology, the Cappadocian Father assumes an anthropological egalitarianism.<sup>85</sup>

Basil observes the distinction between the terms “image of God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ) and “likeness” (ὁμοίωσις) of the image, present in lines 26 and 27 of the Book of Genesis. In line 26, the Hebrew original distinguishes the image, שֵׁלֶם (šelem), from similitude or likeness, דְּמוּת (transliterated as demut). In line 27,

80 Basil the Great, *Homilia in illud: Attende tibi ipsi* (PG 31, 197–217); critical edition: S.Y. Rudberg (ed.), *L'homélie de Basile de Césarée sur le mot "Observe-toi toi-même": Édition critique du texte grec et étude sur la tradition manuscrite*, Stockholm 1962.

81 Basil. Caes., att. t. i. 3.

82 Pl., *Alc.* 1.131e.

83 Interestingly, Basil does not list slaves among one's possessions.

84 Basil. Caes., att. t. i. 6 (PG 31, 212).

85 Basil. Caes., hex. 7.3. Cf. footnote 19 below.

the Hebrew twice repeats the noun *šelem*, in the expression “*bəšelem*”, composed of the preposition “in”, *בְּ* (*bə*), the noun meaning image—*שֶׁלֶם* (*šelem*), and in one case additionally accompanied by the first common pronominal suffix *נּוּ* (*nu*), meaning “our”.<sup>86</sup> The Greek and Latin translations of the Scripture, known to the Church Fathers, also distinguish an image from likeness: Greek *εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ* and Latin *imago Dei* refer to the icon of God, whereas Greek *ὁμοίωσις* and Latin *similitudo* refer to the likeness of an image. Many Christian thinkers made use of this distinction in the context of original sin, assuming that being an icon is an unchanging fact of nature, whereas similarity or dissimilarity to this icon is a variable that alters according to the choices people make, and specifically those of moral gravity.

Basil uses this terminological distinction to introduce a twofold understanding of the human resemblance to God, consisting of two basic elements: a static element of nature and a varying dynamic element of actions. The soul constitutes, for Basil, the unchanging aspect of dignity ingrained in human nature, whereas human actions (Basil writes: living “a good life”) constitute the dynamic aspect that shapes an icon into either greater similarity to the archetype, or dissimilarity from it.<sup>87</sup> The human soul is shaped by the hands of God (this being an evident reference to Psalm 118) in His image, yet it can be less or more similar to the Maker, depending on the individual’s choices.

Significantly, Basil does not distinguish between men and women in his understanding of iconicity, giving an exegetic argument against such a reading: “For, the virtue of man and woman is the same, since creation is equally honored (*ὁμότιμος*) in both. Listen to Genesis. *God created humankind*, it says, *in the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them.* They whose nature is alike have the same reward.”<sup>88</sup> The passage stresses the identical character of human nature created as iconic in both men and women.

The distinction Basil does draw in his model of *imago Dei* is, firstly, that between Jesus and all other human beings, and secondly, that between the iconicity of the soul and the greater or lesser similitude of the icons, depending on the particular icon’s choices.

The dynamics of the process of becoming more or less similar to God is clarified by Basil’s theory of the soul, adopted from classical Greek philosophy.

86 In Hebrew transliterations I follow Thomas Lambdin’s rules: T.O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, New York 1971, XXI–XXV.

87 Basil. Caes., att. t. i. 6.7.

88 Basil. Caes., in ps. 13 (PG 29, 216–217). English translations by A.C. Way are taken from: Saint Basil, *Exegetic Homilies* (A.C. Way trans.), Washington 2006, 155–156. I replaced the biblical quotation with NRSV-CE to remain consistent with the previous biblical references.



One part of the soul, according to him, is rational and capable of ruling the other, the merely affective, consisting of feelings and desires. Those who use their rational part of the soul wisely, in order to master their passions, live according to the image of God; those who succumb to passions and abandon reason lose the similarity of the image to the archetype, but that process can be reversed: “the soul, falling for the passions of the body loses its beauty and again, cleaned of the ugliness of its malice through virtue, returns to the similarity to the Maker”.<sup>89</sup>

In another homily, Basil argues: “When the soul is not enslaved by the pride of the flesh, but assumes a greatness (μέγεθος) and dignity (ἄξιωμα) proper to it because of its awareness of its attributes received from God, in this soul is the voice of the Lord.”<sup>90</sup> In one other homily of uncertain but possible attribution to Basil, this significant idea of the soul being not just an image but also a temple of God is also expressed in terminology derivative of the Gospel, which calls a human being “a jar of clay” in which God’s grace resides.<sup>91</sup> The Greek text makes use of this biblical notion, popularly known in its Latinized form as *capax Dei* (“the vessel of God”), by calling a human being a “vessel divinely molded” or “molded by God”, σκεῦος θεόπλαστον.<sup>92</sup> Being a vessel is an aspect of human nature created wondrously by God, thus θεόπλαστον. Regardless of it being put to use as a vessel or not, the vessel remains a characteristic of human design, for it has a certain capacity formed during creation. Being filled with divine life constitutes the dynamic element—in parallel to the icon’s similarity—an element that might be achieved or forfeited. Humans are designed to achieve it, for it is an imprint of God in their nature, but even if they do not, the vessel is who they are.

Basil expressed the idea of divinity being human purpose in yet another way, paraphrasing the exchange formula that he knew from Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, and Athanasius. Basil’s version, forwarded to us by Gregory of Nazianzus, reads: “I am God’s creature called to be God (θεὸς εἶναι).”<sup>93</sup> This deification formula accentuates the greatness to which the human icon or the human vessel can aspire, but, similarly to Athanasius’s, need not be understood literally. The deification of a human being is a frequent theme among Greek Fathers, typically understood as a description of humanity reaching a state of glory: eternal, joyful life.

89 Basil. Caes., att. t. i. 7 (PG 31, 216, J.G.M trans.).

90 Basil. Caes., in ps. 28 4 (PG 29, 293, A.C. Way trans., 202).

91 2 Cor 4:7.

92 Basil. Caes., de cr. hom. 2.4 (Sch 160, 234, linea 16).

93 Gr. Naz., or. 43 in laud. B. 48 (PG 36, 560).

The opposite possibility involves realizing the dissimilarity of the archetype. This idea leads Basil to quote a verse from Psalm 49 which gave rise to many descriptions of the “bestialization” of men: “Man that is in honor (τιμῆ), and understands not, is like the beasts that perish.”<sup>94</sup> Hence, Basil calls such a man “the earthly image” (εἰκὼν τοῦ χοίκοῦ).<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, “he, because he did not perceive his own honor (τιμῆ), but bowed down to the passions of the flesh, *is compared to senseless beasts, and made similar to them.*”<sup>96</sup> Aware of such a possibility, Basil formulates a suggestion to realize one’s dignity, which is a recurring theme in his orations. One of them reads: “Therefore, Scripture urges the just to be aware of their dignity (ἀξιωμα), because they have been considered worthy to be the servants of so great a Master.”<sup>97</sup> Basil has more to say about a cognitive obligation to understand one’s dignity—one that is universal to all human beings—in his commentary to Psalm 48, which we shall turn to below.

At this point, let us summarize Basil’s stance regarding iconicity. His understanding of an icon is as partially static and partially dynamic. The irreversible fact of being created in the image of God pertains to the soul by virtue of creation. Human choices, however, can make this naturally dignified image dissimilar to its archetype. The characterization of iconicity is, similarly to Athanasius’s approach, common among men and women and identical in each human being, for it pertains to human nature as such. The notion of an icon, moreover, is normative, since the dignity of creation obliges the dignity-bearer to conform to certain behaviors, and in particular to be aware of the dignity bestowed upon humanity. As we know from the Book of Genesis, humans did not exhibit the required behavior and fell into a trap of evil: “Then, because he estranged himself from the word of God, having become a brute beast, the enemy carried him away.”<sup>98</sup> Basil explains the history of how human beings were freed from the entrapment of evil, in order to reveal an infinite human dignity, superseding the initial dignity resulting from creation.

### 2.2.2 *Dignity of the Ransomed Captive*

The argumentation developed by Basil in his commentary to Psalm 48 offers two significant themes relevant to the topic of dignity. Firstly, the commentary to Psalm 48 is relevant because it includes explicit claims concerning the dignity of human creation in the image and likeness of God, as overcome by

94 Basil. Caes., in ps. 48 8 (PG 29, 449, A.C. Way trans., 325).

95 Basil. Caes., in ps. 48 8 (PG 29, 452). A.C. Way translates the expression as “the image of the earthly” (see: 325).

96 Ibidem.

97 Basil. Caes., in ps. 32 1 (PG 29, 324, A.C. Way trans., 227).

98 Basil. Caes., in ps. 48 9 (PG 29, 353, A. C. Way trans., 327).

the greater dignity resulting from redemption. Secondly, it reveals the logic behind redemption leading to regaining human dignity. This argument is concluded with an appeal to know one's dignity that made history insofar as it was repeated for centuries to come, most often in the Latinized version composed by Pope Leo the Great. That Leo's version stems from Basil's is an often overlooked point that I will therefore raise here and return to in Chapter Four, which is dedicated to Leo.<sup>99</sup> Finally, as an introductory remark, it is worth noting that the authenticity of this particular commentary has never been questioned, unlike a few others.<sup>100</sup>

Although written in the typical flowing style of a sermon, the commentary to Psalm 48 consists of a number of premises that all share the typical common-sense character of an elenctic Socratesian premise. Basil was, after all, educated in Greek philosophy and rhetoric. These premises lead to the aforementioned appeal to recognize one's dignity. They are developed in an apologetic manner insofar as, firstly, the author applies logical reasoning to explain the claims derivative of Revelation, and secondly, he illuminates the logic of the theological claim by applying it to everyday human reality. This makes the argument apologetic in the sense of providing a rational explanation and defense of faith. I will outline the premises separately and formalize them in symbolic formulas, in order to reveal the philosophical, argumentative content of the sermon and its line of reasoning, specifically in regard to human axiology.

The argument is ingrained in the military metaphor of negotiations over the exchange of captives, illustrating the human being trapped by the Devil in a prison from which God is trying to free His creature. Basil's premises are the following:<sup>101</sup>

1. Every captive is in need of a ransom for which they could be freed.
2. The value of the ransom (symbolized as "Vr") must be greater than the value of the captive (symbolized as "Vc"), if it is to be an argument in favor of the captive being freed. Thus, Vr > Vc.

99 Selected sentences from this chapter are identical to the contents of my Polish article: J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Późnostarozżytne apele o rozpoznanie godności ludzkiej: Bazyli z Cezarei Kapadockiej, Ambroży z Mediolanu, Leon Wielki, Mistrz z Werony*, in: *Vox Patrum* 83 (2022), 141–162.

100 J. Quasten, *Basil the Great*, in: id., 1991, 218. Quasten considers homilies dealing with psalms 1, 7, 14, 28, 29, 32, 33, 44, 45, 48, 59, 61, and 114 to be authentic. Cf. also A.C. Way, *Introduction*, in: Saint Basil, *Exegetic Homilies* (A.C. Way trans.), Washington 2006, vii–xvi; B. Jackson, *Works: Exegetic*, in: P. Schaff (ed.), *Saint Basil the Great, The Treatise "De Spiritu Sancto", the Nine Homilies of the Hexaemeron, and the Letters*, Grand Rapids 1894, 76–77.

101 Basil. Caes., in ps. 48 3–4.

3. Hidden premise: The value of the captive is the only thing the captive has at their disposal, and it is of no use in negotiations over the captive's freedom, as the captive is imprisoned and thus in the possession of the Devil together with their value.
4. If the value of the ransom must be higher than the value of the captive (premise no. 2), no brother of the captive can ransom the captive, for the brother's value (symbolized as "Vb") is equal to the captive's. Formally put,  $Vb=Vc$ . Thus, the value of the brother is not high enough to persuade the Devil to free the captive.
5. All human beings have sinned, which is why they are all captives.
6. The captive's value is great, for it is the value of an icon of God. As such, it is greater in value than the whole world (symbolized as  $Vc>Vw$ ).
7. God's value (symbolized as "Vg") is infinite, and as such, it surpasses the value of all captives taken together:  $Vg>Vc$

Conclusion 1: Only God can ransom the captive by offering Himself in exchange for the captive.

Conclusion 2: Whoever can ransom the captive is more than just a human being.

Conclusion 3: After being ransomed, the captive acquires the value which has been paid for them. The price paid elevates their original finite value ( $Vc$ ) to the infinite level of the ransom paid for them.  $Vc=Vg$ .

At this point, the argument justifies one frequently repeated line of the Gospel: ἡγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς, i.e., "you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:20, 1 Cor 7:23) or, formulated slightly differently: "you were bought for the precious (most honored) blood (τίμιον αἷμα) of Christ" (1 Pet 1:19, cf. Acts 20:28, Rev 5:9). This passage uses τιμή in the sense of a price or an offering, not honor. The act of ransoming, symbolizing redemption, constitutes the second justification (next to creation) for human dignity, a dignity which is infinite. Such dignity must necessarily be greater than the original value of the captive, due to the logic of the practice of an exchange.<sup>102</sup>

Following this line of thought, Basil concludes with a clarion call that, literally translated, reads<sup>103</sup>:

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Basil. Caes., in ps. 48 3.

<sup>103</sup> Basil. Caes., in ps. 48 8 (PG 29, 452): Εἰ μὴ τῆς πρώτης σεαυτοῦ γενέσεως μέμνησαι, ἐκ τῆς καταβληθείσης ὑπὲρ σοῦ τιμῆς λάβει τοῦ ἀξιώματος ἔννοιαν· ἀπόβλεψόν σου πρὸς τὸ ἀντάλλαγμα, καὶ γνώθι σεαυτοῦ τὴν ἀξίαν. Τῷ πολυτιμῆτῳ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡγοράσθης· μὴ γίγνου δούλος τῆς ἀμαρτίας. Σύνες σεαυτοῦ τῆς τιμῆς, ἵνα μὴ παρειασθῆς τοῖς ἀνοήτοις κτήνεσιν.

If you do not remember your first origin, from the price (τιμή) exchanged for you, grasp the notion of your worth (ἀξίωμα). See what was given for you and recognize (γνώθι) your value (ἀξία). You were bought (ἡγοράσθης from ἀγοράζω—to buy on agora) with the highly dignified (πολυτίμητον) blood of Christ, do not become a slave of sin. Take notice (σύνες) of your dignity (τιμή), and so you are not made like the mindless (οἱ ἀνόητοι) beasts.<sup>104</sup>

The Latin version, referenced alongside the Greek in *Patrologia Graeca* after numerous sixteenth century manuscripts, translates ἀξία, ἀξίωμα and τιμή as *dignitas*,<sup>105</sup> which makes this particular line very similar to the calls formulated some years later by Leo the Great in Rome.<sup>106</sup> The most literal translation of this Latin passage could be the following:

If you do not remember your first origin, because of the price (*pretium*) paid for you, accept some idea (*notio*) of your dignity (*dignitas*); look at that which was given in exchange for you and realize your own worth (*dignitas*). You were purchased with the most precious (*pretiosissimus*) blood of Christ; do not become a slave of sin. Understand (*intellige*) your preeminence (*praestantia*), and do not become similar to the beasts of burden (*iumenta*).

I have listed these accounts in order to make room for the comparison between the original shape of the appeal, including in its Latin translation, to later passages. Since our aim is to speculate about the exact origins of the most famous call to know one's dignity, that of Leo the Great, we must know the earlier Greek passage first so as to later compare it with that of Leo. Let us analyze the source material offered.

The Latin version follows the Greek closely, but alters the semantics of the passage in some nuances. The Greek τιμή is used by Basil to name both the offering for which the exchange is made (a price) and the honor of the captive. This use of τιμή is analogical to the Gospel (cf. 1 Pet 1:19; 1 Cor 6:20) and uses a mercantile metaphor. In Greek, τιμή has both the commercial connotation of a price and the religious meaning of an offering, such as one made by the Greeks

104 Compare the English translation by A. C. Way, in: Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Psalm 48*, par. 8 (A.C. Way trans.), 326: "If you are not mindful of your first origin, because of the price paid for you, accept at least some idea of your dignity; look at that which was given in exchange for you and realize your own worth. You were bought with the precious blood of Christ; do not become a slave of sin. Understand your own honor, in order that you may not be made like the senseless beasts."

105 PG 29, CLXXVII–CLXXVIII.

106 Basil. Caes., in ps. 48 8 (PG 29, 451): *Primae tuae originis si memor non es, ex persoluto pro te pretio qualemcumque dignitatis tuae notionem accipe; ad pretium illud quo commutatus es respice, tuamque agnosce dignitatem. Emptus es pretiosissimo Christi sanguine; peccati ne fias servus. Intellige tuam praestantiam, ut ne iumentis insipientibus assimileris.*

to the gods, not to mention the common meaning of honor or dignity. Greek ἀγοράζω is a verb meaning to purchase at the agora. Latin *pretium*, a translation of τιμή, also has more than one meaning, including that of a price and of a ransom. This highlights the character of redemption understood as some sort of exchange. Interestingly, some specialists argue that this mercantile character is also visible in the last words spoken by Christ on the Cross, when he cried out “τετέλεσται”, commonly translated as “it is finished” or “it is completed” (John 19:30).<sup>107</sup> The first meaning of τελέω is to accomplish, complete, finish, yet the second meaning of τελέω is to pay. In the first century, τετέλεσται written in an abbreviated form on a receipt functioned as a confirmation of a receipt being paid. Τιμή understood as a price, ἀγοράζω as a market exchange, and τελέω as paying all have strong mercantile connotations.

Latin obscures the wordplay between the τιμή of the human being and the highly honored (πολυτίμητον) blood of Christ. Translating the adjective specifying blood as *pretiosissimus* once again loses the link between τιμή and πολυτίμητον entirely, for there is no evident etymological connection between *dignitas* and *pretiosissimus* that would be visible in writing or detectable in listening. Thirdly, the Latin translator proposed the noun *notio* as a substitute for ἔννοια, very much in line with Basil, who writes not of “accepting dignity” but “accepting the notion (ἔννοια)” of one’s value (ἀξίωμα). This emphasizes the cognitive imperative to realize *an idea* of one’s dignity. Finally, the beasts, *iumenta*, are the animals which can draw carts and are thus held in the reins. This accentuates the limitations of the captive’s situation.

The presented line of argumentation, including the conclusion drawn in the clarion call, reveals significant assumptions concerning human dignity. Given the extensive influence of this sermon, it is crucial for us to spell them out.

The metaphor Basil appeals to has a commercial character to it, with a trace of the wartime practices known to the Romans. Such exchange practices were not uncommon in *Imperium Romanum*, which commonly practiced slavery.<sup>108</sup> In a different speech, Basil himself thematized the practice of selling children in order for the parents to pay their debts. Appealing to children’s nobility (εὐγένεια παιδων, literally being well-born), he condemned the practice, arguing that by doing so, the parents deprive their children of their nobility.<sup>109</sup> We will return to this appeal later on.

107 J.H. Moulton / G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, London 1995, 630; see *teleo* in LSC.

108 K. Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425*, Cambridge 2011, 33–66.

109 Basil. Caes., 2 in ps. 14 4 (PG 29, 277). Cf. also Basil. Caes., in div. 4.

Furthermore, Basil's line of argumentation leads to the conclusion that the value of the captive after the ransoming is necessarily higher than the value of the captive before the transaction, and in fact becomes infinite. This explains why the incipit of the call refers to "remembering the first origin". The first origin is the creation that brings forth some kind of human dignity in every human being: "Human being (ἄνθρωπος) is a great thing (μέγα), and *pitiful man is something honorable* (τίμιον),<sup>110</sup> who has his honor in his natural constitution (τὸ τίμιον ἐν τῇ φύσικῇ κατασκευῇ ἔχων)," Basil reassures us in this same commentary to Psalm 48.<sup>111</sup> If this is forgotten, Basil directs the listener to the dignity resulting from redemption. The human icon that disregarded God's law and fell into the Devil's trap is not abandoned by God, who finds the captive worthy of the price of the sacrifice of His Son. By ransoming the captive with the most honorable price, His Son, God bestows the captive with a new, infinite value, one greater (according to premise 2) than the original value introduced by creation (conclusion 3). This is necessarily so, because this ransom is an argument in favor of freeing the captive. The attention of the listener is thus drawn in the call to this second justification of dignity: the fact that they are, in the eyes of God, worthy of God's own Son's sacrifice, exchanged for a human being. The second dignity necessarily surpasses the first in value, not only because the price paid for the captive must be greater than the captive in order for the exchange to be attractive to the Devil in whose keeping the captive remains, but also because the first dignity that elevated humans "above the stars" did not equate them with the Son of God. It is redemption, understood as an act of exchange, that bestows the captive with the infinite value paid for them, a value that equates the human being with the value of the Son of God. As such, we can observe that Basil formulated the principle of incommensurability of human dignity, i.e., the idea that human dignity lacks any basis for comparison in the world in regard to its value. The conclusion of Basil's logic of the exchange is based on the idea that human ἀξία or ἀξίωμα finds stronger justification in redemption than in creation.<sup>112</sup>

Basil's call to know one's dignity, localized in a work of relatively lesser importance, seems to have been transmitted to the Latin West. In particular, Leo the Great cried out this and similar calls a number of times during Christmas celebrations, and earlier, Ambrose of Milan and Jerome of Stridon (both proficient in Greek) did so as well. This provides some grounds to argue

110 Compare with Prov 20:6 in Septuagint version.

111 Basil. Caes., in ps. 48 8 (PG 29, 451, A.C. Way trans., 324, adapted).

112 A similar conclusion was formulated by Volp; cf. U. Volp, *Die Würde des Menschen: Ein Beitrag zur Anthropologie in der Alten Kirche*, Leiden 2006, 165–166.

that the Latin writers received *lumen orientale* from the Cappadocian regarding the call to know human dignity. The comparative analyses of all these calls are contained in Chapter Four, but here we can summarize the content of the call formulated by Basil.

Basil's call comprises three significant elements, which we shall identify in many later Latin axiological appeals of this kind:

1. Firstly, a cognitive imperative to realize one's dignity:
  - a. Λάβε τοῦ ἀξιώματος ἔννοιαν—*Accipe dignitatis tuae notionem!*—*Accept the notion of your worth!*
  - b. Γνώθι σεαυτοῦ τὴν ἀξίαν!—*Agnosce dignitatem tuam!*—*Know your dignity!*
  - c. Σύνεσ σεαυτοῦ τῆς τιμῆς—*Intellige tuam praestantiam!*—*Realize your preeminence!*
2. Secondly, the idea of the highest price called “the blood of Christ”: πολυτίμητον αἷμα—*pretiosissimus sanguis*—*the most precious blood.*
3. Thirdly, a strong appeal to refrain from entering again into the captivity of sin: μὴ γίγνου δοῦλος τῆς ἁμαρτίας—*peccati ne fias servus!*—*do not become a servant of sin!*

As I will argue, two of these three elements reappear in Ambrose of Milan's *Hexaemeron*, and one in Jerome's homilies on the Psalms. Later, an imperative of the same style and the same conceptual context (inclusive of all three elements just listed) appears during Christmas celebrations led by Leo the Great in 440 and onwards. Similar cognitive imperatives can be found in numerous medieval texts listed in Chapter Four. Finally, as of today, it is a common liturgical practice to quote the call containing these three elements during Christmas Eve celebrations in the Catholic Church.

This is not all. The ideas behind this call made history in yet another way: the concept of human dignity as resulting from the “wondrous creation” but more importantly from “yet more wondrous redemption” was introduced into a prayer that was spoken first during Christmas celebrations in the Catholic Church, and that from medieval times until the reforms of *Vaticanum Secundum* could be spoken during offertory of every Mass. Today, the prayer remains part of the Christmas liturgy.<sup>113</sup> This prayer in all its original forms is discussed in Chapter Four, which is dedicated to Leo the Great, its most likely author. The idea contained in it—of dignity twice received—stems, nonetheless, from Basil.

113 M. Lebech / J. McEvoy / J. Flood, “*Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem*”: A Latin Liturgical Source Contributing to the Conceptualization History of Human Dignity, in: Maynooth Philosophical Papers 10 (2020), 117–133.



Here, let us observe that this prayer's presence in liturgy means that the altar has become one of the most persistent broadcasters of the concept of human dignity in European culture. Few other factors, let alone written texts—such as Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitate*—can rival the impact of the words spoken since antiquity at the altars, which gathered men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated alike, people of all social standings. As we approach various texts discussing human dignity, we will observe that none—statistically speaking—could have been distributed as broadly in the Latin West as the ideas promoted through Roman liturgy.

Basil's conceptualization of human dignity is not entirely forgotten. Two contemporary popes, John Paul II<sup>114</sup> and Benedict XVI, selected Basil's appeal to ideas of human dignity as a vital theme in the Cappadocian's teachings.<sup>115</sup> John Paul II identified redemption as a key factor in Basil's conception: "Human dignity is contained in the mystery of God and the mystery of the Cross—such is the teaching of Basil the Great."<sup>116</sup> Few connect Basil's call with Leo's, however.

Basil's philosophical approach to human dignity, which makes sense of redemption by using an analogy to the practice of prisoner exchange during a war, was also exploited in the twentieth century by C.S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. One of Lewis's protagonists, young Edmund, is saved from the White Witch by being ransomed by the legendary lion king of Narnia, Aslan, who offered himself instead.<sup>117</sup> This kind of reasoning makes use of the mercantile metaphor of redemption, which is understood as settling the score with evil by exchanging a human captive for God.

It is, therefore, justified to estimate Basil's role in the history of dignity as inventive in regard to the philosophical argument pertaining to incommensurability of dignity. If there is any inspiration behind the exact argument contained in Basil's appeal, it could not be Latin, for—as we pointed out—Basil never mastered it. The Greek philosophical texts, for example the opening passages of Epictetus's *Diatribai*, stress the need to know the value of reason and one's choices, as well as to live in accordance with one's role (πρόσωπον),<sup>118</sup> yet are not formulated as a rhetorical imperative to know one's dignity. Greek commentaries to the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν also come close to Basil's appeal,

114 John Paul II, *Patres Ecclesiae*, II.

115 Benedict XVI, *General audience*, 4 July 2007; *General audience*, 7 August 2007.

116 John Paul II, *Patres Ecclesiae*, II. Trans. JGM.

117 C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, London 1950. I am referring to Aslan's reasons for offering himself instead of Edmund, as explicated in Chapter 15 revealing "the deeper magic."

118 Epict., dia. 1.1–2, πρόσωπον in chapter 2 (LCL 131, 14).

yet his exact phrasing (λάβε τοῦ ἀξιώματος ἔννοιαν, γνώθι σεαυτοῦ τὴν ἀξίαν, and σύνες σεαυτοῦ τῆς τιμῆς) is not to be found among them. Following the exposition of Leo's call, I will formulate the hypothesis that Basil's appeal has spread, through a Latin translation possibly carried out by Ambrose of Milan, to the West, and from there, via the Universal Church, to medieval Christendom and into widespread European culture, where it is still present.

Finally, let us briefly return to the appeal to children's nobility that Basil formulated when criticizing the practice of selling children into slavery.<sup>119</sup> Basil expressed such a view more than once.<sup>120</sup> His objection to treating children as mere things that have a fixed, finite price is surprisingly contemporary and goes against the fundamental principles of the ancient Roman mindset and law.<sup>121</sup> This passage, illustrating the ancient practice of exchanging people as goods on markets (ἀγοραί), illuminates a significant normative aspect of dignity, by which I mean that dignity is not merely a descriptive concept saying something about how things are, but also introduces norms. In this case, dignity grants its subjects (children) the right to be properly treated, i.e., according to their nobility and not like objects of a market exchange. The norm of treating dignity-bearers with proper respect is the result of dignity inherent to children, even though it is linked by Basil to their property of being well-born. This norm-introducing aspect of dignity, today common in the practice of law, also manifests itself in the cognitive call to recognize one's dignity. The obligations stemming from dignity pertain to the dignity-bearers themselves, who are obliged to know their dignity and act accordingly, because they have it.<sup>122</sup> It

119 Basil. Caes., 2 in ps. 14 4 (PG 29, 277).

120 Basil. Caes., in div. 4.

121 Basil's views on slavery entail an explicit denial of the view of natural slavery, the criticism of harsh treatment of slaves, the criticism of the abundant needs of the slave owners, and a commentary on a particular biblical story of the two brothers, one foolish and one wise. Cf. Basil. Caes., de S. S. 20 (denial of natural slavery and commentary on the two brothers) and id., in mar. I. 1, in div. 2.2, hex. 7.3 (criticism of the harsh treatment and the abundant needs of the slave owners). Some commentaries suggested that one line of Basil's commentary on the two brothers comes close to an Aristotelian view of slavery, which would suggest that Basil contradicted himself within just a few lines. Cf. P. Garney, *Ideas on Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, Cambridge 1996, 47. For a good account of the source material, see: Harper, 2011, 46.53.99–100.410–411.

122 Basil. Caes., in ps. 14 4 (PG 29, 277, A.C. Way trans., 189): "I have seen a piteous sight, free sons (παῖδες ἐλεύθεροι) dragged to the market place to be sold because of the paternal debt. You are not able to leave money to your sons? Do not deprive (προσ αφαιρέω) them as well of their nobility (εὐγένεια). Preserve for them this one thing, the possession of their liberty, the sacred trust which you received from your parents. No one has ever been prosecuted for the poverty of his father, but a father's debt leads into prison. Do not leave a bond, a paternal curse, as it were, descending upon the sons and grandsons."

is most significant that a fourth-century thinker appeals to a so-called “dignity premise” in an argument in favor of treating children as dignified subjects. He also criticizes any form of mistreating the weak for the sake of satisfying one’s indulgent needs, comparing such behavior to the animal food chain in which the weaker serve as the food for the stronger.<sup>123</sup>

If, then, we try to assess Basil’s place in the landscape of the European history of dignity, we must situate him at the very forefront of this landscape, as one of the main protagonists and a central figure—one, nevertheless, remaining in the shadows—as an overlooked source of the thought that took a leading role in the speeches of the influential pope, Leo I, and one whose authorship of the call to recognize one’s dignity remains, ever so humbly, concealed in the shadows of history.

### 2.3 Gregory of Nyssa

Basil’s younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa, followed in his brother’s footsteps in many ways: education, faith, engagement in the theological discussions over the nature of the Trinity, social engagements, even sanctity.<sup>124</sup> In particular, having observed that Basil’s commentary on the six days of creation were never completed and lacked a discussion of Day Six, he wrote a treatise supplementing his brother’s *Hexaemeron*, called *Περὶ κατασκευῆς ἀνθρώπου*, known in the Latinized version, *De opificio hominis*.<sup>125</sup> This treatise, comprising a comprehensive discussion of anthropology, not only observes human value but offers polemics towards some accounts of it. This demonstrates two points: first, that for the Greek thinker writing in the early 80s of the fourth century (when *De opificio hominis* was written), the topic of human axiology was plausible and familiar enough to discuss competing conceptualizations of it. Second, it is a great example of Greek precedence in the discussions of human axiology in relation to the Latin West. Apart from numerous anthropological-axiological themes, Gregory’s social teachings, specifically concerning the slaves, are relevant to his understanding of human greatness. Observing the implications of human value for the case of slavery was not at all common in the ancient mindset. Gregory stands out as a rare example of implementing the principle of human dignity to the notoriously inhumane practice of selling people for

123 Basil. Caes., hex. 7.3.

124 J. Gribomont, *Gregorio di Nissa*, in: Di Berardino, 2006, 2466–2473; Starowieyski, *Grzegorz z Nyssy*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 416–24.

125 Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis* (PG 44, 124–256).

finite monetary value. His model social sensitivity illustrates that a recognition of the implications of the idea of human dignity to the practice of selling and enslaving people is not entirely absent from the ancient cultures, even though the link was made by very few thinkers. These are the two strands of Gregory's thought that we will investigate: his anthropology and his criticism of slavery.

### 2.3.1 *The Great and Most Precious Human Being*

The opening chapters of *De opificio hominis* introduce the topic of human axiology as inseparable from anthropology, since the human being is made "in God's image and likeness," and that by itself introduces the topic of human greatness alongside the discussion of human ontology. Gregory begins his account of the creation of a human being by asking why the human being, which is a great and honored thing (τὸ μέγα τοῦτο καὶ τίμιον χρῆμα ὁ ἄνθρωπος), was made at the very end of God's act of creation (typically, ancient Christian writers overlook the fact that it was actually a woman who was the very last creature to be formed by God).<sup>126</sup> The Book of Genesis names Day Six, just before God rested, as the day on which the human being was made.<sup>127</sup> Formulating four arguments for a standpoint known today as "anthropocentric finalism," Gregory explains why the final positioning justifies humans' exceptional status.<sup>128</sup>

The four arguments are: an argument of a ruler, an argument of an explorer, an argument of a researcher, and an argument from divine council. The first of these points out that one does not invite guests before the feast is ready and the home is decorated, and thus God finished the creation of the world before placing the final and most honored guest in it, the human creature. This creature was to be an explorer; thus, they could only be placed in the completed world ready to be investigated once it was finalized. Analogically, the creature that was to be a ruler of the world could only be placed in it once the world was there to be ruled.<sup>129</sup> Finally, the treatise proclaims that the nature of the human being was more precious (τιμιωτέρα) than any other being because only their making was preceded by a divine council.<sup>130</sup> All other beings were summoned to existence through God's direct imperative, whereas before the

126 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 2 (PG 44, 132).

127 Gen 1:24–31.

128 For a general introduction to Gregory's views on human axiology, cf. F.H. Bastitta, *If You Do Not Know Yourself, Beautiful Amongst Women: Human Greatness in Gregory of Nyssa and its Influence on the Quattrocento*, in: Maspero / Brugarolas / Vigorelli (eds.), 2018, 390–402.

129 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 2 (PG 44, 132–133).

130 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 3 (PG 44, 133).

human creature was called into existence, the Trinity pondered their nature, as suggested by verse 26 of the Book of Genesis: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.”<sup>131</sup> The positioning of the creation of the human being at the end of the act of creation is thus taken by Gregory to be symptomatic of human greatness and exceptionality. Such a version of anthropocentric finalism, one closely resembling a concise paragraph on human creation by Theophilus of Antioch, opens Gregory’s anthropological treatise.

The second significant strand accentuating human preciousness in Gregory’s work is human iconicity. As specialists observe, Gregory’s approach to the subject provides a number of criteria of human iconicity in this and other writings, often intertwining both natural and supernatural gifts.<sup>132</sup> Although the descriptions differ in their details, they are not inconsistent with one another, for they all rely on the premise that the icon reflects the goodness of the Creator and they result from the particular context and the work’s aim.<sup>133</sup> Since God’s goodness can never be fully known, neither can the icon’s.<sup>134</sup> Gregory, therefore, lists various goods present in the icon, depending on the context which he tackles. To provide some examples: in the early chapters of *De opificio hominis*, Gregory lists human independence (ἀδέσποτον), self-determination (αὐτεξούσιον), and being led by one’s own will—all three characteristics of human dominion over the world.<sup>135</sup> In the next chapter, he names additional factors that shape the icon: human virtues, such as chastity, freedom from passions (for which he uses the Stoic ἀπάθεια), happiness, and having nothing to do with evil. The passage is concluded by adding human reason and speech, self-determination, and love as distinctive of God’s icon.<sup>136</sup> In a more advanced chapter of the treatise, Gregory provides yet another, longer list: participation in the totality of goodness, beauty, virtue, wisdom, freedom from determination, and self-determination.<sup>137</sup> In a work from the same period, *De anima et resurrectione*, he also names immortality, life, fame, beauty, brightness, and strength.<sup>138</sup> One of Gregory’s homilies on the beatitudes additionally refers to immortality, happiness, independence, life

131 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 3 (PG 44, 133). Gen 1:26 (NRSV-CE trans.).

132 See J.T. Muckle, *The Doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa on Man as the Image of God*, in: MS 7 (1945), 55–84; M. Przyszychowska, *Introduction*, in: Grzegorz z Nyssy, *O stworzeniu człowieka* (M. Przyszychowska trans.), Cracow 2006, 14–21.

133 R. Leys, *L’image de Dieu chez Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris 1951, 60; W. Völker, *Gregorio di Nissa filosofo e mistico* (C. Tommasi trans.), Milan 1993, 72.

134 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 11; 16.

135 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 4 (PG 44, 136).

136 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 5 (PG 44, 137).

137 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 16 (PG 44, 184).

138 Gr. Nyss., de an. et resurr. (PG 46, 160).

free from hardship, and contemplation of the good.<sup>139</sup> This listing of various goods present in a human being leads Gregory to perceive human iconicity as an alienable feature, because if a particular divine mark is replaced by a contrasting form, the human being ceases to be an image of God.<sup>140</sup> Gregory specifies this view as pertaining to the dynamic human likeness to God, different from being an icon, a characteristic associated with a higher part of the soul.<sup>141</sup> This approach marks a popular, partially dynamic understanding of human iconicity, which consists in the inherent image of God and the dynamic property of similitude or dissimilitude of the image to the archetype.<sup>142</sup>

*De officio hominis* also contains a noteworthy discussion of the most appropriate terminology for conveying the message of human greatness. Having described his understanding of *imago Dei*, Gregory addresses a competing way of favoring (χαρίζομαι) human nature, by means of the ancient concept of microcosm (μικρὸς κόσμος).<sup>143</sup> What does microcosm mean?

Ever since classical Greek antiquity, and arguably Democritus, the concept of the microcosm has been employed in various anthropological contexts, by philosophers and medical practitioners, to describe the human condition of remaining on the border of various worlds, typically spiritual and material, mortal and immortal, animal and divine, intelligible and sensible, and so on.<sup>144</sup> This concept has not infrequently been ingrained in the dignitarian context, for the microcosmic characterization was considered unique. It situated the human being at the center of the world, or at its completion, and thus as the crown of creation, binding together all that is otherwise unmixed. Among the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory developed the concept, as did another fourth-century Greek, Nemesius of Emesa.<sup>145</sup> Christian authors often ingrained

139 Gr. Nyss., hom. in beat. 3 (GNO 7/2, 105).

140 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 11.

141 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 20.

142 For scriptural and philosophical assumptions of Gregory's take on apokatastasis cf. I. Ramelli, *Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, in: VigChr 61 (2007), 313–256.

143 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 16 (PG 44, 180).

144 For the history of the concept of the microcosm from Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle until the late Middle Ages, cf. Guerrero van der Meijden, 2019, 155–63. See also: J. Kielbasa, *Człowiek jako mikrokosmos w myśli średniowiecza*, in: M. Karas (ed.), *Historia filozofii: Meandry kultury. Teksty i studia ofiarowane Jackowi Widomskiemu z okazji 65. urodzin*, Cracow 2014, 145–158; R. Wright, *Macrocosm and Microcosm*, in ead., *Cosmology in Antiquity*, London 1995, 57–59; J.A. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of Late Neoplatonists*, Leiden 1976; G.P. Conger, *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy*, New York 1922.

145 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 2; Nemes., nat. hom. 1.

their analysis of human microcosmic nature in the context of a human creature being made on the last day of God's work, thus as a final creation. Ancient doctors, such as Hippocrates and Galen, typically used the notion to express a more physiological idea of the human being as comprising a unity of the four elements: water, earth, fire, and air.

Gregory, however, mocks the ancient idea of a microcosm, which he takes to be a feature shared by the human being with a mouse and a mosquito. According to him, all terms which compare the human creature to the world are "small and unworthy of the greatness of human nature" (μικρά τε καὶ ἀνάξια τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μεγαλοφυΐας).<sup>146</sup> In claiming so, Gregory reduces the meaning of the microcosm to the composition of the aforementioned four elements. The manifold interpretations of the notion of microcosm, stemming from Aristotle and ancient medicine, provide evidence of a much wider scope of reference of the ancient concept. In fact, Gregory himself presented views that could be classified as a version of ancient microcosmic theories: classifying the human being as borderline creature that unites various realms of the created world; mortal and immortal, or rational and animal.<sup>147</sup> His selected approach to the notion of microcosm—as meaning merely the composition of the four elements—does not cut deep enough to pose a threat to microcosmic theories such as those of Nemesius of Emesa or Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>148</sup> Gregory of Nyssa nonetheless expressed contempt for the view that human distinction can be expressed by a designate such as "microcosm." He concludes his critical remark with an opinion that the notion of an image of God, accentuating human likeness to God instead of to the world, is much more suitable for expressing the truth about humans' exceptional status.

This interesting critical standpoint demonstrates that Gregory pondered the available terminology for describing humans' axiological status. His discussion is limited to two concepts: the image of God and the microcosm, which he called the image of the world. By implication, the notion of human dignity is not one to be considered as a candidate to describe human greatness. It is not clear, in fact, what Gregory's name would be for "human dignity." He used a range of terminologies to refer to humans' axiological status, calling the human being "great" (μέγας), "precious" (τίμιος), or "more precious" (τιμιώτερος) and

146 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 16 (PG 44, 177).

147 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 16.

148 I present a discussion of Gregory's accusation in the context of the interpretations of microcosm by Philo of Alexandria and Nemesius of Emesa in J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Człowiek jako mały świat: Filon z Aleksandrii, Grzegorz z Nyssy, Nemejusz z Emezy, Edyta Stein. Czy mikrokosmiczność uchybia godności człowieka?*, in: J. Machnac (ed.), *Edyta Stein: Fenomenologia getyńsko-monachijska*, Wrocław 2016, 13–30.

“of great nature” (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μεγαλοφυΐας).<sup>149</sup> *Lexicon Gregorianum* does not include any of these, presumably because while consistently interested in human axiology, Gregory was inconsistent in naming the phenomenon he described with one word.<sup>150</sup> The terminological debate he opened suggests, nonetheless, that “the image of God” is a better name for the human being than “microcosm.”

### 2.3.2 *Slavery as Sin against Freedom*

Gregory’s criticism of slavery comprises an implication of his understanding of human iconicity, specifically the soul, as independent and self-determined (ἀδέσποτον καὶ αὐτεξούσιον).<sup>151</sup> He opens his fourth homily on Ecclesiastes with the explication of an egalitarian approach to human icons, who are all truly made to rule the world, yet not to rule one another. Whoever attempts to rule over his brother firstly takes on God’s prerogative, and this represents the sin of pride, for such a person looks down on his fellow man. Secondly, whoever enslaves another makes a slave of the one whom God ordered to rule the world, according to Gen 1:28. Slavery, therefore, contradicts the divine law; but more importantly, the natural law, reasons Gregory, directly opposing the Aristotelian view of natural slavery and in solidarity with whomever Aristotle was criticizing in his *Politics*, Philo of Alexandria, and selected Stoic voices on the matter (specifically Seneca’s *Letter 47 to Lucilius* and Epictetus’s *Discourses*).<sup>152</sup> Did the human being become cattle?—Gregory provocatively inquires—or have the cows given birth to a human child? Is there anything—he continues, clearly following in his brother’s footsteps—that has a value equal to the human being? How many obols will you give for an icon of God?—he finishes, rhetorically, only to conclude that the one who called us forth to be free (ἐλευθέρρα) cannot oblige us to be enslaved by one another.<sup>153</sup>

Following Basil’s argumentation from a homily on Psalm 48, Gregory ridicules the idea of there being any value equivalent to the worth of the human being. If one cannot pay the price for the whole world, he argues, how can one

149 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 2–3 (PG 44, 132–133); 16 (PG 44, 177). Similar terminology is used throughout the work; cf. cap. 20 (PG 44, 201).

150 See Brill’s *Lexicon Gregorianum Online*, accessed 1.01.2022, <https://referenceworks-brillonline-1com-18ylw9x8x0017.hps.bj.uj.edu.pl/browse/lexicon-gregorianum-online>.

151 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 4 (PG 44, 136).

152 J.T. Fitzgerald, *The Stoics and the Early Christians on the Treatment of Slaves*, in: T. Rasimus / T. Engberg-Pedersen / I. Dunderberg (eds.), *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, Peabody 2010, Kindle location: 3458–3496.

153 Gr. Nyss., in Ecc. hom. 4 (GNO 5, 334–337).



pay the price (τιμὴ) for something that is worth more than the entire world?<sup>154</sup> Can anyone estimate the price for the whole world? Can one find the price for all the things in it? If these things are invaluable (ταῦτα ἀτίμητα), how can anyone pay the price for the human being, who is worth more than they are?<sup>155</sup> Finally, Gregory addresses the slave “owner”, who wrongly believes he possesses another human being, and sighs over such a man: “Oh, what stupidity!” (ὦ τῆς ἀνοίας!).<sup>156</sup> Whoever believes they have gained dominion over another human being is deceiving themselves. The human creature they think they own is of the same flesh and same nature as they are—and there is nothing in human nature to show that any of them is in any way subordinate to another. If nothing in them justifies the view that some are slaves, the “owner” must be relying in his view on a piece of papyrus that concludes the purchase, thus proving he is incapable of using reason in analyzing reality. Gregory, fully unaware of the fact that racist theories discussing physiological differences between slaves and lords were yet to be formulated in the Western culture, contradicts the existence of any natural evidence of subordination of one human being to another. By doing so, he dismisses the Aristotelian description of the natural slave, who was said not to possess reason, being only able to detect it in others.<sup>157</sup>

Gregory’s remarks rest on the premise worked out earlier by Basil: human pricelessness whose value was to be matched only by God’s divine person. Even though Basil’s preserved texts offer a more laconic criticism of the practice of the public selling and enslaving of people,<sup>158</sup> they do spell out the presumptions upon which Gregory’s conclusion rests. Following again in his older brother’s footsteps, Gregory elucidates the conceptual link between paying a ransom for the human beings and their inherent value which supersedes the whole world. Gregory’s vocabulary is not consistent enough to operate with a fixed category of human dignity; nevertheless, he certainly grasped the idea of humans’ intrinsic and equal value, inclusive of its implications to the social phenomenon of slavery. We shall encounter ancient theoreticians who used the category of human dignity much more systematically—such as Augustine of Hippo—yet remained blind to the important link between human dignity and slavery. The formulation of the mercantile understanding of human value (which is described in terms of a price to be paid, as indicated by Psalm 48

154 Gr. Nyss., in Ecc. hom. 4 (GNO 5, 335).

155 Gr. Nyss., in Ecc. hom. 4 (GNO 5, 337).

156 Gr. Nyss., in Ecc. hom. 4 (GNO 5, 337).

157 Arist., pol. 1.13,1254b16–21.

158 Cf. Harper, 2011, 410–411.

and developed by Basil) facilitated the observation of the fundamental injustice of estimating human worth in finite terms. This is why Gregory mocks the ancient practice by asking how many obols one can pay for the icon of God.

This achievement of the Cappadocian brothers constitutes a milestone in the development of European culture, which in ages to come would categorize slavery as a crime against humanity. The two brothers led the path towards such principles by describing human value in terms of mercantile language, of a price to be paid, and an infinite one at that. Ridiculing the mere notion of people being purchased by other, equal people of the same human nature, Gregory opened the later European *forma mentis* to the humanist presumption of equal, universal, intrinsic, and priceless human dignity.

#### 2.4 Gregory of Nazianzus

Basil's friend from Athens, Gregory of Nazianzus—another son of fourth-century Cappadocia, known in the East as “the Theologian” (a linguistic practice that still exists in the Orthodox Church)—has also made his own contributions to the history of human dignity. Firstly, who was he?

Having studied in Caesarea and Constantinople before reaching a scientific center in Athens, Gregory developed skills in classical Greek theology, philosophy and rhetoric, which he put to use in his poetic theological and philosophical speeches. Apart from contributing alongside Basil and Athanasius to Trinitarian debates, and thus the history of doctrine, Gregory wrote a text that remains significant for the history of liturgy.<sup>159</sup> One of his orations, fashioned in a beautiful, paradoxical style, happens to be one of the first preserved Christmas sermons spoken in the Church (preceded only by a sermon by St. Optatus, Bishop of Milevis). The celebration of Christmas developed as a practice of a separate liturgy synchronously in the West (where it was first celebrated on 25 December) and in the East (where it was first celebrated on 6 January) around fifty years before Gregory gave his speech.<sup>160</sup>

159 J. Gribomont, *Gregorio di Nazianzo*, in: A. Di Berardino (ed.), *Nuovo dizionario F-O*, Genova 2007, 2461–2466; Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers*, 75–80; B.E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 117; Starowieyski, *Grzegorz z Nazjanzu*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 409–416.

160 S. Heid, *Natale*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 2006, 3423–3424; M. Pratesi, *Introduzione*, in: E. Montanari / M. Naldini / M. Pratesi (eds.), Leone Magno, *I sermoni del ciclo natalizio*, Florence 1998, 11; J. Naumowicz, *Narodziny Bożego Narodzenia*, Cracow 2016, 68–69.124–129; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Mowy wybrane* (collective trans.), 1967, 415.548–549.

Gregory's long and metaphorical speeches thematize human dignity in three significant contexts: firstly, that of an icon of God, which, as I will argue, is ingrained in and transformed by the context of redemption and final judgement; secondly, although often in conjunction with another context, that of a microcosm and, thirdly, but also in conjunction with the other two, that of Christmas. I will present them in the listed order, ultimately drawing conclusions regarding Gregory's approach.

#### 2.4.1 *Dignity of the Icon during the Final Judgement*

In Gregory's writings, human iconicity is a concept ingrained in the larger context of various anthropological distinctions. When referring to human creation, Gregory continued the ancient tradition of calling the human being a microcosm, i.e., a being which combines within itself two opposing elements: the spiritual and the material. According to Gregory, only the spiritual dimension is a carrier of human iconicity of God. In order to explain the entire structure of the microcosm, consisting of both, let us start with the first building block, *imago Dei*.

Surprisingly, yet characteristically for the Christian message, the theme of the image of God and the dignity connected to it is most often developed by Gregory of Nazianzus not in the context of their creation, but in their being in need of preservation, particularly for the Last Judgement. In *oratio 16*, the Cappadocian thinker draws the listener's attention to the Last Judgement, during which the "dignity of an image of God" (τῆς εἰκόνοσ ἀξίωμα; in Latin translation *dignitas imaginis*)<sup>161</sup> will be demanded of them.<sup>162</sup> Images darkened and blurred by sin, as he writes, will themselves condemn their own state, and be delivered for eternal punishment. The expression "the dignity of an icon" is repeated by Gregory a number of times, sometimes contrasted with the "the form of the snake" (μορφή τοῦ ὄφεωσ), symbolizing the blurred and darkened icons.<sup>163</sup> This *memento mori* is not addressed only to Gregory's listeners, however.

In *oratio 33*, spoken in his own defense in response to Arians, Gregory applies the understanding of the dignity of an icon as a subject of the Last Judgement to his own situation.<sup>164</sup> The speech discusses Gregory's own responsibility before God for the state of his individual dignity and the iconicity entrusted

161 Gr. Naz., or. 16 in patr. tac. 8 (PG 35, 945 [50]).

162 Gr. Naz., or. 16 in patr. tac. 8.

163 Gr. Naz., or. 16 in patr. tac. 8; 15 (where he calls the dignity of the image "first dignity"); id., or. 19 ad J. 13; or. 33 contr. Ar. 12.

164 Gr. Naz., or. 33 contr. Ar. 12.

to him. Since everyone is given noble dignity which can be preserved through virtuous life and faithfulness to the archetype of the icon, the same is true for Gregory.<sup>165</sup> Just like everyone else, he will answer to God for the state of the icon entrusted to him and will be judged on this basis. This theme introduces unanticipated connotations between dignity and the final judgement of the human soul. It is also, manifestly, one possible stance in the debate over eternal judgment, and its subject. For Gregory, it is the value of human resemblance to God that is subjected to God's judgement. This remark is critical, insofar as it reveals how crucial human iconicity and dignity are, yet not merely as relevant to human creation. *Imago Dei* is seen as dynamic, and Gregory focuses on the outcome of the dynamic process of shaping oneself according to the image of God. It can be argued, therefore, that where dignity is concerned, although the notion of an icon is used, what is crucial for Gregory is how the dignity of the icon is reshaped, repainted and preserved.

"The Theologian" also uses the notion of an icon in more concrete, earthly contexts. In his well-known speech *De pauperum amore*, Gregory argues that the image of God which is present in the humble and pious poor, who are rejected and humiliated, is greater than in those who refrain from helping them.<sup>166</sup> Whoever blemishes their iconicity by sin and takes on an opposing image, the form of the snake (μορφή τοῦ ὄφραως), loses their nobility, argues Gregory.<sup>167</sup> This, once again, introduces the idea of the Last Judgement. It also shows how volatile dignity is: it can be altered by the most mundane choices such as passing by a fellow man in need.

It is interesting that Gregory mentions not only the fluctuating state of dignity alterable by actions, but also the fact that dignity of iconicity will reach a fixed state of eternal sameness after the final judgement. The dignity of an icon will be everlasting in the Kingdom of God, as Gregory writes.<sup>168</sup> This adds new significance to what happens before death. It implies that iconicity can change during human life, in the so-called *status viae*, the pilgrim's state. The factor that alters dignity is moral or immoral human choice. Gregory also names a criterion for reversing the negative alterations: Christian baptism, and thus cooperation with grace.<sup>169</sup> Although alterable, dignity is designed to reach a static, lasting form in the end, after death, in eternal life. This is a good example of how fixed the early Christians were on the eternal perspective, and

165 Gr. Naz., or. 33 contr. Ar. 12.

166 Gr. Naz., or. 14 de paup. am. 14.

167 Gr. Naz., or. 33 contr. Ar. 12 (PG 36, 229). Cf. id., or. 40.22.

168 Gr. Naz., or. 19 ad J. 5.

169 Gr. Naz., or. 16.5.

specifically, how they perceived every event through its consequences for the eschatological state. It also serves to illustrate that the notion of an image was perceived by them through the need of its restoration and preservation, not merely creation.

The emphasis on the development of an icon is visible in Gregory's approach to contemplating the *imago Dei* present in a human being. It is exalting or glorifying to be an icon of God, yet Gregory is more concerned with the effects of such an observation. If one focuses solely on this "spark of divinity," as the Stoics would put it, one might fall into pride or vanity. The Cappadocian Father thus advises that people always remember that being an icon is merely one element of the human structure, complemented with a body that is characterized by fragility and temporality. This binding of the two opposing elements, one exalting and one humbling, introduces the microcosmic context that we will now turn to.

#### 2.4.2 *Dignity of the Microcosm Binding the Earthly and the Divine*

Employing a poetic style, the Cappadocian Father introduces repetitive descriptions of various opposing characteristics, all leading up to describing humans as a mixture or a hybrid—a microcosm.

Gregory of Nazianzus proposed his own understanding of microcosm, and of opposing elements united in a microcosm, one of them being—as previously mentioned—an image of God ingrained in the soul opposed by the body made out of clay. These two opposing features are accompanied by a rich list of others, such as earthly and celestial, or belonging to light and belonging to darkness. In each case, only one characteristic is glorifying, the other demeaning. As discussed in the context of *imago Dei*, Gregory advised people to be aware of both, for remembering the negative characteristic prevents pride. Let us quote one sample of Gregory's poetic style of writing that employs the notion of human dignity, and that of microcosm:

[...] we, who are the portion of God and have our source in heaven above, should always look to Him as we wrestle and fight against the flesh and that the weakness to which we are harnessed serves to impress upon us our true worth (ἀξία), least we disdain our Creator out of pride and in inflated sense of our importance? That we may know that we are at once most exalted and most humbled, earthly and celestial, ephemeral and immortal, heirs of light and fire—or of darkness—depending on which we turn? Such is our hybrid nature (κρᾶμα—literally, a mixture)<sup>170</sup>, which, in my view at least, takes a form so that whenever

<sup>170</sup> Gr. Naz., or. 14 de paup. am. 7 (PG 35, 865 [59]). I stress a more precise meaning of κρᾶμα than an English translator because Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermo 2 in Nativitate Domini expounds Gregory's understanding of the three mixtures.

we feel exalted because of our likeness to God's image, we may be brought down because of our clay.<sup>171</sup>

This remark (which has the power to sober one of false vanity because the human mixture is ultimately a combination of the image and the clay) is a good example of the Greek approach to human value as opposing any notion of literally understood deification. The human being is exalted by being made in God's image, and Gregory will, therefore, insist on human exceptional value; yet the human being is at the same time merely a material creature: earthly, of flesh, ephemeral, connected to darkness. Gregory's insistence on maintaining the right balance between contemplating human divinity and earthliness are good examples of the Greek Father contradicting any literal understanding of the exchange formula we spoke of before.

Gregory of Nazianzus repeated Athanasius's line concerning God's incarnation and human deification, implementing a *tantum—quantum* ("inasmuch as ...") structure: "He became a man, God on earth, [...] so that I could be God inasmuch as He is a man."<sup>172</sup> Gregory did so following Basil, whose version of the exchange formula is passed on to us by Gregory.<sup>173</sup> This version of the formula must be read in the context of Gregory's remarks on human hybrid nature, exalted and humbled at the same time, for the deification formula was not used by the Cappadocians in a literal sense.

The previously introduced theme of a microcosm is developed further in the most famous of Gregory's speeches, *oratio* 38, spoken on the occasion of Theophany, to which we will now turn.

### 2.4.3 *Dignity Manifested during Christmas*

Let us start with a few words concerning the history of the speech itself. On December 25th, 380, in Constantinople, Gregory of Nazianzus delivered the first of a trilogy of speeches dedicated to the birth of Christ, to God's manifestation, and to Jesus' baptism, respectively. Some liturgists question the exact dating of the speeches, suggesting they may instead have been all given in January 381 during the preparatory service that concluded what is today celebrated as Epiphany, the Three Kings visiting the new-born Messiah, on the 6th of January.<sup>174</sup>

171 Gr. Naz., or. 14 de paup. am. 7 (PG 35, 865 [59]), in: St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Selected orations* (M. Vinson trans.), Washington 2003, 43–44.

172 Gr. Naz., or. 29.19.

173 Gr. Naz., or. 43 in laud. B. 48.

174 J.A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography*, Crestwood 2001, 336–337; B.E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 117.

Other historians have suggested that each speech was delivered on one of these holidays, each corresponding to the topic of a particular oration.<sup>175</sup> There were good arguments behind this hypothesis. The most common title of the sermon occurring in the earliest manuscripts is *In Theophania*, and in fewer manuscript sources, although still many, the speech is titled *In nativitate Domini*. In antiquity, the terms “epiphany” (meaning manifestation or appearance) and “theophany” (meaning God’s manifestation or appearance) have been used in respect of the birth of Christ (God’s arrival in this world), Christ’s baptism (the appearance of the Savior among the wider public) and the visit of the Kings (the presentation of the infant God to the first visitors). The expression was applied to Christmas day as early as the fourth century.

Regardless of the ambiguity concerning its specific date of delivery, however, the speech addresses the topic of Christ’s birth, and is one of the first to do so in preserved Christian writings. The topic is discussed as part of the history of humanity’s fall and redemption. Gregory’s speech analyzes the birth of the Savior as one episode in the history of humanity. What is this history?

It is a story of God creating a human being in His image and likeness; thus, free but not fully mature—as in Irenaeus’s view.<sup>176</sup> Since Adam and Eve were immature, they were not capable of knowing good and evil, which is why they were forbidden to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Because they were free, they could obey or disobey the law. The Snake cleverly used the human weakness of immaturity and tempted the women to disobey God’s laws, which led to human mortality. Gregory presents death as a mercy, for it is the limit of human sinning, but not the limit of human life. Nevertheless, thus wounded in their development, humans require healing, and God sends it in the form of His Son taking on human nature. This gives Gregory the opportunity to discuss the nature of humankind.<sup>177</sup>

A human being’s creation is described as a merging of various opposing realities: visible and invisible, matter and an image of God, body and the rational soul, some second world (δεύτερος κόσμος) or a small world (μικρὸς κόσμος)<sup>178</sup> and the big world, the earthly and the celestial, temporal and eternal, a complex worshiper seeing the visible and at the same time grasping the spiritual, made to be the king or to rule (βασιλεύω) the world and to remain a subject to heaven.<sup>179</sup>

175 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Mowy wybrane* (collective trans.), 1967, 415.

176 Iren., haer. 4:38.

177 Gr. Naz. or. 38 in Theo. 11–13.

178 Gregory of Nazianzus (PG 36, 324 [27]).

179 Gr. Naz., or. 38 in Theo. 11. Cf. id., or. 14 de paup. am. 7.

As in the speech quoted earlier, Gregory discusses human iconicity and microcosmic nature in conjunction. The human being is a mixture, and thus a microcosm, consisting of the image and the matter, the soul and the body. Such merging is taken on by the Son of God as His own nature so that it can be cleansed and renewed in Him. This results in yet another set of paradoxes present in the incarnated God.

“Oh what a new mixture (μίξις)!—Gregory cries out—What paradoxical combination! (παράδοξος κράσις).”<sup>180</sup> He lists the new set of paradoxes: the Creator becomes created; the One who Is starts to be; the ungraspable is graspable; the Giver is a beggar; the fullness is lacking; the one with all the glory lacks glory; so that I could—the Cappadocian concludes, following in Athanasius’s footsteps—partake in divinity. I was made in the image of the divine, Gregory continues, listing the opposing realities, now He is made in the image of the flesh; I was made to resemble what is better, He is made to resemble what is worse, Gregory goes on. This, he concludes, is the second mixture, one even more bewildering, a fullness of goodness and a mystery.<sup>181</sup>

And this is human nature incorporated by God, according to the Greek philosopher. Gregory poetically draws the image of mixing the opposing elements, describing human nature with increasing complexity as a mixture and God’s incarnation as a greater mixture. Describing human microcosmic nature as a combination of the spiritual and material leads to a spelling out of the oxymoron of the infinite God becoming finite in a creature, a theme still popular in Christmas carols describing God’s birth.<sup>182</sup> Gregory presents the symmetric logic of redemption: the image of God is saved through God becoming an image of flesh. Similarly to Athanasius and Basil, Gregory’s speech is therefore apologetic, insofar as it reveals some rational standing behind incarnation and redemption. Given the education that Basil and Gregory received in Athens, it is not surprising that they both enrich theology through a properly philosophical argument, revealing a logic behind the theological claims. Gregory, moreover, eloquent in his arguments, stands out as the poet among the Cappadocians.

180 Ibidem (PG 36, 325 [43]). I stress terminology because Bernard’s of Clairvaux’s *commixtiones* from *Sermo 2 in Nativitate Domini* follow in Gregory’s footsteps: the Cistercian discusses *triplex commixtio*: that of human first creation (*prima creatio*), incarnation (*nova commixtura*, *secunda coniunctio*, and *thesaurus absconditus*), and final glory about which no eye has seen and no ear has heard (1 Cor 2:9).

181 Gr. Naz., or. 38 in Theo. 13.

182 F. Karpiński, *Pieśń o Narodzeniu Pańskim* [*God is Born*], in: id., *Pieśni nabożne* [*Songs of Piety*], Supraśl 1792.



#### 2.4.4 *Dignity in Gregory's Approach*

As shown, the bishop of Nazianzus discussed human dignity primarily in the context of *imago Dei* (τῆς εἰκόνοσ ἀξίωμα), though his use of the notion appears in the context of redemption and final judgement, as well as in conjunction with God's incarnation, seen as God taking on *imago hominis*. This serves to show that early Christians, unlike Jewish philosophers, perceived the notion of *imago* as transformed by the specifically Christian message concerning the incarnation. Gregory is a good example of an early Greek who thematized human iconicity as relevant to salvation.

He is on one hand original in his doctrine (emphasizing human iconicity as a subject of final judgement, describing the mixing of elements in a human being, concentrated in a paradoxical human God), and on the other, compatible with other Greek Fathers (identifying an image of God in the rational soul and making sense of the logic of redemption). The bishop of Nazianzus is perplexed by both human creation in the image of God and God's creation in the image of a human being, one serving as a foundation for human dignity, the other as its salvation, since the image of God is saved through God becoming an image of flesh. Dignity is clearly seen as dynamic, for there is a story about its loss and reacquisition. Gregory discusses dignity as common to all, bestowed on all of humanity in the act of creation, a point best revealed in the context of the love of the poor, and specifically lepers. Through creation, God's image is present in them, just as in all other people, and due to their virtue—specifically piety—even more fully than in those who do not keep to the obligations that iconicity demands of them.<sup>183</sup> The ethical aspect of dignity is thus accentuated in Gregory's approach, yet the fundamental ontological dimension of dignity shaped during creation is universally shared by all.

Finally, in the context of human value, Gregory of Nazianzus uses not only the notion of an image of God or the topic of human nature incarnated by God, but also the ancient theme of a microcosm. For Gregory, human microcosmic nature highlights both human dignity and indignity. As we have seen, in *De officio hominis* Gregory of Nyssa stressed that the notion of microcosm is not dignifying at all, for it points to human corporality only.<sup>184</sup> It is possible that the youngest of the Cappadocians, Gregory of Nyssa, was inspired by the writings of his brother's friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, who, however, was not as radical, and understood the concept of microcosm to point out both human indignity and dignity.

183 Gr. Naz., or. 14 de paup. am. 14.

184 Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 16.

## 2.5 Theophilus of Antioch's Expression in the Cappadocian School

Having summarized the Cappadocian's approach to human dignity, it is good to say a few words about the inspirations of their phraseology, specifically one designating the ἀξίωμα of the human being, even though our focus here is primarily on the Golden Age. The first author to use the phrase in a universal sense was Theophilus of Antioch.<sup>185</sup> This second-century bishop, of whose life we know very little and whose only complete surviving text is *Ad Autolyicum*, was born into a pagan family living on the Euphrates, received extensive Hellenistic education, converted at a mature age after a long study of the Scripture, and became the bishop of Antioch. Sometime after the year 180, he wrote a polemical work against his pagan friend, Autolycus, in which he explained the rational of faith in the invisible God, the meaning of a Christian's name, the ancient wisdom of the prophets in relation to the pagan mythologies, and the lack of merits in the accusations of immorality leveled against Christians.<sup>186</sup> Interestingly, Theophilus is the first Greek Christian writer to relate the concept of τριάς to the Holy Trinity<sup>187</sup> and is also the first to use the concept of human dignity, ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, in a universal and egalitarian sense. Let us explore the latter.

In *Ad Autolyicum*, Theophilus states that the making of the human being cannot be comprehended by a human creature, yet can be known to them from the divine scripture, Γραφή, which at the time meant primarily the Old Testament. Thus, he comments on human creation in the image and likeness of God in Genesis 1:26, arguing that the human being is the only creature made directly by God, not through a commanding word.<sup>188</sup> This argument, pointing to the direct creation of a human being by God's hands—later used by Augustine of Hippo in his defense of direct triune iconicity—demonstrates, according to Theophilus, precisely human worth, ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.<sup>189</sup> Theophilus supports this conclusion with another exegetic argument, one pointing out the plural form used in Genesis 1:26 by God: “Let us make humankind in our image

185 Volp, 2006, 128–129.

186 P. Nautin, *Teofilo di Antiochia*, in: A. Di Berardino (ed.), *Nuovo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane P–Z*, Genova 2008, 5279–5280; M. Starowieyski, *Teofil z Antiochii*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 944–945; B. Altaner / A. Stuiber, *Patrologie: Leben, Schriften und Lehre der Kirchenväter*, Freiburg 1978, 75–77.556; J. Quasten, *Theophilus of Antioch* in: id., 2013, 236–242.

187 Starowieyski, 2022, 945.

188 Theoph., ad Aut. 2.18 (OECT 1970, 56).

189 Theoph., ad Aut. 2.18 (OECT 1970, 56).

[...]”<sup>190</sup> The plural form reveals the divine council between God, λόγος, and σοφία, which took place only during the creation of humankind, not that of any other creature or part of the cosmos.<sup>191</sup> He also adheres to human dominion over the created world, the role of which is to serve humankind.

The reasoning in which the idea of human worth is mentioned is simple: its premise is the biblical description of human creation, according to Genesis 1:26 and 1:27, and its conclusion is the axiological status of a human creature, called worthiness, ἀξίωμα. Despite its laconic character, the passage marks a threshold in the ancient anthropological discourse, one that clearly influenced the Cappadocians.<sup>192</sup> This might suggest that the earliest Christian idea of human dignity centered on human creation; however, in *Ad Autolyicum*, Theophilus indicated that human worth was revealed during creation only “for the first time.” The Cappadocians, who followed Theophilus’s language and ideas, expounded them in the light of the premises derived from their reflection on the second creation, i.e., incarnation and redemption.

## 2.6 Nemesius of Emesa

In the last decade of the fourth century, a unique ode to human dignity was written in the Greek-speaking eastern Christian world. Its author was Nemesius, bishop of Emesa, even though medieval masters such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas often wrongly identified Gregory of Nyssa as the author of the work in question. This confusion resulted from a copyist’s mistake when the work was translated into Latin for the first time in the eleventh century, possibly because of the similarity between the names *Nyssenus* and *Nemesius*.<sup>193</sup> Little is known about the author himself, despite the fact that he was a convert to Christianity and wrote for a varied audience, not just Christians, implementing the philosophical method. Nemesius’s only preserved work, *De natura hominis*, opens with what the author himself claims could well be called ἐγκώμιον ἀνθρώπου, an encomium of the human being. This genre, encomium, was popular in classical and Christian antiquity, most often implemented as praise of individuals or their actions; e.g., Gorgias wrote an encomium of Helen of Troy, and Gregory of Nyssa wrote an encomium of his brother, Basil, among a

190 NRSV-CE trans.

191 NRSV-CE trans.

192 Volp, 2006, 129.

193 S. Swieżawski, *Nemezjusz z Emezy*, in: id., *Dzieje europejskiej filozofii klasycznej*, Warszawa 2000, 323.

few others. Nemesius's idea of opening the anthropological treatise with praise of something as abstract as the human being is thus all the more significant, although some suggest that it was Paul the Apostle who initiated the idea by writing an encomium of love in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. Moreover, Nemesius's work comprises one of the earliest Christian anthropologies written as a separate philosophical investigation. Despite the fact that the work presents a number of Christian views, it is not theological in its method.<sup>194</sup>

Whereas Gregory of Nyssa tackled human axiology alongside a description of human nature, as the two were inseparable from one another, Nemesius begins with praise of the human being. This ode serves as a gateway to the descriptive anthropological investigation. Many ideas of the investigation are taken from past thinkers, and the treatise is often described as syncretic. Indeed, it references views as varied as those of Plato, Aristotle, Posidonius, Hippocrates, Philo of Alexandria, Galen, Origen, Plotinus, Apollinarius, and Eunomius—to name only the most prominent figures. Thanks to this syncretic character, we can today reconstruct some of the heterodox ideas, such as those of Apollinarius or Eunomius.

There are three interconnected strands that lead Nemesius in Book One to the conclusion that he is in fact writing in praise of human nature. One of them relates to human microcosm, one to anthropocentric finalism, and one to human distinctiveness from other beings—a standpoint philosophers today call “the personalist distinction.” Let us investigate them one by one.

### 2.6.1 *Physical Majesty (εὐπρέπεια) of the Microcosm*

The notion of microcosm (μικρὸς κόσμος)<sup>195</sup> is explicated by Nemesius in the following four ways. First, Nemesius proclaims that human nature is “like being on a border” (ὡσπερ ἐν μεθορίῳ ἐστὶ) between various kinds of beings: it shares reason and virtue with spiritual beings; biological life, reproduction, feelings, and movement with animals; growth and nourishment with plants; and four elements (water, earth, fire, and air) and a body with material beings.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, Nemesius calls the human being a bond (σύνδεσμος) of

194 Starowieyski, 2000, 737; Swieżawski, 2000, 323–329; S. Lilla, *Nemesio di Emesa*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 2008, 3440–3441; A. Kempfi, *Słowo wstępne*, in: *Nemezjusz z Emezy, O stworzeniu człowieka* (A. Kempfi trans.), Warsaw 1982, 5–15; D.L. Dusenbury, *Prologue: Cosmopolitan Anthropology of Late Antiquity*, in: id., *Nemesius of Emesa on Human Nature: A Cosmopolitan Anthropology from Roman Syria*, Oxford 2021, xv–xxiv; R.W. Sharples / P.J. van der Eijk, *Introduction*, in: id., *On Human Nature* (R.W. Sharples / P.J. van der Eijk trans.), Liverpool 2008, 1–34; J. Quasten, *Nemesius of Emesa*, in: id., 1991, 218–246.

195 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 15).

196 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 2).

various kinds of beings.<sup>197</sup> As such, the human being is the only creature in the world to unite within themselves the otherwise unrelated realms of being. Before the human being was made, the material and spiritual worlds remained unrelated. Once the human being was created, these beings became related through one common relative. Hence, all beings have common kinship and are of one origin (συγγενής), and the world becomes all the more harmonious and beautiful.<sup>198</sup> This completion of the world by way of a common relative demonstrates, according to Nemesius, two points: first, that human beings occupy a special, central role in the world which they complete and finalize, and second, that the world was created by one Designer, for the harmony just described could not result from various designers working independently.<sup>199</sup>

Nemesius's alternative way of explicating humans' microcosmic character is by stating that the human being remains at the crossroads of not four but two kinds of beings: the things which can be experienced through our senses, and the intelligible objects.<sup>200</sup> Additionally, the twofold distinction is explicated by the fourth-century writer in terms of remaining at the crossroads of the beings which have reason and the non-reasonable ones (in yet another formulation: the rational and the sensible worlds), or of the immortal and mortal beings.<sup>201</sup> Whether the more detailed fourfold or the simplified twofold distinction between various beings is applied, the human being in Nemesius's treatise is one to remain on the border of these various categories, hence being a small world (μικρὸς κόσμος).

Nemesius goes on to discuss human kinship with various kinds of beings, and his discussion of the human body leads up to naming the dignity, majesty, or comeliness (εὐπρέπεια) of human physical composition.<sup>202</sup> This majesty is illustrated by humans' delicate and precise hand motor skills as well as their soft skin, incomparable to the fur of animals, the scales of fish or lobsters, etc. These kinds of arguments, drawing on the description of the human being as a microcosm, justify humans' special status. It is worth noting that in this context εὐπρέπεια signifies the excellence of human physical composition, not an axiological status of the human being in general, even though, later in the treatise, Nemesius uses the term in a non-physical abstract meaning.

197 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 5).

198 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 3).

199 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 3).

200 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 2).

201 Nemes., nat. hom. 1; BSGR, 2–3 (what is known through the senses and the intelligible), 5 (sensible and rational), 6 (mortal and immortal), and 15 (mortal and immortal).

202 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 5; compare linea 3, 15).

### 2.6.2 *Uniquely Human Prerogatives*

The second theme justifying humans' privileged position results from a sharp personalist distinction, which is a categorical difference between the human and any other kind of being. What distinguishes the human being from the rest of the world is twofold, according to Nemesius. Firstly, there is the already discussed point of humans' central positioning in the created world. Secondly, Nemesius observes that to feel remorse and thus receive forgiveness is a uniquely human capacity, for neither animals nor angels can regret anything. Additionally, another distinctively human prerogative is that the human body, one of special dignity, will become immortal. No other piece of matter can enjoy such privilege, and all other immortal beings are non-material. This distinction of the human body results from the fact that it is connected to the human soul, which possesses special excellence and attributes: reason and virtue. The practice of science and mastering various arts is yet another specifically human capacity that Nemesius points out. This, he claims, distinguishes people even from creatures like nymphs or demons, who—according to some—possess knowledge. Their knowledge does not result from learning, as in the human case, but from nature. Humans are uniquely characterized by their capacity to learn: they actualize knowledge and skill through a process. All of these add up to a demonstration of how uniquely gifted the human being is.<sup>203</sup>

### 2.6.3 *Anthropocentric Finalism as a Justification of Human Dignity* (εὐγένεια)

The third dignifying theme of the opening book of Nemesius's treatise is a view already discussed: anthropocentric finalism. Nemesius recalls the Jewish opinion, known to him from Philo of Alexandria and describing how the entire world is made for the sake of the human being only. Firstly, the bishop of Emesa stresses that all non-rational beings exist for the sake of something else, and only rational beings exist for their own sake. The question can therefore be posed: who was the world created for? It could not have been created for the sake of angels, as they need no matter; thus, it follows, it was made to provide human beings with food, shelter, and all of nature to be ruled by them. Nemesius, nonetheless, warns his readers against mistreating animals, for whoever does so behaves neither like the Lord nor like a human being. This animal-friendly stance was not unusual among the Church Fathers, who conceived of

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<sup>203</sup> Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 9–11).

the natural world as wounded by humans' original sin. Nemesius's treatise is a good example of an early humanist approach to nature.<sup>204</sup>

To accentuate human predominance, Nemesius stresses that the arrival of the human being in the world was prepared for by God, who made intermediate steps by gradually developing beings of increasing similarity to the human being, while preserving unique prerogatives for the last creature.<sup>205</sup> In the face of quite a number of glorifying factors of human nature, Nemesius asks rhetorically: what can one do but wonder (τίς οὖν θαυμάσειε) at the dignity (τὴν εὐγένειαν) of this special human creature?<sup>206</sup> These creature reflect everything in themselves, as if in a mirror (ὡς ἐν εἰκόνι): they rule the non-rational creatures as well as demons, exercise arts and sciences, foretell the future, and interact with angels and God Himself.<sup>207</sup> Using Plato's expression, Nemesius hence calls the human being "a plant rooted in the heavens" (φυτὸν οὐράνιον) and warns his readers against living beneath the honor granted to them.<sup>208</sup> They are all well born, originating from God, and this dignity (εὐγένεια) obliges them to behave well.<sup>209</sup> As they were given a lot, humans ought to guard the goods bestowed upon them and aspire to noble aims. The moralistic tone of this remark corresponds with Basil the Great's plea to human beings to know their dignity and act accordingly.

Nemesius ends the first book of his treatise with a somewhat auto-ironic remark that, having said all that he did, he could well be accused of composing an encomium of human nature (ἐγκώμιον ἀνθρώπου γράφειν). While comprehending that this would compromise his investigation in the eyes of some readers, he concludes that he is correct to do so. This is because pointing out the wonderful prerogatives of human nature in an ode equals describing human nature. The ancient author thus proclaims humans' special axiological status to be a state of fact worthy of scholarly consideration. This is why he placed this consideration in the opening chapter of his anthropological work.

Nemesius's praise harmoniously proceeds from observing humans' unique microcosmic role, to highlighting specifically human prerogatives and human distinction, to anthropocentric finalism. As such, the ancient masterpiece remains well-structured and deliberated to a point unrivaled by any other—

204 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 11–12).

205 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 3–4).

206 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 15).

207 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 13).

208 Pl., Ti. 90a.

209 Nemes., nat. hom. 1 (BSGR, 15). Nemesius's English translation published in the third volume of the Library of Christian Classics (W. Telfer [ed.], *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, Philadelphia 2006) also translates εὐγένεια as "dignity." See Quasten, 1991, 352.

whether Greek, Oriental, or Latin—anthropological-axiological description of human nature written in late antiquity.

## 2.7 John Chrysostom

Finally, we turn to John Chrysostom, born two generations after Athanasius and Basil, around the year 347. Although younger than Athanasius by two generations, and younger than Basil and Gregory by almost one, he is included among the Four Great Greek Doctors of the Church as well as being one of the three Holy Hierarchs of the Orthodox Church. He was never nicknamed “the Great,” however. Instead, the adjective “Chrysostom”—literally, “Golden-mouthed”—was coined for him, for he was praised and known for his eloquence and outstanding style of speaking. This style manifested itself in the anaphora constituting a part of the liturgy named after Chrysostom, which—together with the Liturgy of St. Basil and the Divine Office of the Presanctified Gifts—came into regular use in the Orthodox Church, where it is still used today.<sup>210</sup> The role he played in reforming liturgy secured his authority in the Byzantine culture for good.<sup>211</sup>

In our collection of Greek Christian voices on human dignity, Chrysostom’s style is an example of cultural continuity with both classical Greek philosophy, at least in one respect, and with the already-discussed patristic account of human axiology.

### 2.7.1 *Conceptual and Terminological Continuity with the Greek Fathers*

Chrysostom’s orations, including his famous *De statuis*, refer to the axiological aspect of the human being as ἀξίωμα. This terminological choice, initiated by Theophilus of Antioch in his expression ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, later exemplified in Basil’s appeal to know σεαυτοῦ ἡ ἀξία, τοῦ ἀξιώματος ἔννοια, and σεαυτοῦ τὸ ἀξίωμα, and later still carried on by Gregory of Nazianzus in his notion of τῆς εἰκόνης ἀξίωμα, finds its continuity in Chrysostom’s writings. In some orations, Chrysostom discusses simply a dignity which the human being has (ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀξίωμα ἔχει), and in *De statuis* he often relates ἀξίωμα to the city of Antioch, the people of which he addresses, as well as to the human soul.

<sup>210</sup> *The Orthodox Liturgy*, Oxford 1982.

<sup>211</sup> A.-M. Malingrey / S. Zincone, *Giovanni Crisostomo*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 2007, 2216–2224; Benedict XVI, 2009, 88–97; Muszala / Woźniak, 2019, 156–163; H. Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great*, Oxford 2001, 479–498.



In particular, Chrysostom contrasts the merit of the dignity of the soul (visible, for example, in its virtue) with the illusionary dignity of the earthly city, which extends to the unvirtuous and the morally deprived. He thus appeals to the people of Antioch to concentrate on the real values, such as virtue, and not to grieve over the illusionary worth of the earthly metropolis. A reasonable person should rather grieve over the damage done to the dignity of human soul (τῆς ψυχῆς ἀξίωμα), through sin for example,<sup>212</sup> because the merit of a person ought to be measured by the state of their soul, not in terms of their belonging to a rich and majestic city or of their external appearance.<sup>213</sup>

Let us observe three points regarding this appeal. First, the distinction between earthly glory and the eternal merit identified in the soul demonstrates the classification of moral perfection as an unchanging value worthy of protection and development. Second, the distinction pertains primarily to the moral dimension of human dignity, not to universal human worth. Third, the remark continues the practice of appealing to the people to know and develop their dignity.

### 2.7.2 *Reason as the Foundation of Human Dignity*

Let us move on to Chrysostom's continuity with classical Greek philosophy. All the thinkers of the Golden Age we have discussed were well-educated in classical Greek philosophy and rhetoric, and Chrysostom is no different. Let us point out one classical idea typical of ancient philosophy which Chrysostom discussed in an explicit axiological context.

Plato and Aristotle defined human beings primarily based on their reason, rather than by any other trait and, sadly, both excluded slaves from its possession. Plato's remarks are less systematic, yet at times clear when it comes to classifying slaves as lacking understanding.<sup>214</sup> Aristotle's account of natural slavery—a state, according to Aristotle, that differentiates natural slaves from human beings in much the same way as humans are differentiated from beasts and the soul is differentiated from the body—excludes slaves from being individuals in possession of reason.<sup>215</sup> Plato's and Aristotle's celebration of reason

212 Ioh. Chrysost., de st. 17.13.

213 Ioh. Chrysost., de st. 17.14.

214 Pl., lg. 720–966b; id., r. 433d. On the debate over the conclusive character of these remarks, cf. G. Vlastos, *Slavery in Plato's Thought*, in: PhRev 50 (1941), 289–304; J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford 1981, 171; B. Calvert, *Slavery in Plato's Republic*, in: CQ 37 (1987), 367–372.

215 Arist., pol. 1254b16–21. Commentators observe the inconsistency of Aristotle's account of slavery with respect to other claims of his anthropology; cf. D. Dobbs, *Natural Right and the Problem of Aristotle's Defense of Slavery*, in: The Journal of Politics 56 (1994), 69–94.

influenced later Hellenistic and Roman philosophers. Cleanthes, for example, a Greek Stoic philosopher and poet cited by Paul the Apostle in the Areopagus sermon (Acts 17:28), posited that human beings resemble Zeus due to their reasoning ability.<sup>216</sup> The ideas of ἀπόσπασμα or μέρος, a portion, part or spark of divinity in Stoicism, presupposing egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism, often also relied on the criterion of reason and provided some framework for comprehending the value of human beings. These ideas, however, often aligned with an elitist perspective on reason, virtue or social hierarchy, resulting in a selective approach to human worth.<sup>217</sup> In his last work, for instance, Cicero (who held the Aristotelian view of natural slavery and kept approximately two hundred slaves),<sup>218</sup> praised reason as that which demonstrates human predominance over the rest of the world, yet suggested that this *praestantia hominis* is selective, for not all humans deserve to be called human: *sunt enim quidam homines non re, sed nomine* (“For there are some people in name, not in fact.”)<sup>219</sup> Ancient Platonist philosophers also maintained that human esteem lies in reason, yet the universal approach to it was uncommon. The author of the Latin Asclepius, Pseudo-Apuleius, wrote: *Magnum miraculum est homo, animal adorandum et honorandum* (“The human being is a great miracle (*magnum miraculum*), the animal to be admired and honoured”)<sup>220</sup> and justified human marvelousness by way of reason. Due to reason, he argued, humans alone enjoy the gods’ esteem: *homines soli eorum [deorum] dignatione perfruntur*.<sup>221</sup> Pseudo-Apuleius, however, also did not see reason as a common or equal human trait; rather, he used it to distinguish the few (*paucissimi*) who have the ability to contemplate divine matters with their pure intellect (*pura mens*) from those who lack such reasoning and partake of physical creation instead.<sup>222</sup> Plotinus, in his praise of reason, was more inclusive, yet less so with regard to virtue, and his criticism of Gnosticism includes his belief that human value is inferior to that of the heavenly bodies.<sup>223</sup>

216 Cleanth. Stoic., hymn. D. 4–5 (STAC 33, 34–35).

217 Cf. J. Rist, *Divine Sparks*, in: id., *Human Value: A Study in Ancient Philosophical Ethics*, Leiden 1982, 71–83.

218 Cic., rep. 3.37 (OCD, 106–107). See calculations of Cicero’s slaves in M. Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, London 2015, 328–329.

219 Cic., off. 1.105 (LCL 30, 106). A debate on the Stoic approach to reason can be found in J.-B. Gourinat, *Apospasma: The World Soul and Its Individual Parts in Stoicism*, in: C. Helmig (ed.), *World Soul—Anima Mundi: On the Origins and Fortunes of a Fundamental Idea*, Boston 2020, 167–188.

220 (Ps.)Apul., Asc. 6 (CCCM 143, 179).

221 (Ps.)Apul., Asc. 7 (CCCM 143, 181).

222 (Ps.)Apul., Asc. 7 and 9; *paucissimi* and *pura mens* in 9 (CCCM 143, 184).

223 Plot., enn. 2.9.

In such reason-oriented approaches, therefore, humans' special axiological status most often coincided either with presumptions of social hierarchy in which slaves were considered "speaking tools" (*res vocalis* or *instrumentum vocale*) of other "reasonable" people, an elitist approach to virtue and reason, which led to the exclusion of some humans from its possession, or a cosmological model in which human value was not ultimate with regard to rest of cosmos. Finally, as can be argued, the human-divine relation was not considered reciprocal.<sup>224</sup>

Jewish philosophy, which operated with anthropocentric finalism and a notion of an icon, resulted in a more coherent anthropological model of universal human value, one in which all humans were conceptualized on the fundamental level as inherently valuable, and some, additionally, as axiologically developed in other ways.

Most educated Christians followed in classical Greco-Roman footsteps in their appreciation of reason or virtue, though—as we have seen—they most often viewed it through a Scriptural lens: as belonging to the universal human nature created by God, iconic of Him, incarnated by Him or redeemed by Him. This overall nature included reason, for its universality was taken for granted based on the Biblical premises, specifically the description of human iconic creation in the Book of Genesis. John Chrysostom, to whom we now turn, represents an excellent example of a Greek Father who named human reason as the dignifying criterion of humankind and complemented it with a universal identification of human dignity (ἀξίωμα) in all.

Firstly, in one of his orations, Chrysostom drew a distinction between acquired and natural goods: goods which one might lose, and the loss of which one therefore fears, and the goods which cannot be lost at all and of which the loss does not need to be feared. In order to provide an example of the latter, he wrote: οἶον ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀξίωμα ἔχει, τὸ εἶναι λογικός.<sup>225</sup> ("For instance, human beings have the dignity of possessing reason.")

The remark from the oration on the Letter to the Philippians is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows continuity with classical Greek thought. Secondly, it explicitly formulates the idea of the inherent nature of human dignity; that is, the position that dignity belongs to nature and is inalienable, i.e., not transferrable to anyone else. This is explicated *expressis verbis* by Chrysostom in drawing the distinction between an acquired good that might be lost on one hand, and these, which are natural and cannot, on the other. Such phrasing constitutes a significant anticipation of the twentieth-century

<sup>224</sup> Rist, 1982, 3–11.99–113.

<sup>225</sup> Ioh. Chrysost., or. 8 in ep. Phil. 73 (WGRW 16, 142).

characterization of dignity as inalienable (German: *unantastbar*), which was introduced—after the atrocities of the World War II—into the first article of the West German Basic Law, later the German constitution.<sup>226</sup> This characterization was designed to secure the idea of dignity as intrinsic to human nature, and thus inalienable, not by the law of the Third German Reich, nor by any other external power.

These two points—the displayed continuity with classical Greek philosophy and the explication of the idea of inalienability of human dignity—are the two most significant accounts of human dignity in Chrysostom's speech.

## 2.8 Conclusions Concerning the Greek East

We began by saying that the Greek East is a blank spot in the heretofore written diachronic histories of human dignity. The vibrant figures just discussed fill this spot not only with manifold conceptions, but also an archetypical approach to dignity that yielded a quantity of later inspirations, Byzantine and Latin. How can we synthetically summarize this earliest Greek Christian approach?

### 2.8.1 *The Context in which Human Dignity Occurs*

Firstly, it is an approach in which dignity, as a concept, is an element in a grand narration explaining human nature and its genesis. This narration describes the history of human dignity's creation, blemishing and reacquisition. By belonging to such a fundamental explanatory anthropological system as the Christian paradigm, the notion of dignity found a safe place at the very heart of the Roman empire, and thus of European civilization, increasingly sharing in the Christian faith during the centuries of slowly-developing medieval Christendom.

The Golden Age Greek Fathers exemplify that which is originally Christian—as contrasted with Judaism and pagan Greek philosophies—in their approach to dignity. As we saw in Athanasius's and Basil's works, the context of incarnation and the resulting redemption is one of the key settings in which human dignity functions. This led to creating a connection between the concept of dignity and Christmas celebrations. Additionally, the concepts of *capax Dei*, microcosm, and deification constitute other perspectives through which dignity was considered.

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<sup>226</sup> *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 23 May 1949, article 1: "Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar."

By accentuating the dignity of a human being as resulting from redemption and the incarnation leading up to it, the eastern Christian writers pioneered a novel approach. At the same time, they displayed continuity with ancient Judaism—in particular, the Book of Genesis and the Book of Psalms—by delivering an exegetic analysis of human creation in God's image and likeness. Ancient Jewish philosophy also provided them with the idea of anthropocentric finalism. Secondly, they upheld a number of classical and Hellenistic Greek philosophical ideas, often demonstrating conceptual continuity with them, yet interpreting them in the light of their own interests, as is the case with deification. Characteristically, the *imago Dei* was seen by the Greek Fathers through the lens of its redemption, preservation and salvation. Therefore, even though they implement the notion of an image, their description and justification of dignity pertains less to the earliest chapter of human history describing creation, and more to the advanced episode of human and divine union in one nature taken on by a human-God.

As we saw, the Greek Fathers picked up the notion of *imago Dei* and identified the human image not in the whole of a human being, but in the human soul only. They also differentiated human iconicity from God-likeness, understood as a developing feature of the icon. Thus, they contributed to a two-fold understanding of human dignity as both static (as an image ingrained in the soul) and dynamic and developing (depending on the actions the icon performs and the grace he or she receives). In their approaches, these thinkers adjusted the notion of the image to the doctrine of redemption, transforming the context in which the idea is used.

Nemesius of Emesa and Gregory of Nazianzus additionally introduced dignity into the context of the ancient notion of microcosm. Gregory's microcosmic analysis formulated a paradigmatic description of the oxymorons of human creation and God's incarnation, which was picked up on by later Christian speakers when conceptualizing Christmas; e.g., still in antiquity, Leo the Great, and in the Middle Ages, Bernard of Clairvaux. Gregory's understanding of human microcosm also represents a typical early Christian attempt at developing every idea in the light of its eschatological consequences for the Last Judgement. For this reason, the Cappadocian Father insisted on perceiving of the dignity of a human icon as connected to human insignificance, which results from embodiment. We can find similar approaches in medieval writers (Catherine of Siena, for example) for whom human dignity is also always connected to indignity. Gregory's discussion of human iconicity remains in conjunction with the doctrine of God's incarnation understood as God taking on *imago hominis*.

Nemesius's idea of microcosm has a univocally positive meaning, accentuating the completeness and harmony that the human microcosm brings to the world. Human dignity is praised by him in an encomium in which microcosm is one way to spell out the idea of humans' special, incomparable axiological status. This was done in contrast to Gregory of Nyssa's idea that humans' microcosmic nature cannot function as the foundation of dignity, for it is limited to the humbling and demeaning aspect of the human condition: embodiment. Gregory is, nonetheless, an example of integrating the idea of human dignity into a discussion of the social phenomenon of slavery—a significant theoretical achievement that eventually became central to European culture.

Before we move on to the discussion of the Latin West, it is worth mentioning that the writings of the last of the Greek Fathers, John of Damascus—working much later than the Golden Age—demonstrate the effects of the axiological framework worked out by the Greek thinkers we have discussed. In his *Expositio fidei*, Damascene repeated the already worked out patristic approach to human axiology, including the use of the notion of the worth of the human soul (τῆς ψυχῆς ἀξίωμα), its foundation in self-determination (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον), and an appeal to know one's dignity, including a demand to act according to it.<sup>227</sup> Given the kind of authority Damascene and the discussed Greek thinkers enjoyed, this secured the transition of their theories and terminology into Byzantine and Latin culture.

### 2.8.2 *The Philosophical Arguments and Principles Concerning Human Dignity*

Within those manifold contexts, some properly philosophical arguments and principles were worked out, and even though they are not all historically directly linked to the corresponding contemporary ideas, they are often expressed in them. I shall name three such lasting principles pertaining to the value we today call human dignity.

First, Athanasius's paradoxical reasoning concerning the reacquisition of human dignity in consequence of God's deprivation of it stands out as an original explanation of why humans have dignity, which they injured in the first place, and a meaningful *bon mot* still prevalent in contemporary theological tradition. The reasoning behind the dignitarian formula secures the non-autonomous, transcendental, and therefore ultimately unchanging aspect of human dignity: its root basis is God's love and kindness towards the human being.

<sup>227</sup> Jo. D., ex. f. 1.44 (SCh 535, 368).

Second, Basil's apologetic attempt at revealing the rational standing behind the exchange performed by God in order to rescue the human captive explains the difference in human worth before and after the transaction. By situating the topic of human worth within the metaphoric context of exchanging prisoners of war, it formulates the argument for the understanding of the incommensurability of human dignity, a feature today debated in value theories.

Third, John Chrysostom completes this colorful landscape of ancient Greek theoreticians of human dignity with the example of explicating the temporarily prevalent idea of the inherence of human dignity. In addition, his discussion of the criterion of reason hallmarks the theoretical achievement of naming the fundamental feature of the international legal discourse, that of dignity's inalienability.

### 2.8.3 *The Justification of Dignity*

Given the just-described contexts and the arguments contained in them, the Greek justification of dignity lies both in the act of redemption, preceded by incarnation, and in the act of creation. The philosophical analyses of the difference between the relationship of one being originating from another on one hand, and the unity introduced between the two beings sharing the same nature on the other, reveals why the Greek Fathers saw the dignity resulting from incarnation as superseding the dignity resulting from creation. Athanasius and Basil understood the human being to be dignified by the act of creation as *imago Dei*, but assumed the need for a greater human value after the human union with God was established in one nature. Secondly, Basil showed the need for a greater human value after a human creature was exchanged for an infinite price, the price of a Son of God. The price paid for the captive must be greater than the captive, if it is to be an argument in favor of the exchange. Typically, therefore, although human creation itself justifies dignity for the Christian Greeks, redemption does so on a larger scale.

It is therefore crucial to observe that although *imago Dei* is a significant part of the early Christian approach to dignity, it is supplemented by other justifications, and, when present, it is itself transformed by the originally Christian message concerning incarnation.

### 2.8.4 *Characterization of Dignity*

The Greek Doctors worked out a universal approach to human dignity which understood it as common among humanity, present in all created as human. Basil's insistence on recognizing the dignity of the outcasts of the late ancient societies (the sick, specifically lepers, slaves, children), Gregory of Nyssa's fierce criticism of slavery, and Gregory of Nazianzus's remarks on the dignity

of the poor all indicate that their approach to dignity is applicable to all human beings, not only the noble, free men or those who have civil rights. Dignity, therefore, reached the universal scope of reference among the class of human subjects, at least on the conceptual level. The application of this principle to the social practices of the time remained a problem, as slavery was prevalent as a social phenomenon. In such a society, Gregory of Nyssa stands out as a vocal critic of the practice, which in the mid-twentieth century was eventually classified as a crime against humanity. The so-called problem of subsumption, i.e., the application of the principle of human dignity to different cases, in particular to slavery, remained an issue that European culture would have to face for many centuries to come. Nonetheless, a step towards a new approach to humanity was taken; namely, the formation of a principle of universal, inherent, incommensurable, and inalienable human dignity.

Such human value was taken to be inherent in human nature not only because Chrysostom explicitly stated it, but also because it is the assumption of the doctrines of iconicity and redemption, both pertaining to human nature, not something external or circumstantial. Dignity is, in general, assumed by the Greek Fathers to be one in each human being, even if it is elevated after redemption and fluctuates throughout human life. There was no attempt in the fourth century to suggest divergent dignities in one human being, only one in each human creature.<sup>228</sup>

This one dignity is at least partially dynamic, i.e., capable of growing and diminishing. The process of alteration might go both ways, although the criterion of change is the same: actions that either increase or decrease God-likeness. This process reaches its limit upon human death, when the icon is judged by its state. The infinite level of human value is not achieved by human means, however, for after the incarnation and redemption, human dignity reaches a priceless, absolute limit of being equated with the infinite value of God. This theme introduces some contrast with the dominant trend of the ancient pagan culture in which human τιμή (honor) was at times estimated in high-valued yet finite categories. Basil's reasoning contradicts any limit placed on human value. It is infinite, as is the price (τιμή) paid for a human being.

Multiple remarks, specifically those concerning the treatment of dignity-bearers, show the normative (as distinct from descriptive) character of the concept of dignity. Dignity obliges those who face it to treat its subject accordingly, as Basil insists when commenting on the disrespect to children being sold at the agora, or the neglected poor, who deserve to be loved. He and Gregory of

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<sup>228</sup> The idea of multiple dignities in a human being (as many as twenty, in fact) is to be found in: Jan of Trzciana, *De natura ac dignitate hominis*, Cracow 1554.



Nazianzus make equal contributions with regard to justifying the dignity of the poor, while Gregory of Nyssa aided the development of a humanitarian approach to slavery the most. The topic, thus formulated, does not have many precedents in the ancient pagan tradition, not even in Stoic cosmopolitanism.

The norm-introducing feature of dignity is also clearly revealed in the cognitive imperative which arises from the highest value humans possess: that is, the imperative to recognize one's own dignity. Having entered into European culture through Basil's writings, the imperative multiplied, and endured. The significance of this call will be fully revealed in Chapters Three and Four, dedicated to the Latin West.

The Greeks invented a framework of reference for the notion of dignity that the next generations of intellectuals followed, passed on, and finally enriched with an influx of new ideas. Before this happened, in advanced medieval times, ages passed during which the statements of the Greek Fathers of the Golden Age about human dignity remained the steady course on which European culture moved.

## The Latin West. *Magistra Latinitas*

This chapter considers the Latin West, with Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon, Chromatius of Aquileia, Augustine of Hippo, and Faltonia Betitia Proba as examples of a non-systematic Christian approach to the concept of dignity. Latin authors are scrutinized in regard to their descriptions of human axiology and use of *dignitas*, specifically *dignitas hominis* and *dignitas Christiana*. I identify a trend to transform the ancient tradition of writing calls inspired by the Delphic maxim, γνῶθι σεαυτόν (“know thyself”), into specifically axiological calls urging one to “know one’s dignity.” Among appeals thus formulated, those written by Jerome of Stridon around the year 397 in Bethlehem urge one to know *dignitas hominis*. Analysis of the terminology used by the Christian authors therefore reveals an anthropological use of *dignitas*; one, however, that is interchangeable with other Latin expressions. In contrast, Latin texts written in the fifth century use the concept of dignity as a systematic anthropological category, where the question of human value arises. This comparison serves to illustrate a terminological shift during the fifth century.



This Chapter focuses on the five main representatives of the fourth- and early-fifth-century AD Latin West: Hilary of Poitiers (d. 367), Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), Chromatius of Aquileia (d. c. 407), Jerome of Stridon (d. 419), and Augustine of Hippo (d. 430). I will discuss their approaches in chronological order based on their birth dates, although all these thinkers were contemporaries. This analysis will start with the writers who did not implement *dignitas* as an anthropological category in their axiological deliberations and gradually move on to the ones who did so with an increasing degree of frequency and regular usage of the concept. This ordering matches the aforementioned chronological one. Included in this discussion is an identification of the tradition of formulating axiological appeal to know human dignity. This Chapter also offers a description of the early Christian tendency to challenge the Roman social axiological order and propose the appropriation of *dignitas Romana* to refer to hierarchy built on the criterion of merit (*dignitas Christiana*), rather than on circumstantial conditions such as birth or wealth. In doing so, the early Christians clearly follow the Hellenistic schools.

I begin the investigation with the examination of a writer who committed himself only marginally to anthropological topics, and who consequently did not have much chance to implement *dignitas* in an anthropological sense: Hilary of Poitiers. When he did, nevertheless, mention the idea of human worth, Hilary used alternative Latin terminology, not *dignitas hominis*. Second, we will consider an author who, likewise, barely used the notion of dignity (*dignitas*) in anthropologically relevant contexts at all, instead primarily employing *dignitas* in a social sense (*dignitas Romana*), but who comprehended and deliberated the idea of human value and succumbed to the use of alternative terminology or periphrastic expressions to describe the human axiological status: Ambrose of Milan. We will then briefly consider one example of a writer who used *dignitas* and *dignatio* to indicate *dignitas Romana*, but reinterpreting the term so as to question worldly social hierarchies: Chromatius of Aquileia. Next, we will move on to a thinker who (around the year 397) employed, discussed, and demanded that *dignitas hominis* be observed, even though he did so in only one work of his: Jerome of Stridon. We will conclude by studying a figure who both debated human dignity and used *dignitas* with an anthropological meaning (*dignitas naturae* and *dignitas humana*) in his major works written in the last decade of the fourth and at the beginning of the fifth century, but did so in a non-systematic manner, often interchangeably with expressions employing positive adjectives to describe human axiological status: Augustine of Hippo. At the end of the chapter, we will break from the chronological structure to reference a group of female Christian intellectuals, and in particular Faltonia Betitia Proba's *Cento* (written around 360), to reconstruct the late ancient female view on human axiology. This provides additional evidence of the proposed idea that fourth-century Christian anthropology did not systematically implement the category of human dignity.

This order, both chronological and systematic, is designed to demonstrate the increasing tendency to implement the anthropological meaning of *dignitas* in the Golden Age of patristic literature, with a substantial watershed in the propagation of the concept of human dignity occurring in the fifth century. In order to clearly show the momentum behind the popularization of *dignitas* in its anthropological meaning in the fifth century, it is best to start by illustrating the void in which *dignitas* was not a leading anthropological-axiological category, but one of a number of similar expressions descriptive of human value, and one in which the social meaning of a rank or status (*dignitas Romana*) prevailed.

This observation allows us to pose a question: since when, or perhaps, since which author, did *dignitas* become popularized in the European Latin tradition

in the anthropological-axiological sense that we are used to today? One possible answer remains to be shown at the end of this Chapter and in the next. First, let us consider the linguistic choices relating to human axiology made by major Christian Latin authors of the fourth and early fifth century.

### 3.1 Hilary of Poitiers

This Chapter, opening the presentation of the Latin conceptions of human dignity in the Golden Age of patristic literature, fittingly starts with the mention of a thinker often called the “Athanasius of the West.” As we shall see, many Latin thinkers remained highly influenced by their eastern Greek contemporaries, including in their conceptualizations of human axiology. Hilary’s short reflection on universal human *nobilitas* (nobility) and *honor* (honor) is perhaps the most evident example.

As we know, Athanasius of Alexandria repeated the golden rule of patristic soteriology (“God became human, so that a human being could become divine”) and proposed its axiological version, which we called “the dignitarian formula”. It stated that God’s kindness (φιλανθρωπία) for the human creature led to the fact that “God was undignified, so that we could be dignified.” This line appeared in *De incarnatione Verbi* as a commentary to Jesus’ crucifixion. Even though the deification formula remained the most popular of Athanasius’s lines, Hilary of Poitiers’ *De Trinitate* is an important example of the dignitarian formula resonating in the Latin West as well.

In his most popular work, *De Trinitate*, Hilary discusses Christ’s incarnation, which leads him to repeat Athanasius’s dignitarian formula twice in the context of God’s birth (not the crucifixion, as was originally done by Athanasius). In his vivid description of the nativity scene, Hilary invokes the image of the Holy Mary carrying the crying newborn baby, with kings arriving to see the infant child, animals surrounding the cradle, and angels proclaiming the arrival of the Savior, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit leading up to Mary’s pregnancy. Yet Hilary also follows Gregory of Nazianzus in describing the nativity scene in terms of paradoxes of incarnation, among which he lists the two dignitarian formulas. The list opens by recalling that He, who sustains all things, is born and starts to be; that He, at whose voice archangels tremble, is heard wailing in the cradle; He, who is incomprehensible and unseen, is seen, etc. Hilary will demonstrate how divine dignity was preserved in the human context, yet at this point he states the obvious: God had nothing to gain by incarnation, which is why it was done for humankind’s benefit only. He therefore rhetorically asks:

*Quid tandem dignum a nobis tantae dignationis adfectui rependetur?*<sup>1</sup> (“At last, with what worthy thing will we repay for the feeling of such great honour?”) In this context, the two dignitarian formulas, expressive of our gain due to incarnation, are uttered: *Humilitas eius nostra nobilitas est, contumelia eius honor noster est*<sup>2</sup> (“His humiliation is our nobility, his mistreatment is our honor”). These lines suggest that God’s humiliation and mistreatment, manifested in a defenseless child wailing in a cradle, translate into human nobility and honor, because the vulnerable human nature is shared by one before time and the maker of the universe. Read in this context, the formulas are a reference to Christ’s birth, rather than the Way of the Cross and Crucifixion, the original context in which Athanasius placed his formula. Nonetheless, the point of Christ’s incarnation is the mission of resurrection that leads through the Cross, which is why Hilary’s and Athanasius’s views are reconcilable.

The egalitarianism of Hilary’s dignitarian formulas, both referring to the “we” of humanity, is a necessary consequence of the universal message of incarnation—a point he confirms explicitly.<sup>3</sup> By tying the notion of “our” nobility and honor to the description of Christ’s birth, Hilary introduced a universal and egalitarian scope of reference regarding these notions to all of humanity.

As we will see below, Hilary also made use of the social sense of *dignitas* in order to refer to *dignitas Christiana*, which will be examined alongside similar points in the discussion of Ambrose’s ideas on the matter, some of the most developed among the Latin Church Fathers. In his discussion of human axiology, resulting from Christ’s sacrificial incarnation, Hilary found alternative names expressive of human worth; namely, *nobilitas* and *honor*.

### 3.2 Ambrose of Milan

Ambrose of Milan was born in either 337 or 339 as a Roman aristocrat. His writings are an example of the non-universal use of the term *dignitas*, and of alternative ways of describing common human greatness. Although a curiously distanced opinion about Ambrose was expressed in his day by Jerome of Stridon (in *De viris illustribus*),<sup>4</sup> Ambrose was certainly counted among the

1 Hilar. Pict., de trin. 2.25 (SCh 443, 316, linea 1; CCL 62, 61). In order to make the Latin quotations presented in the book uniform, I do not follow CCL insofar as I replace the letter “u” with the letter “v”, where it is orthographically justified.

2 Hilar. Pict., de trin. 2.25 (SCh 443, 316, linea 16; CCL 62, 61). Cf. Phil 2:8.

3 Hilar. Pict., de trin. 2.24.

4 Hier., vir. ill. 124 (CSEA VI/1, 378, lineae 1393–1395): *Ambrosius, Mediolanensis episcopus, usque in praesentem diem scribit, de quo, quia superest, meum iudicium subtraham, ne in alteram partem, aut adulatio in me reprehendatur, aut veritas.*

“illustrious” of his time, and was seen as a crucial Christian authority. In the ages to come, he would be listed as one of the four intellectual pillars of the Church by the Venerable Bede, and counted among the first four great Latin Fathers, next to Jerome himself, Augustine of Hippo, and Gregory the Great.<sup>5</sup> His popularity was certainly increased by Augustine of Hippo’s account of the Bishop of Milan’s role in Augustine’s Christian development. *Confessiones* testifies not only to Ambrose’s intellectual authority, but also to his charismatic personality and rhetorical talent, best demonstrated through the bishop’s influence over the Roman emperor, Theodosius, who, following the massacre of Thessalonica, he forced into a public display of remorse and acts of penitence.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2.1 *Axiological Themes and Terminology in Ambrose’s Writings*

Ambrose’s major work *Hexaemeron*, a commentary on the six days of creation, largely based on both Basil the Great’s *Hexaemeron* as well as Basil’s other writings (in particular, *Homilia in illud: Attende tibi ipsi*), employs the Latin *dignitas* in the sociological sense of an office (*dignitas Romana*).<sup>7</sup> The homilies were spoken to the public during the Holy Week of a year somewhere between 384 and 390.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the text does not employ *dignitas* in the anthropological context pertaining to human nature where it could appear, such as in the discussion of human greatness present in the commentary on the sixth day of creation.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Ambrose selects a different linguistic palette. This use of *dignitas* is mirrored in other writings, specifically *De officiis ministrorum*.

Except for a singular sentence in *De Cain et Abel*, utilizing the phrase *dignitas condicionis humanae* (dignity of a human condition) to praise one particular man, Moses, Ambrose did not use *dignitas* when discussing human axiology. The attribution of “dignity” to the human condition was, nevertheless, apparently viable for Ambrose, for in *De Cain et Abel* he stated that by earning the title of “a god,” Moses surpassed “the dignity of his human condition.”<sup>10</sup> This

5 Pope Bonifacius VIII, *Gloriosus Deus*, 1295; Beda Venerabilis, *Epistola responsoria Venerabilis Bedae ad Accam Episcopum* (PL 76, 303–308).

6 M.G. Mara, *Ambrose of Milan*, in: A. Di Berardino (ed.), *Patrology 4: The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature: From the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon*, (Placid Solari trans.), Notre Dame 1991, 144–180; M.G. Mara, *Ambrogio di Milano*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 2007, 229–235; C. Marksches, *Leone I Magno*, in: Döpp / Geerlings / Noce (eds.), 2006, 40–60; M. Starowieyski, *Ambroży bp Mediolanu*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 51–62.

7 Ambr., hex. 5.15,52 (CSEL 32/1, 178, linea 23, and 179, linea 8; two instances of *dignitas* understood as an office in a primitive community).

8 Mara, 1991, 153.

9 Ambr., hex. 6 (CSEL 32/1, 204–261).

10 Ambr., *Cain* 1.2,7 (CSEL 31/1, 343, linea 8). The title of “a god” in reference to Moses appears in Ex 7:1.

is consistent with the wide range of possible applications of *dignitas* taken to mean nobility or honor and conceptually echoes the Greek ideas of human deification. Additionally, and unsurprisingly, Ambrose's texts feature many classical uses of *dignitas Romana*, such as in the characteristic phrasings *ordo dignitatis*<sup>11</sup> or *gradus dignitatis*.<sup>12</sup>

As a Roman aristocrat, Ambrose was well-acquainted with Greek, sometimes quoting its original forms or commenting on its translations, something that is rare among the Latin Fathers. Interestingly, he discussed the Greek word ἀξίωμα, occurring in Psalm 118,<sup>13</sup> as possibly resulting from a scribe's mistake, but to be adequately translated as *mea dignitas*, which he took to mean a rank (*dignitas Romana*), just like ἀξίωμα.<sup>14</sup>

His commentary to Psalm 118 offers, additionally, an observation concerning the kinds of dignities understood as offices (*dignitates Romanae*), which introduces the novel idea of specifically Christian kinds of ranks, *dignitates Christianae*. This comprises a distinctive example of an ancient commentary to the dignity-related terminology where the term is still employed in the classical meaning of an office. Various other texts also mention *dignitas Christiana*<sup>15</sup> and one discusses female dignity specifically. We will discuss them laid out against other patristic ideas about *dignitas Christiana*.

Most importantly, Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* stresses the privileged character of the human creature and their superior ontological perfection, and thus, undoubtedly, treats the topic of human axiology. According to the Bishop of Milan, the human creature is bestowed with incomparable gifts by the Creator; in particular, the soul, a gift unrivalled by anything else in the world and having nothing in common with the rest of creation (*sola nihil habet commune cum ceteris*).<sup>16</sup> At times, Ambrose calls the soul "precious" (*pretiosa*),<sup>17</sup> at times "beautiful" or "elegant" (*decora*),<sup>18</sup> and at times, evidently following *The First Letter to the Corinthians* and Irenaeus of Lyon's *Adversus haereses*, he calls

11 Ambr., psal. 118.22,14 (CSEL 62, 495, linea 19).

12 Ambr., Luc. 10 (CCL 14, linea 12).

13 In today's editions it is Ps 119:17.

14 Ambr., psal. 118.22,14 (CSEL 62, 495, lineae 14–17): *Sed quia Graecus habet: εἰσέλθοι τὸ ἀξίωμα μου, hoc est "dignitas mea", licet potuerit et scriptor errare et fuerit ἀξίωσις, hoc est "deprecatio", tamen hoc quoque explanemus, ut possumus. Nempe cum hominem rogas regem, dicis ut contemplationem habeat honoris tui, tangat eum tuae contemplatio dignitatis, ut aut misereatur.*

15 Ambr., Abr. 1.7,63 (CSEL 32/1, 543 linea 19): *Provocantur feminae meminisse dignitatis suae et lactare filios suos.*

16 Ambr., hex. 6.1,2 (CSEL 32/1, 205, linea 8); 6.9.67 (CSEL 32/1, 254, linea 20).

17 Ambr., hex. 6.8,52 (CSEL 32/1, 243, linea 23).

18 Ambr., hex. 6.8,50 (CSEL 32/1, 241, linea 14).

it “the glory of God” (*gloria Dei*).<sup>19</sup> These remarks draw a sharp distinction between the human creature and the rest of creation, and lead to calling the human being a “wreath” (*corona*) of creation, more than once.<sup>20</sup> Such description provides evidence not only of a personalist distinction, but also an anthropocentric finalism. This classical view coexists in Ambrose’s writings with the recognition of human responsibility for the world and the creatures living in it. Ambrose argues that animals will serve human beings all the better, the more attention humans pay to the animals’ needs.<sup>21</sup>

Ambrose’s *Hexaemeron* includes, moreover, many passages pertaining to self-knowledge, inspired by the ancient maxim, γνῶθι σεαυτόν. References to the Delphic maxim, also popular in its Latinized form *nosce te ipsum*, remain a red thread of anthropologically-orientated commentary to Day Six, although they appear in other books as well. Ambrose formulated a number of appeals to know oneself which specifically require the recognition of one’s own greatness, thus developing the ancient tradition of calls to know thyself in an original, axiological way. This new form of the axiological *nosce te ipsum* appeal was continued throughout the late Patristic Period, the Middle Ages, and beyond. It remained in European culture, and is today one of its key characteristics. It is rarely noted that the tradition of formulating appeals to recognize one’s own (as well as another’s) dignity originates in Christian antiquity. Those appeals differentiate Ambrose’s *Hexaemeron* from Basil’s, who commented on the Delphic inscription in his commentary to the six days of creation, but did not make his own imperatives of that type in *Hexaemeron*. We will here attempt a description of the beginnings of this tradition, one which received much less scholarly attention than the classical “know thyself” maxim.

Finally, Ambrose at times appeals for the value of the human body to be recognized, to which he pays a great deal of attention. We will investigate this as well, for despite being among the theologians who identify the human soul as the foundation of human iconicity, Ambrose praises human embodiment and ascribes special value to it.

We will recapitulate Ambrose’s imperatives to know oneself and one’s value first, move on to the bishop’s views on the human soul, and conclude with remarks concerning the value of the human body, as well as remarks concerning *dignitas Christiana*.

19 Ambr., hex. 6.8,50. Cf. Iren., her. 4.20.7 (*gloria enim Dei vivens homo*; Sch 100, 648, linea 180); 1 Cor 11:7.

20 Ambr., hex. 6.1,2 (CSEL 32/1, 204, lineae 20–21).

21 Ambr., hex. 6.3,10 (CSEL 32/1, 209, linea 29). This is worth stressing because anthropocentric theories are sometimes interpreted as anti-environmentalist.



### 3.2.2 “Know Thyself” Maxim Transformed into “Know Thy Dignity”

Axiological appeals to know one’s value developed in the fourth century AD from the ancient tradition of interpreting and formulating phrases relating to the inscription γνῶθι σεαυτόν, which is present on the fronton of the temple of Apollo in Delphi, dating, according to the ancient sources, from as long ago as the archaic Greek period.<sup>22</sup> It is unclear whether the inscription was originally a maxim, a proverb, religious advice, or a prophetic message spoken by Pythia.<sup>23</sup> The popular, non-philosophical message of the inscription was that of humility. “Know yourself” is listed by Menander, Pseudo-Menander, Diodorus of Sicily, and Plutarch of Chaeronea among many Greek sayings suggesting people should not take on challenges beyond their powers.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, to know oneself was to know one’s limits, and thus it was suggested to originate from Prometheus or Croesus.<sup>25</sup> This popular meaning is confirmed by philosophers, including Aristotle, Xenophon, Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch, who comment on the maxim, at times bestowing it with new meanings.<sup>26</sup> Aristotle and Xenophon additionally reference Socrates as inspired by the inscription, although the text of Plato’s *Apology* testifies to a different reason for the philosopher’s interest in Apollo’s temple.<sup>27</sup>

The most significant philosophical interpretation of the maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν is that of Plato’s (or Pseudo-Plato’s) *Alcibiades Major*, but the inscription’s origins are topics of both *Protagoras* and *Charmides*, and lack of self-knowledge as a phenomenon is also tackled in *Philebus* and *Phaedrus*, while *Apology* famously describes Socratesian knowledge of the limits of knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Socrates’ remarks concerning the limits of knowledge became popularized in the Latinized version by Cicero, *scio me nihil scire*, a line which in fact never appears in Plato’s *Apology*.<sup>29</sup>

22 Plin., nat. 3.7.

23 E. Osek, ‘Poznaj samego siebie’ w interpretacji Bazylego Wielkiego, in: *Vox Patrum* 52 (2008), 762–763. I reconstruct many facts of the subsequent history of the Greek maxim using Ewa Osek’s fabulous research as well as Marius Reiser’s synthetic article: M. Reiser, *Poznaj sam siebie: Samopoznanie w starożytności i chrześcijaństwie* (H. Ordon trans.), in: *Ruch biblijny i Liturgiczny* 1 (1991), 1–11.

24 Men., asp. 198–193; id., kon. 1.1–2; (Ps.)Men., sent. 1.584–585; D. S., bibl. hist. 13.24,5; Plu., cons. Ap. 116c–d.

25 Reiser, 1991, 1.

26 Arist., rh. 1395a; X., mem. 4.2,24–27; Philo, legat. 69.1.

27 X., mem. 4.2,24–27; Plu., adv. Col. 118c; Pl., ap. 23a–b.

28 Cf. Pl., ap. 23a–c.

29 Pl., Alc. 1 124a–133c; Prt. 343a–b; Chrm. 164d–165a; Phlb. 48c–49a; Phdr., 229c–230a; ap. 23a–c.

Among the listed texts, Plato's *Alcibiades Major* is the most significant source for the Church Fathers, for the distinction drawn in that dialogue and a metaphor employed there are used by Basil in *Homilia in illud: Attende tibi ipsi*, and by Ambrose in *Hexaemeron*. The distinction in question is that between who I am and what is mine (we recapitulated Basil's version of this distinction in Chapter Two on the Greek East), while the metaphor is that of an eye which cannot look at itself directly and can only see itself when looking in a mirror, symbolizing the soul's need to reflect God in order to know oneself.<sup>30</sup>

Ancient Roman tradition was as interested in the maxim *γνώθι σεαυτόν* as the ancient Greeks were, although their use of the phrase developed a new interpretation, commonly known in its Latinized form as *memento mori*. Romans placed the Greek inscription *γνώθι σεαυτόν* on graves and depicted the decaying human body along with the inscription. The most famous of these is a mosaic discovered on Via Appia, at San Gregorio al Celio, built over Pope Gregory the Great's suburban villa. The mosaic presents a human skeleton (or almost-skeleton, for the figure has the remains of muscles and tendons on the clearly visible bone structure) lying down and pointing with an outsized finger to large lettering reading, *γνώθι σεαυτόν*.

Lucian of Samosata in his *Dialogi mortuorum* had his protagonist sing, *γνώθι σεαυτόν*, accompanied by the exclamations of the dead.<sup>31</sup> The phrase *memento mori* itself has Roman roots. Tertullian and Epictetus describe the ritual of a triumphant army leader parading the street of Rome after a victory. In order to save the successful military officer from pride, a man was ordered to walk just behind him, shouting *Respice post te! Hominem te memento*. ("Look back! Remember that you are a human being").<sup>32</sup> It is therefore not a surprise that Clement of Alexandria interprets *γνώθι σεαυτόν* as meaning *memento mori* and *hominem te memento*.<sup>33</sup> As we shall see, Ambrose also formulated one call belonging to this tradition.

Philosophers of the Roman Empire developed complex interpretations of the maxim of self-knowledge, in which there were two dominant schools, the Stoic and the Neoplatonist. Epictetus, a Stoic, understood the maxim to suggest a practical message of care for oneself, *ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτῶν* (he used the phrase "caring for oneself": *ἐπιμελεῖσθαι ἑαυτῶν*).<sup>34</sup> Plotinus, often called the creator of Neoplatonism, took the maxim to have an anagogic and apophatic meaning

30 Pl., Alc. 1 131e (me and mine) and 132d (the eye).

31 Luc., dmort. 2.3; Reiser, 1991, 1–11; E. Jünger, *Tbd*, Tübingen 1985, 54–74.

32 Tert., apol. 33.4; Epict., dia. 3.24,85.

33 Clem. Al., strom. 5.4,23,1.

34 Epict., ench.3.1,18–19.

at the same time: it urged humans (who are intrinsically diverse, specifically in their self-knowledge) to look into themselves and realize that they cannot distinguish their internal diversity, yet ought to, in order to transform themselves.<sup>35</sup> The unending popularity of the maxim is best visible in the fact that, according to the Byzantine Suda, Porphyry wrote a book on the saying (Περὶ τοῦ Γνώθι Σεαυτόν); this manuscript, sadly, did not survive.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Basil, strongly influenced by Porphyry, paid much attention to the maxim, and so did his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, as well as their keen Latin reader, Ambrose.

Ambrose remained strongly influenced not only by the Greek maxim and its Roman reception, but also a Jewish standpoint regarding its origins. Philo of Alexandria is the first to present a view that the maxim is present in the Tora, and originates from Moses.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the Septuagint used the phrase πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ, “guard yourself”, a number of times.<sup>38</sup> Most famously, in Deuteronomy, in a speech addressed to the Israelites forsaking God’s covenant, Moses addresses his people with a phrase containing the wording, πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ (“watch yourselves” or “beware”), only to add right after it: “so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen.”<sup>39</sup> The Biblical verse read in its entirety is not analogous to the Delphic inscription.

Philo’s view was nevertheless shared by Origen, and almost exactly repeated by Clement of Alexandria.<sup>40</sup> Origen, however, observed the similarity between γνώθι σεαυτόν and a verse from *The Song of Songs*.<sup>41</sup> We can therefore summarize the Alexandrian school’s standpoint as claiming that the inspiration for the engraving placed on the forefront of the Temple of Apollo stems from Biblical expressions.<sup>42</sup> The two-word phrase, πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ, was singled out by Basil, who meditated over its meaning in the homily on the words *attende tibi ipsi*, although he did so in full abstraction from the original context and meaning. Ambrose, who knew Basil’s homily, shared the Alexandrian view concerning the origins of the maxim and further strengthened it by suggesting

35 Plot., enn. 1.6,9; 4-7,41; 5.3,1-10; 5.3,17.

36 Cf. Osek, 2008, 769.

37 Philo, migr. 8.

38 Deut 4:9, 6:12, 8:11, 11:16, 12:13, 15:9, 24:8, 19:30; Gen 24:6; Ex 10:12, 23:21, 43:12; Tob 4:12, 4:14; Sir 29:20. In providing the list, I rely on a detailed study presented in Osek, 2008, 769. Cf. also 1 Pet 5:8; 2 Cor 13:5.

39 I quote the New Living Translation.

40 Clem. Al., strom. 2.15,71.

41 Or., cant. 10.141-142 (Greek text), 2.5 (Latin text); Cant 1:8.

42 Cf. Osek, 2008, 769-771, Reiser, 1991, 5.

that the Greeks had hijacked the maxim from the Jews, who knew it long before.<sup>43</sup>

What is interesting for the study of the patristic view of human dignity is that the tradition of repeating and commenting on the appeals to know oneself was vibrant among Christian writers, who transformed it in the fourth century into a new kind of specifically axiological appeal.<sup>44</sup> In doing so, paradoxically, they did not part ways with either the original Greek reading (which stresses human limitations) or the Roman understanding of the maxim (emphasizing human finitude), but rather supplemented them with a new message pertaining to human greatness. As we saw in the Greek East, in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, the messages of humility and dignity coexisted in Christianity, and complemented one another.

We have already identified the call to know one's dignity formulated by Basil in his homily on Psalm 48. It was Ambrose who developed the idea of calls to know one's value by verbalizing not one but a number of such appeals, addressing them to his listeners. Given that Basil's homily on Psalm 48 is not known to have been popular in the Latin West, it is Ambrose whose influence is likely to have been crucial in popularizing a practice of formulating imperatives to recognize one's value. Soon after, Jerome of Stridon would follow in Ambrose's footsteps, and in the fifth century, Leo the Great, Master of Verona, the anonymous author of *Dicta Albini*, and various authors of the sermons gathered in a collection called *Eusebius Gallicanus* would do so as well. Later, the Middle Ages would boast over a dozen Christian appeals of this kind.

### 3.2.3 *Ambrose's Calls to Recognize One's Greatness*

*Hexaemeron* contains a number of calls to recognize oneself, among which three lines have a specifically axiological character. Many others comment on self-knowledge or describe its conditions. As noted, those remarks differentiate Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* from Basil's, whose comments on γνῶθι σεαυτόν do not take the form of repeating it as an imperative in his *Hexaemeron*. This is significant given the debate concerning the repetitive character of Ambrose's

43 Ambr., hex. 6.6,39 (CSEL 32/1, 230, linea 8); id., psal. 118 2.13 (CSEL 62, 27, linea 20–24): *Nosce te ipsum, quod Apollini Pythio adsignant gentiles viri, quasi ipse auctor fuerit huius sententiae, cum de nostro usurpatum ad sua transferant et longe anterior Moyses fuerit, qui scripsit librum Deuteronomii, quam philosophi qui ista finxerunt.*

44 J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Późnostarożytne apele o rozpoznanie godności ludzkiej. Bazyl z Cezarei Kapadockiej, Ambroży z Mediolanu, Leon Wielki, Mistrz z Werony*, in: *Vox Patrum* 83 (2022), 141–162.

text compared to Basil's.<sup>45</sup> Basil exhausted his interpretation of the Greek maxim in a homily on the words *πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ*, and his interpretation is different from that offered by Ambrose in his text.

Ambrose's axiological calls also differ from the Cappadocian Father's homily on Psalm 48. Firstly, they appeal for people to know themselves, and add a call to know one's axiological status to the classical "know thyself" message. This is why they belong to the ancient tradition of *γνώθι σεαυτόν* appeals much more evidently than Basil's "know your value" passage. Secondly, Ambrose's calls avoid the use of one noun to refer to human axiological status, and instead employ periphrastic descriptions as well as positive adjectives related to "the soul." This has a twofold effect: Ambrose is at the same time more eloquent and yet imprecise, for on the one hand he achieves stylistic complexity, but on the other, he lacks one specific name for the phenomenon of human axiological status. Thirdly, Ambrose's calls do not have the mercantile or military connotation of Basil's appeal in his commentary on Psalm 48, which is ingrained in a metaphor of war negotiations. A number of Ambrose's calls, however, stress the need for self-care contained in Basil's homily on the words *πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ* and the homily on Psalm 48. Let us explore the appeals formulated by the Bishop of Milan in his *Hexaemeron*.

Ambrose placed a passage containing three imperatives to know oneself and one's value, and two appeals to attend to oneself, in the midst of his commentary on Day Six:

*Cognosce, ergo te, decora anima; quia imago Dei es. Cognosce te, homo, quia gloria es Dei. Audi quomodo gloria. Propheta dicit: Mirabilis facta est cognitio tua ex me, hoc est: in meo opere tua mirabilior est maiestas, in consilio hominis tua sapientia praedicatur. [...] Cognosce ergo te, o homo, quantus sis, et adtende tibi; ne quando laqueis implicatus diaboli fias praeda venantis; ne forte in fauces tetri illius leonis incurras, qui rugit et circuit quaerens quem devoret. Adtende tibi, ut consideres quid in te intret, quid ex te exeat. Non de cibo dico qui absorbetur et egeritur, sed de cogitatione dico, de sermone assero. [...] Miles es, hostem diligenter explora; ne*

45 The traditional view assuming the lack of Ambrose's originality can be found in: F.E. Robbin, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries to Genesis*, Chicago 1912, 57; a more moderate standpoint in: T. Krynicka, *Hexaemeron Ambrożego z Mediolanu jako źródło do XVII księgi Etymologii Izydora z Sewilli*, in: *Vox Patrum* 48 (2005), 26; A. Aleksiejczuk, *Homilie na sześć dni stworzenia świętych Bazylego Wielkiego i Ambrożego z Mediolanu: przyczynek do analizy porównawczej "Heksaemeronów"*, in: *Acta Patristica* 9 (2018), 56–72. As for ancient opinions, Jerome writes that Ambrose compiled both Basil's *Hexaemeron* and the commentary to Genesis by Hippolytus of Rome; cf. Hier., ep. 84.7 (PL 22, 749).

*tibi nocturnus inrepat; athleta es, manibus adversario propior esto, quam vultu, ne oculum feriat tuum.*<sup>46</sup>

Recognize, therefore, o beautiful soul, yourself, because you are the image of God. Recognize, o human being, yourself, for you are the glory of God. Hear, in what way you are this glory. The Prophet says: “your cognition was created as marvelous out of me, that is, in my work your majesty is more marvelous, in the human council your wisdom is praised.” [...] [...] Recognize, therefore, o human being, yourself, how great you are, and guard yourself, lest you someday, whilst entrapped in the snares by sinning, become prey to the hunting Devil; may you not fall, by accident, into the jaws of that hideous lion, who roars and circles, seeking who to devour. Guard yourself, that you consider what goes inside you and what goes outside. I do not speak of food, which is absorbed and ejected, but of thinking, and I assert from this speech [scil. by Jesus]. [...] Be a soldier, watch the enemy diligently, may he not crawl in at night; be an athlete, keep the enemy closer to your arms than to face, lest he strike your eye.

We will present a comparative analysis of this and Basil’s appeal to recognize one’s value in Chapter Four, contrasting them with one another as well as with the calls by Jerome of Stridon and, most of all, Leo the Great. The comparison will demonstrate that Basil’s passage is closer to Leo’s than to that of Ambrose, whose phrasing is most unlike the other two. At this point, it suffices to note that a tradition of axiological appeals is being originated, since another Christian writer continues in Basil’s footsteps. This itself is a meaningful phenomenon in the history of human dignity.<sup>47</sup>

Ambrose formulates a call that, as we said, used many adjectives expressive of human axiology (*pretiosa anima, decora anima*), as well as periphrastic expressions addressed to his listeners and naming human value (*quantus sis, gloria Dei es*). His reference to *imago Dei* in the appeal is meaningful, for it

46 Ambr., hex. 6.8,50 (CSEL 32/1, 241, lineae 14–24). Where Ambrose uses the phrase “glory of God” he references Paul’s address to men only, in which a woman is called “the glory of a man” (1 Cor 11:7). Initially one is tempted, therefore, to translate *homo* as “man” in this line, but nonetheless, the context justifies the opposite; that is, an inclusive interpretation of Ambrose’s line as addressed to both men and women. Firstly, Ambrose discussed issues pertaining to women, whom he addressed just a moment before, and secondly, the homilies were spoken to a mixed group of the faithful. There is nothing in this line to suggest the author suddenly addresses men only. Thirdly, when Ambrose addresses men only in the other places, he stresses it explicitly. Fourthly, the phrase “glory of God” already had an inclusive reading in Irenaeus of Lyon’s *Adversus haereses*. For the discussion of Ambrose’s approach to the value of women, see: D. Kasprzak, *Tematyka społeczna w pismach Ambrożego z Mediolanu*, in: *Vox Patrum* 32 (2012), 279–281; for the thesis that Ambrose did not proclaim the ontological inferiority of women anywhere, see: L.F. Pizzolato, *La coppia umana in sant’Ambrogio*, in: *SPMed* 5 (1976), 185.

47 I briefly describe this phenomenon in: Guerrero van der Meijden, 2002, 405–426.

presents a different justification for human dignity than in Basil's call, which references redemption as the factor determining the human being's highest value. Ambrose pairs a classical call for self-knowledge (*cognosce te*) with a message and a demand to know one's greatness (*quia imago Dei es, quia gloria Dei es, cognosce te [...] quantus sis*), as well as a practically-orientated appeal not to enter into the captivity of sin again (*adtende tibi*). His *nosce te ipsum* therefore continues the Stoic reading of the maxim as expressive of practical advice regarding care for oneself, but adjusted to the Christian paradigm of thought.<sup>48</sup> Ambrose also follows the Alexandrian school in identifying the origins of the call in the Biblical tradition, as containing the message of guarding oneself.

Basil's homily on the words *πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ* inspired another appeal to know and guard oneself written by Ambrose in his *Hexaemeron*. Clearly following Basil's homily on the words *πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ*, and not the commentary on the six days of creation, Ambrose repeats the distinction between what I am and what is mine:

*Adtende inquit [scil. Scriptura] tibi soli. Aliud enim sumus nos, aliud sunt nostra, alia quae circa nos sunt. Nos sumus, hoc est anima et mens, nostra sunt corporis membra et sensus eius, circa nos autem pecunia est, servi sunt et vitae istius apparatus. Tibi igitur adtende, te ipsum scito, hoc est non quales lacertos habeas, non quantam corporis fortitudinem, non quantas possessiones, quantam potentiam, sed qualem animam ac mentem, unde omnia consilia proficiscuntur, ad quam operum tuorum fructus refertur. [...] Illa anima bene picta est, in qua elucet divinae operationis effigies, illa anima bene picta est, in qua est splendor gloriae et paternae imago substantiae. Secundum hanc imaginem, quae refulget, pictura pretiosa est.*<sup>49</sup>

Guard your own self, [scil. the Scripture] states. We are therefore different, what is ours is different, and what is around us is different. We are, that is the soul and the mind are; ours are the parts of the body and their senses, while we are surrounded by the money, slaves and supplies of this life. Guard yourself, then, come to know yourself; that is, not what muscles you have, not what bodily strength, not what possessions, not what power, but what soul and mind you have, from which all counsel comes forth and to which the fruit of your work is referred. [...] Such a soul was well painted, and shines in the image of divine work, and such a soul was well painted in the splendor of glory and the image of paternal nature present. Precious is the painting which reflects according to such an image.

48 This provides an identification of Stoic influences on Christianity. For an overall description of the relationship between Stoicism and Christianity, see, e.g.: Rasimus / Engberg-Pedersen / Dunderberg (eds.), 2010.

49 Ambr., hex. 6.7,42 (CSEL 32/1, 233–234, lineae 15–4; lines across two pages).

This interpretation of Moses' *πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ* repeats the distinction drawn by Basil in his homily, and by Plato in his *Alcibiades Major*, between "me" and "mine," identified as the soul and the body respectively. It therefore continues the Platonic identification of the self with the spiritual dimension of the human creature. Consequently, just like the Cappadocian Father, Ambrose takes the prescription "guard yourself" to apply to the human soul and mind rather than the whole of a human being. He also links the idea of guarding oneself with the idea of *imago Dei*, which he and Basil identified in the soul.

Typically for Ambrose, however, in his explanation of guarding one's image, he uses a metaphor. Suggesting that to guard oneself is to care about the kind of image the soul is to become, Ambrose calls God an artist, and describes two kinds of images, one by the divine artist, *imago caelestis*, and one by a human artisan, *effigies terrestres*. If *imago Dei* depicts the splendor of God's glory, His paternal nature, and His work, then it is precious and celestial. This celestial image was deposed (*deposuit imaginem caelestis*) through original sin by Adam, and the earthly picture was obtained (*sumpsit terrestres effigiem*) instead.<sup>50</sup>

This interpretation of the original sin demonstrates a dynamic understanding of human iconicity, seen as a characteristic capable of being erased and exchanged for a contrasting form. Such a view will reappear in many medieval theories of the soul, typically inspired by Augustine of Hippo, who himself took it on from Ambrose. Ambrose, on the other hand, adopted it from the Cappadocian writers, who, as we saw, contrasted the image of God with "the earthly image" (*εἰκῶν τοῦ χοῖκου* in Basil of Caesarea)<sup>51</sup> or "the form of the snake" (*μορφή τοῦ ὄφρα* in Gregory of Nazianzus).<sup>52</sup> Once again, we identify *lumen orientale* as a source of Latin axiological theories.

There are other practically-orientated interpretations of the ancient maxim both in Ambrose's *Hexaemeron*, and in other works by Ambrose, for example his *De officiis ministrorum*. The latter work, modelled after Cicero's *De officiis*, investigates the connection between *decorum* and *honestas*, employing rich axiological vocabulary. Ambrose calls the faculties of the human being, such as the mind and the heart, "the precious possession" (*possessio pretiosa*) as well as gold (*aureum*) and silver (*argentum*), and urges human beings: *Custodi interiorem hominem tuum, noli eum quasi vilem neglegere ac fastidire, quia pretiosa possessio est*.<sup>53</sup> ("Guard your internal human being and do not neglect or

50 Ambr., hex. 6.7,42 (CSEL 32/1, 234, linea 29): *Secundum hanc imaginem Adam ante peccatum, sed ubi lapsus est, deposuit imaginem caelestis, sumpsit terrestres effigiem.*

51 Basil. Caes., in ps. 48.8 (PG 29, 452).

52 Gr. Naz., or. 33 contr. Ar. 12 (PG 36, 229).

53 Ambr., off. 1.3,11 (CCL 15, 5).



disdain them as something worthless because they are a precious possession.”) The opposition *villis—pretiosus* (worthless—precious), has clear axiological connotation and serves to illustrate Ambrose’s poetic and often rich descriptions of human worth.

Another passage urging one to guard oneself, because of the value one possesses, reads: *Adtende tibi ipsi. Adtende tibi, pauper, quia anima tua pretiosa est.*<sup>54</sup> (“Guard yourself. Guard yourself, you who are poor, for your soul is precious.”) In a very similar passage Ambrose demands: *Adtende ergo tibi pauper, adtende dives; quia et in paupertate, et in divitiis tentamenta sunt.*<sup>55</sup> (“Therefore guard yourselves, you who are poor; guard yourselves, you who are rich; for both in poverty and in riches, trials await”).

These last remarks are developed in an egalitarian manner expressive of the Biblical principle repeated five times in similar forms in the New Testament: οὐκ ἔστι προσωπολήπτης ὁ Θεός.<sup>56</sup> Questioning the rationale of rank, position, and in general feature-related axiological judgements, the Apostle Paul famously proclaimed the universality of the Christian message and the egalitarianism of the Gospel: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>57</sup>

The early Christians lived by this egalitarian principle through the ages of persecution, which is visible in their practice of calling all people brothers and sisters.<sup>58</sup> This often led them to challenge the worldly ranks and hierarchies.

Minucius Felix criticized any pride derived from rank, calling it *vanus error hominis et inanis cultus dignitatis*<sup>59</sup> (“vain human error and worthless veneration of rank”). He argued: *omnes homines, sine dilectu aetatis, sexus, dignitatis, rationis et sensus capaces et habiles procreatos nec fortuna nactos, sed natura insitos esse sapientiam*<sup>60</sup> (“all humans, regardless of age, sex, and rank were procreated as capable of and apt for reason and understanding; they were not given by fate, but imprinted with wisdom by nature”). He thus appealed: *hominem nosse se et circumspicere debere, quid sit, unde sit, quare sit*<sup>61</sup> (“The human being ought to know and examine themselves, what they are, where they

54 Ambr., hex. 6.8,52 (CSEL 32/1, 243, linea 23).

55 Ambr., hex. 6.8,53 (CSEL 32/1, 245, linea 10).

56 Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Jas 2:1, 2:9; cf. Jude 1:16.

57 Gal 3:28 (NRSV-CE); cf. Mark 8:36.

58 B. Degórski, *Pojęcie brat w okresie prześladowań chrześcijan*, in: *Dissertationes Paulinorum* 30 (2021), 5–28.

59 Minuc., oct. 37.11 (BSGR 1982, 35, linea 28).

60 Minuc., oct. 16.5 (BSGR 1982, 13, lineae 1–3).

61 Minuc., oct. 17.1 (BSGR 1982, 13, linea 16).

come from, and how they are"). Minucius reached for the Stoic idea of virtue, which—according to him—Christianity exemplified best, and stressed: *omnes tamen pari sorte nascimur, sola virtute distinguimur*<sup>62</sup> ("we are, however, all born of the same rank, we are only distinguished by virtue"). Thus, he stressed, as free, human beings are correctly to be judged by their actions, not their rank (*actus hominis, non dignitas iudicatur*).<sup>63</sup> Even though Minucius expressed the idea of human inborn axiological status, justifying it on the basis of reason and understanding (*ratio et sensus*), which form a free mind (*mens libera*),<sup>64</sup> nowhere did he name this status *dignitas*.

Lactantius also upbraided the practice of respecting rank, compared to which there is, according to him, "nothing uglier, nothing more arrogant, nothing further from the course of wisdom" (*quo nihil foedius, nihil adrogantius, nihil a sapientiae ratione submotius*).<sup>65</sup> Instead, he proposed—arguably for the first time in Latin literature—thinking of *gradus dignitatis Deo iudice* (the level of dignity in God's judgement), thus formulating a novel meaning, *dignitas Christiana*.<sup>66</sup> This idea expressed an already existent notion of virtue as perceived by God, though interpreted by the standards of Christian ethics. Despite being novel and much more inclusive than *dignitas Romana*, this idea of *gradus dignitatis* is not yet an inherent, nor unconditional idea of a universal dignity of all humans, since it refers to an acquired excellence, one closer to the idea of virtue. The very idea of *gradus* suggests that this approach to *dignitas* is hierarchal.

Cyprian of Carthage, another early-third-century Christian apologist, expressed a view suggesting that the characteristic of nobility is more applicable to Christian confessors than to the worldly ranks of birth. Describing the nobility and glory of a group of prosecuted martyrs as greater than that of Roman patricians, he asked: *quanto maioris laudis et honoris est fieri in caelesti*

62 Minuc., oct. 37.10 (BSGR 1982, 35, linea 30).

63 Minuc., oct. 36.1 (BSGR 1982, 34, lineae 5–6).

64 Minuc., oct. 16.5 (BSGR, 13, linea 2: *ratio et sensus*) and 36.1 (BSGR 1982, 34, lineae 4–5: *mens libera*).

65 Lact., inst. 5.15,7, (CSEL 19, 448, linea 13). Cf. also other uses of the social meaning of *dignitas*: e.g., 1.20,6 (CSEL 19, 72, linea 21); 5.1,19 (CSEL 19, 401, linea 18); 5.11,8 (CSEL 19, 434, linea 17).

66 Lact., inst. 5.15,6 (CSEL 19, 448, linea 9: *gradus dignitatis Deo iudice*). Having followed a distinction between the noble (yet selective) *dignitas Christiana* and the universal and unconditional *dignitas hominis*, I agree with Volp's suggestion that Lactantius reinterpreted *dignitas Romana*; cf. Volp, 2006, 360: "Minucius Felix, Laktanz und Ambrosius verwenden den altrömischen dignitas-Begriff zunächst vor allem negativ, um das Neue des christlichen Wertekosmos auszudrücken [...]." Cf. also p. 219, where Volp comments again on the one use by Lactantius.

*praedicatione generosum*?<sup>67</sup> (“how much greater are the glory and honor of becoming noble by celestial proclamation?”). He compared this heavenly nobility (*generosi*) to the worldly nobility of birth inasmuch as it is passed on to offspring: *Ita aequaliter apud eos recurrit et com meat divina dignatio ut et illorum coronam dignitas subolis inlustret et huius gloriam sublimitas generis inluminet*<sup>68</sup> (“Equally among them runs and remains divine reputation so that the dignity of offspring illuminates the martyr’s crown and the sublimity of the martyr’s kind brightens the offspring’s glory”). Even though the remark is limited to a particular family of confessors, Cyprian appropriated the meaning of *dignitas Romana* in order to point to a different, Christian kind of hierarchy before God.

Still in the third century, the notion of dignity was also related to Christian martyrs by Novatian when corresponding with Cyprian.<sup>69</sup> Later, in the fourth century, the idea of the dignity of martyrdom (*dignitas martyrii*) is to be found in Lucifer of Cagliari’s writings, who quotes the biblical line “what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”<sup>70</sup> Significant figures such as Hilary of Poitiers and Philastrius, the Bishop of Brescia, also discussed Christian dignity, albeit from the eschatological perspective of the diverse dignities of the saved. Philastrius stressed that these dignities would vary due to the faith and works of particular people—hence, the saved would not live according to one kind of dignity (*non in uno modo dignitatis*)<sup>71</sup>—and the opinion of Ambrosiaster was similar.<sup>72</sup> Hilary pointed to the dignity of those who will forever sit at the God’s throne (*dignitas eorum qui in saeculum super sedem sessuri sunt*),<sup>73</sup> and likewise differentiated kinds among them.<sup>74</sup> Even though the new axiological order proposed by these early Christians introduces hierarchies, these are distinct from the one of the social order of *dignitas Romana*, and are based on the criterion of human choice, not circumstantial factors such as birth, wealth, or sex, which were favored by the Roman social order. In fact, Hilary himself proposed the rule expressive of this new approach when he wrote about the heritage of faith (*hereditas fidei*) among Christians and Old Testament figures: *Dignitas igitur originis in operum consistit exemplis* (“Dignity of the origin

67 Cypr., ep. 39.3 (CCL 3A, 583, linea 16).

68 Cypr., ep. 39.3 (CCL 3A, 583, lineae 18–23).

69 Novatian., ep. 30.4 (CCL 4, linea 111).

70 Lucif., moriend. 4 (CCL 8, linea 73).

71 Philastr., div. her. 150 (CCL 9, lineae 38–45).

72 Ambrosiast., ad Cor. 1.15,41,1, (CSEL 81/2, 179–180, lineae 22–26).

73 Hilar. Pict., psal. 131.23 (CCL 61B, 127, linea 1).

74 Hilar. Pict., psal. 64.5 (CCL 61, 227, linea 22).

consists in the examples of actions”),<sup>75</sup> not in the succession of blood or unity of flesh. Thus, the dignity of the origin, i.e., a nobility of particular people who once acted well, passes on a legacy of faith (*hereditas fidei*) to the later generations, who themselves maintain it by their own actions, whereas the succession of blood or bodily composition (*successio carnis*) is empty of such a legacy. This view would also be expressed in regard to the so-called “ecclesiastical dignities” by Jerome of Stridon, who reformulated a well-known Roman saying, *barba non facit philosophum*, that is, “the beard does not make a philosopher”, into a Christian motto that would later be included in canon law: *non facit ecclesiastica dignitas Christianum*<sup>76</sup> (“ecclesiastical office does not make a Christian”). Concluding these remarks on *dignitas Christiana*, let us add that Augustine of Hippo discussed the dignity of martyrs and made it a point that in the kingdom of God there would be “no deformation in them [scil. resulting from suffering they endured], only their dignity” (*Non enim deformitas in eis, sed dignitas erit*).<sup>77</sup> This thought would be appreciated and upheld in the late patristic period; for instance, by Julian of Toledo.<sup>78</sup>

Additionally, since Christianity—largely recruiting from the lower social classes—assumed that all people are equal in God’s eyes, the hierarchy of sanctity it proposed is built on this principle of equality, modifying it as to the outcome of human choices, not circumstantial factors. In *De agone christiano*, Augustine explicitly affirmed a view regarding an egalitarian and inclusive approach to human beings, which embraced the idea of common human vocation. The bishop of Hippo stressed that each human being is included in the hope of eternal life (*ad spem vitae aeternae commota est*), specifying that this extends to every man and woman (*et masculi et feminae*) of all ages (*omnis aetas*) and all worldly ranks (*omnis huius saeculi dignitas*).<sup>79</sup> This was particularly important for the debates over the doctrine of predestination (which was eventually dismissed). Augustine’s late writings on grace, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* and *De correptione et gratia*, evoked many debates, because the latter, for example, makes reference to the number of the predestined.<sup>80</sup> Regardless

75 Hilar. Pict., comm. in Matth. 2.3 (SCh 254, 106, linea 7). It is worth stressing here that Hilary talks about the dignity of the origins in the contexts of Sadducees and Pharisees, not of the origins of humankind.

76 Hier., ep. 14.9 (CSEL 54, 58, linea 3).

77 August., civ. 22.19 (CSEL 40/2, 631).

78 Iulianus Toletanus, progn. 3.22 (CCL 115, 96, lineae 9–12): *Non enim, ut idem doctor egregius ait, deformitas in eisdem corporibus, sed dignitas erit, et quaedam, quamvis in corpore, non corporis sed virtutis pulchritudo fulgebit.*

79 August., agon. 12.13 (CSEL 41, 117, linea 3).

80 August., corrept. 1.13,39 (CSEL 92, 267; PL 44, col. 940, linea 21): *Haec de his loquor, qui praedestinati sunt in regnum Dei, quorum ita certus est numerus, ut nec addatur eis*

of the debate over the implications of Augustine's account of grace, he certainly counts among the theoreticians to question divisions based on social standing. In time, the challenging of the Roman hierarchal axiological order and egalitarianism of mainstream Christianity would advance one step further and accommodate calling the universal human value *dignitas*.

Moreover, Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, who all discussed *dignitas Christiana*, also referred to the universal dignity of humankind. It is therefore evident that the discussion of specifically Christian dignity did not contradict the idea of universal human value, the egalitarianism of which is assumed in the New Testament.<sup>81</sup> Nor did *dignitas Christiana* replace *dignitas Romana*. The Christian authors simply challenged the Roman axiology and proposed an alternative one, the very idea of which helped to broaden the application of *dignitas* outside of the socially relevant idea of rank, and in this way contributed to the usage of this term in new contexts, particularly in the context of universal human value.

Ambrose expressed the egalitarian message contradicting *προσωπολήπτῃς* (that is, God's preference for people of nobility) when he wrote: *Omnibus in commune elementa donata sunt, patent aequae divitibus atque pauperibus ornamenta mundi*<sup>82</sup> ("Elements were given to all in common, the ornaments of the world are equally open to rich and poor") and *Domus Dei diviti est communis, et pauperi*<sup>83</sup> ("The house of God is common to rich and poor"). Significantly, the Latin Father, who used *dignitas* merely with the social meaning of rank or status, questioned the worldly hierarchies—as Cyprian did a century earlier. Interestingly, among these egalitarian remarks there is one pertaining to women specifically, urging them to remember their female dignity: *Provocantur feminae meminisse dignitatis suae et lactare filios suos*<sup>84</sup> ("Women are invited to remember their dignity and feed their children"). Even though a specific action of a woman is named, the maternal act of nurturing a child, the passage illustrates the inclusive message of the Christian writer who finds nobility

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*quisquam, nec minuat ex eis: non de his qui, cum annuntiasset et locutus esset, multiplicati sunt super numerum.*

81 Such a view is suggested by some commentators. *Dignitas Christiana* does not, however, exhaust ancient Christian views on dignity, which include a discussion of universal *dignitas hominis*. I will return to the discussion of such ideas in the conclusions contained in Chapter Six. The quoted ancient opinions demonstrate that interpreting *dignitas Christiana* to mean ecclesiastical office amounts to an unwarranted reduction.

82 Ambr., hex. 6.8,52.

83 Ibidem.

84 Ambr., Abr. 1.7,63 (CSEL 32/1, 543, linea 19).

in persons and conditions typically disregarded by Roman society. The case with other Christian writers who discuss, for instance, the dignity of widows is similar.<sup>85</sup>

Ambrose is, in fact, the one to have passed on to us the celebrated quotation of Saint Lawrence of Rome, who famously called the poor “the treasures of the Church.”<sup>86</sup> The Bishop of Milan described how, after capturing and killing Pope Sixtus II, the Roman emperor demanded that all the treasures of the Church be gathered and passed on to the Roman treasury. As a pope’s deacon, Lawrence was given three days to accomplish the task, and in this time he gathered all the goods and gave them away to the poor, whom he also asked to come together upon the emperor’s arrival on the third day. On that occasion, having been ordered to show all the Church’s treasures, Lawrence pointed at the gathered crowd and said: *Hi sunt thesauri Ecclesiae* (“They are the treasures of the Church”). He was subsequently martyred on August 10, 258. The remark, *Hi sunt thesauri Ecclesiae*, grew into a legend, and Lawrence became known as the patron of the poor.

The story, including Lawrence’s words as relayed by Ambrose verbatim, demonstrates the exemplary Christian approach to the poor, whom Jesus identifies with in the Gospels. Even if Lawrence’s exact historical gesture was not as spectacular, the fact that this history was transmitted in this way illustrates the early Christian efforts to redefine the traditional Roman axiological order in a way inclusive of social outcasts. Below, we shall say more about this and the related topic of Latin Christian stances regarding slavery, after completing the list of Ambrose’s calls to know one’s greatness.

Let us move on with the recapitulation of Ambrose’s calls to know oneself and one’s greatness. Both the Cappadocian Fathers’ commentaries on the concept of *imago Dei* and the Roman interpretation of γνῶθι σεαυτόν as *memento mori* put the emphasis on human finitude. According to Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, the contemplation of this finitude, specifically that of the fragile human embodiment, was to save the human creature from false pride. In a yet another version of the “know thyself” maxim, Ambrose repeated a passage from Basil’s homily by advising his listeners to be aware that they are dust and will turn into dust:<sup>87</sup>

85 Hilar. Pict., psal. 131.24 (CCL 61B, 128, linea 9): *Quanta viduarum dignitas est [...]*!

86 Ambr., off. 2.28,140–141 (CCL 15, 148).

87 Basil. Caes., att. t. i. 5 (PG 31, 212).

*Nonne tu ipse est cinis? Respice in sepulcra hominum, et vide quid ex te nisi cinis et ossa remanebunt, hoc est, ex corpore tuo: respice, inquam, et dic mihi, quis ibi dives, quis pauper sis?*<sup>88</sup>

Are you yourself not dust? Look in the graves of men and see what will remain of you if not dust and ashes, this is from your body; look, I say, and tell me, who is rich and poor?

Finally, when discussing the frailty of flowers, Ambrose developed a comparison between their structure and that of human creatures. Commenting on human self-knowledge, he metaphorically depicted it as a sweet pollen tube residing amidst petals. By identifying self-knowledge in the human conscience, he introduced a new aspect to the “know thyself” recommendations. He wrote: *In te ipso suavitas tuae gratiae est, ex te pullulat, in te manet, intus tibi inest, in te ipso quaerenda iocunditas tuae est conscientiae.*<sup>89</sup> (“In you yourself is the sweetness of your grace, out of you it grows, in you it remains, within you it is, in you yourself is the charm of your conscience, which you must search.”) This poetic fragment demonstrates a reinterpretation of self-knowledge, understood as an internal discernment between good and evil: the conscience. “Know thyself” is here interpreted as advice to discover one’s conscience.

Apart from formulating various calls for self-knowledge, Ambrose also developed a viewpoint regarding the conditions for self-knowledge. As he stated, *non possumus plenius nos cognoscere, nisi prius quae sit omnium natura animantium cognoverimus*<sup>90</sup> (“we cannot know ourselves more fully, if we do not firstly learn the nature of all living things”). He affirmed the anthropological vision which takes animal nature to be an integral element of human nature, and dedicated substantial parts of *Hexaemeron* to the discussion of various living forms. According to his view, all these descriptions of the animal world instruct humans regarding their own nature.

The remarks concerning knowing oneself, scattered all over *Hexaemeron*, demonstrate that Ambrose was syncretic in his interpretation of the ancient Delphic maxim. By developing a conception of self-knowledge that integrates Greek, Stoic, Old Testament and specifically Christian elements, the Latin Father showed both erudition and originality. Paradoxically, his conception is based on a thorough knowledge of the classical tradition, but brings the current elements into a new whole.

88 Ambr., hex. 6.8,51.

89 Ambr., hex. 3.12,49 (CSEL 32/1, 91, linea 20).

90 Ambr., hex. 6.2,3 (CSEL 32/1, 205, linea 19).

Ambrose knew classical Greek and Roman cultural codes, inclusive of *nosce te ipsum* maxims, and adjusted them to the axiological context. He read “know thyself” as meaning “know the beauty of the image of God”, “know your greatness”, “guard yourself against evil”, “know, especially if you are of a socially inferior position, about the equality of all human creatures”, “know the animal world of which you are a part”, and “know the sweetness of your conscience”. As such, Ambrose was an original re-interpreter of a tradition, a truly syncretic thinker who managed to turn the ancient Delphic maxim into an inscription that could well be inscribed at the forefront of the Church. After all, as a Roman citizen he knew very well that most of the churches standing on the *Forum Romanum* were built over the remains of pagan temples.

### 3.2.4 *Value of the Human Soul. Anima Pretiosa*

Ambrose presented his views on the soul in two chapters of the last book of *Hexaemeron*. Following the Scriptures, the Latin Father affirmed that Christ is the icon of God (*imago Dei*),<sup>91</sup> while all other human creatures are made *in* the image and likeness of God (*ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*).<sup>92</sup> He remained consistent in using the expression “in the image” only in reference to human creatures.<sup>93</sup> His stance can be counted among opinions expressive of indirect human iconicity, mediated by the perfect iconicity of the Son of God, a view that would soon be challenged by Ambrose’s own follower, Augustine of Hippo.

Ambrose recapitulated Basil’s remarks concerning the biblical plural form used in Genesis 26: “Let us make ...” in his *Hexaemeron*. Both the Fathers take the plural form to indicate the Trinitarian council of the divine persons when the human creature was being made.<sup>94</sup> Ambrose supplemented this view with an exegetic argument: since “the soul” is used in biblical language as a name for the entire human being, we are justified in interchanging the expressions “soul” and “human being”, so as to read Genesis 26 to mean that “God created the human *soul* in His image and likeness”.<sup>95</sup> In effect, it is the soul, not the body, that is the foundation of special human value, for one is mortal, the other eternal (*caro mortalis, diuturna anima*).<sup>96</sup> Ambrose had other arguments at hand: “the image is alike God. God is invisible, therefore the image is invisible as well”

91 Ambr., hex. 2.5,19 (CSEL 32/1, 57, linea 22): *Imago est enim invisibilis Dei filius*.

92 Col 1:15: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (NRSV-CE).

93 Ambr., hex. 3.7,31–32 (CSEL 32/1, 80); 5.12,41 (CSEL 32/1, 173); 6.7,40–46 (CSEL 32/1, 231–235).

94 Ambr., hex. 3.7,3; 6.7,40–41.

95 Ambr., hex. 6.8,46 (CSEL 32/1, 237, lineae 5–6): *Et multo aptius anima vel homo Latine vel Graece ἀνθρώπος dicitur [...]*.

96 Ambr., hex. 6.8,52 (CSEL 32/1, 243, linea 23).



(*Qualis ergo Deus, talis et imago. Invisibilis Deus, etiam imago invisibilis*).<sup>97</sup> His views on the soul are therefore fully consistent with those of Basil.

Regarding the soul, we should add that by stating that an image can be deposed (*deponere*), Ambrose expressed a dynamic view of human iconicity. The criterion determining this change of the soul's image is sin, while the indicator increasing the image's beauty is called "following God's works, grace and paternal nature." These criteria allow us to identify a functional conception of similarity to the archetype. Regarding iconicity, Ambrose disqualified the conception of human direct Trinitarian iconicity based on an exegetic argumentation. We can thus identify a conception of the indirect iconicity and the functional and dynamic similarity to the archetype in Ambrose's writings, a traditional view for the Greek Eastern patristic thinkers Ambrose so admired.

### 3.2.5 *Value of Human Body. Corpus Praestantius*

Following Basil, Ambrose paid a great deal of attention to various living creatures, describing their activities and drawing spiritual advice from their function or structure. He assumed we cannot "fully know ourselves, if we do not firstly learn the nature of all livings things." He did not, however, develop a purely biological analysis of the created world, but rather used the biological observations to draw spiritual and moralistic conclusions for his listeners. Observing the horizontal posture of animals, for example, he advised his listeners not to bend down like cattle, although not in their bodies but in desire, thereby succumbing to passions (*Cave, o homo, pecorum more curvari, cave in alvum te non tam corpore quam cupiditate deflectas*).<sup>98</sup> This allowed him to formulate a rhetorical question of axiological relevance: *Cur inlecebris corporalibus deditus ipsum te inhonoras, dum ventri atque eius passionibus servis?*<sup>99</sup> ("Why do you dishonor yourself by surrendering to corporal lust, while a slave of the stomach and your passions?") Such remarks, drawn from observations of animal life, make up a definitive proportion of the ninth homily, which is modelled after Basil's extensive commentary on the animal kingdom.<sup>100</sup> Even though the Latin Father remained interested in human corporality, he fully agreed with the Cappadocian Fathers' view in identifying human iconicity within the soul alone.<sup>101</sup>

97 Ambr., hex. 1.5,19 (CSEL 32/1, 15, lineae 18–19).

98 Ambr., hex. 6.10,3 (CSEL 32/1, 210, linea 7).

99 Ambr., hex. 6.10,3 (CSEL 32/1, 210, linea 14).

100 Ambr., hex. 6.3–6 (CSEL 32/1, 209–231).

101 Ambr., hex. 6.9 (CSEL 32/1, 246–260).

Ambrose conceived of the human body an image of the world (*instar mundi*), which illustrates the popularity of microcosmic analogies in late ancient anthropologies.<sup>102</sup> His perspective stresses the fundamental character of a microcosmic analogy: *Ac primum omnium cognoscamus humani corporis fabricam instar esse mundi*<sup>103</sup> (“First of all, let us recognize that the fabric of the human body is an image of the world”).

Ambrose’s theory of microcosm drew the analogy to the parts of cosmos (the sky, planets, stars etc.) rather than to Galen’s four elements (air, water, fire, earth). He compared, for example, the human head to the sky towering over the world, two eyes to the sun and moon illuminating the world, human hair to treetops protecting the precious fruit growing on the branches, and so on.

Although there was criticism of the microcosmic theories among the Cappadocian Fathers, and in particular by Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose did not abandon the ancient idea. As we remember, Gregory stated in the sixteenth chapter of his *De officio hominis* that being the microcosm is the property of animals and bugs such a mouse and a mosquito, and as such it is not expressive of unique human value. Ambrose, however, followed Basil and Gregory himself in stressing the human body’s distinction, while ignoring Gregory’s objection to the term “microcosm,” possibly because *De officio hominis* presents a rather limited understanding of this notion as a combination of four elements.<sup>104</sup>

The Latin *Hexaameron* stresses that the human body is more excellent in honor and grace than that of all other beings (*praestantius ceteris decore et gratia*).<sup>105</sup> Ambrose explained his awe for human corporeality with detailed descriptions. He presented the top of the head, for example, as sweet and pleasing (*suaavis et gratus*), as are locks of human hair.<sup>106</sup> As an object carved by the divine Artisan, the human body should not, therefore, be improved by human efforts—for, the bishop asks rhetorically, which inferior artisans could rival the Creator? Interestingly, Ambrose thus advises women not to wear make-up, and

102 On microcosmic theories, cf. J. Kielbasa, *Człowiek jako mikrokosmos w myśli średniowiecza*, in: M. Karas (ed.), *Historia filozofii: Meandry kultury*, Cracow 2014, 145–158; J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Człowiek jako mały świat: Filon z Aleksandrii, Nemezjusz z Emezy, Grzegorz z Nyssy, Edyta Stein. Czy mikrokosmiczność uchybia godności człowieka?*, in: J. Machnac (ed.), *Edyta Stein: Fenomenologia getyińsko-monachijska*, Wrocław 2016, 13–22; J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *The Origins of the Concept of Microcosm*, in: ead., 2019, 155–163.

103 Ambr., hex. 6.9.55 (CSEL 32/1, 246, linea 15).

104 Guerrero van der Meijden, 2016, 13–22.

105 Ambr., hex. 6.9.54 (CSEL 32/1, 246, linea 7). Cf. the title of the ninth chapter: *De corporis humani praestantia* [...].

106 Ambr., hex. 6.9.5.6 (CSEL 32/1, 247, linea 22).

all human beings in general not to enter into competition with God by reshaping their bodies on their own.

Ambrose's admiration for human corporality is a repeated theme, also affirmed; for instance, in *De officiis ministrorum*, where Ambrose describes humanity's beautiful appearance (*optima species*) and the fine composition of human body parts (*bona membrorum compositione*), as well as the received decency of redemption (*decorum redemptionis humanae*).<sup>107</sup> It is worth adding that Ambrose never used *dignitas* in relation to human body, even though it carries an aesthetic meaning defined by Cicero in his *De officiis*, and was once used in this sense by Tertullian (*dignitas carnis*).<sup>108</sup>

Despite observing the excellence of the human body, and in a way very much in accordance with the views of the Cappadocian Fathers, Ambrose openly rejected the idea that human iconicity could pertain to the body, which is less fit in many ways than an animal's body.<sup>109</sup> This is why he formulated the *memento mori* message we discussed above: the human body will turn into ashes. Contemplating this fact helps human beings to remain humble.

### 3.2.6 *The Beauty of Human Life*

Although axiology traditionally focuses on the ontology of a human being, it is not without relevance that in his *De officiis ministrorum*, modelled after Cicero's *De officiis*, Ambrose discussed the beauty, grace, respectability, distinction, decency, propriety, etc., of human life. His remarks intertwine the normative problem of how human life ought to be led with the descriptive topic of the beauty or ugliness of life itself. None of these include the use of *dignitas hominis*, but instead display a variety of Latin axiologically-tinted concepts familiar in ancient ethics: *pulchritudo*, *decorum*, *decus*, *honestas*, *valetudo*, *venustas*.<sup>110</sup> They are all related to human life. The example of Ambrose's *De officiis ministrorum* is particularly significant for the understanding of the historical inspirations behind the popularization of *dignitas hominis* as an anthropological category; specifically, Cicero's influence. We address these issues shortly in the section dedicated to Jerome and extensively in Chapter Six, but we can already indicate that Cicero's *De officiis* did not inspire Ambrose to use the category *dignitas hominis* in his text.

107 Ambr., off. 1.452,21 (CCL 15, 81, lineae 28–32).

108 Cic., off. 1.130 (LCL 30, 130–132); Tert., res. 5.2 (CCL 2, 926, linea 14: *dignitas carnis*). On Tertullian's idea of *dignitas carnis*, cf. M. Wysocki, *Godność ludzkiego ciała w dziele Tertuliana "O zmartwychwstaniu ciała"*—wybrane fragmenty, in: *Forum Teologiczne* 10 (2019), 215–228.

109 Ambr., hex. 6.8,44–45.

110 Ambr., off. 1.45–46 (CCL 15, 81–82).

One chapter of Ambrose's *De officiis ministrorum* analyses the meaning of decency (*decorum*) and identifies the general decency (*decorum generale*) in human life led according to the demands of morality such as universal righteousness (*honestas universalis*) and particular decency (*decorum speciale*) in acts of preeminent virtue (*virtus praeeminens*).<sup>111</sup> Decent and beautiful life is further defined, in rather Stoic terms, by living according to nature (*secundum naturam vivere*) and contrasted with the ugly life which is seen as violating nature (*turpe est quod sit contra naturam*).<sup>112</sup> Ambrose additionally develops the idea of harmony of life by showing the interconnection between what is righteous and the qualities of well-being, distinction, grace or beauty (*honestas velut bona valetudo est [...], decus autem venustas et pulchritudo*).<sup>113</sup> This description of human life has clear axiological connotations and demonstrates the classical idea of explaining the ethical through the esthetic. Ambrose is hence a great example of verbalizing the idea of the value of human life through classical Roman categories such as *decorum*, *honestas*, *valetudo* and *pulchritudo*. Among these, *dignitas* plays a marginal role.

### 3.2.7 *Dignitas Christiana. Habet et Christianus Dignitatem Suam*

Having discussed Ambrose's axiology of the human being and human life, which make little use of the category of human dignity, we can now turn to show how the Latin Father used *dignitas*. There is one passage in Ambrose's homilies on Psalm 118 which offers a unique ancient commentary on the noun *dignitas*. This provides evidence that, for a Roman citizen in the fourth century, *dignitas* primarily carried the social meaning of rank or office, which we call *dignitas Romana*. Ambrose elaborates on this meaning, adjusting it to the reality of Christians and identifying specifically Christian nobilities. As he wrote, *habet et Christianus dignitatem suam, qui tanto imperatori militat*<sup>114</sup> (“[...] a Christian who fights for so great a ruler also has their own dignity”).

The passage, which starts with a reference to Greek ἀξιωμα and lists *dignitates Christianae*, names a number of ranks as well as persons performing these offices, calling both *dignitates*. The latter marks a rare personal use of *dignitas*, which developed from the classical meaning of rank or office and which came to mean a dignitary. Ambrose recalls a situation where someone needed to plead to a king and searched for a representative among the *dignitates* (dignitaries) at the court, who are organized according to *ordo dignitatum* (hierarchy

111 Ambr., off. 1.46,222 (CCL 15, 82, lineae 2–8).

112 Ambr., off. 1.46,223 (CCL 15, 82, lineae 9–10).

113 Ambr., off. 1.45,220 (CCL 15, 81, lineae 9–10).

114 Ambr., psal. 118,22,14 (CSEL 62, 495, linea 22).

of rank). He develops a comparison, suggesting that Christians likewise have “ranks of faith” (*dignitates fidei*) which he also calls “honors” (*honores*), and which are organized according to true and great *ordines Christi* (Christ’s orders).<sup>115</sup>

The first of such ranks pertains to the servants, or those who assist in the Church (*administrantes*): firstly apostles, secondly prophets, and thirdly teachers. The second type of dignities are found among the regular members of the Church (*privati*), specifically those who follow the tenets of piety, justice, sobriety, chastity, and obedience (*pietas, iustitia, sobrietas, castimonia, disciplina*). The third type of dignitaries are the dignitaries of prayer (*dignitates orationis*), who ask for the sake of others and whose prayer enters the kingdom of God. The practice of intercession resembles the practice of worldly dignitaries pleading for those who do not belong to the court themselves.<sup>116</sup>

This interesting comparison builds on the classical meaning of *dignitas* as a rank or office, which is visible in the characteristic expression *ordo dignitatis*, hierarchy of rank. By adjusting the notion to the reality of Christian faith (*ordo fidei*), Ambrose alters it to fit the message of the Gospel. He names dignitaries other than the clergy, and creates a hierarchy based on the criterion of virtue, recruited from the regular faithful. This passage illustrates not only the classical use of *dignitas* in late antiquity, but also a tactic for proclaiming the Gospel: making full use of the potential of current reality by adjusting it to the Christian message. Instead of revolutionizing or condemning Roman social practices, like Lactantius, Ambrose puts them to creative use, making his message relatable and yet new.

### 3.2.8 Conclusions

In none of these passages, including those pertaining to human superiority over creation, does Ambrose employ the anthropological meaning of *dignitas*. In fact, the entire *Hexaemeron* only uses the word in the chapter dedicated to the primitive state, employing the social sense of *dignitas* as office.<sup>117</sup> His neglect of the anthropological sense of the word is apparent in the most axiologically relevant passages of *Hexaemeron* and *De officiis ministrorum*, in which he urges human beings to recognize their own greatness. Even though Ambrose only uses the classical meaning relating to social positions (*dignitas Romana*), he openly contradicts the value of axiological hierarchies built on the criterion of worldly honors. Such a criterion is based on factors circumstantial to human

115 Ambr., psal. 118.22,14–15 (CSEL 62, 495–496).

116 Ambr., psal. 118.22,15 (CSEL 62, 495–496, lineae 24–5 [lines across two pages]).

117 Ambr., hex. 5.15,52 (CSEL 32/1, 178, lineae 23–24; 179, linea 8).

choices, whereas the hierarchy Ambrose of Milan proposed is based on human free effort in being good people.

Ambrose's use of *dignitas* allows us to formulate *argumentum ex silentio*, suggesting that in the fourth century the anthropological sense of *dignitas* was not predominant, nor did *dignitas* function as a common anthropological category of human axiological status. This demonstrates that a change was about to take place in European culture, which eventually favored *dignitas* as an anthropological-axiological category.

As I will argue, the watershed occurred in the fifth century. Ambrose's (but also Hilary of Poitiers') writing helps us to identify the period in which anthropology lacked clear axiological terminology, but his role in the history of human dignity is not merely that. As a Roman aristocrat fluent in Greek, Ambrose was a keen reader of Basil of Caesarea, whose call to know one's dignity he reproduced a number of times in an original manner. The rhetorically compelling form of an imperative applied to human axiology thus became a tradition which was to be practiced throughout the centuries to come.

Ambrose also offered a repetition of the Cappadocian view of the soul taken to be the self and the image of God, as well as the Eastern praise of the human body, an image of the world. On top of that, he altered the ancient social idea of rank (*dignitates Romanae*) to fit a conception of Christian ranks (*dignitates Christianae*) by describing not the idea of the hierarchies of clergy, but a spiritual order among the faithful, achieving greater levels of sanctity.

### 3.3 Chromatius of Aquileia

Chromatius, a Bishop of Aquileia, is a unique figure in the history of the Golden Age of the Patristic Era due to his exceptional role in relation to the most significant Christian writers of that time, whom he urged to produce substantial works and translations, sometimes aiding them financially in their efforts. He significantly influenced the lives and works of Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon, Rufinus of Aquileia, Augustine of Hippo, and John Chrysostom, all protagonists of the history of human dignity. Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* was translated into Latin in 401 by Rufinus on Chromatius' request (which why it is dedicated to him), as were a number of Jerome's translations, some with Chromatius' financial help. Chromatius shared the translation tactics used by Jerome, and defended the monk against accusations concerning his unholy interest in the Hebrew language, which why it is justified to say we owe the completion of Vulgate partially to Chromatius. Rufinus' translation of Origen's homilies of Joshua are dedicated to Chromatius, as are Jerome's

commentaries to *The Book of Tobias, Habakkuk* and *Jonah*. Rufinus also chose to receive baptism from Chromatius, and, following a very critical reception of the translation of *De principiis*, sought refuge with him. Jerome, who would become an authority on monastic and ascetic life, joined a proto-ascetic community of Chromatius' family for three years, between 369–372, and so did Rufinus, who met Jerome in this community.<sup>118</sup> Ambrose of Milan was requested by Chromatius to explain the prophecy of Balaam in an epistolary form, and they remained in correspondence for years, as did Augustine of Hippo and Chromatius.<sup>119</sup> Finally, John Chrysostom received Chromatius' protection, expressed in a letter addressed to the emperor by Chromatius, after Chrysostom was deposed in 404. It was also Chromatius who tried to reconcile Jerome and Rufinus when they were entangled in the most scandalous quarrel of the fourth century among Christian authorities.<sup>120</sup>

All this demonstrates that Chromatius was a central figure in the Christian intellectual circles of the fourth century. What is more, his writings, specifically his *Sermon of the beatitudes*, influenced a later Pope, Leo the Great.<sup>121</sup>

Chromatius employed *dignitas* in a social sense only, although at times critically. In a number of instances, Chromatius used the expressions *honores vel dignitates saeculi*,<sup>122</sup> *dignitas regis*,<sup>123</sup> *dignitas ecclesiae*,<sup>124</sup> and *dignitates saeculares*.<sup>125</sup> Similarly to Ambrose, however, Chromatius redefined the logic of worldly honors in the light of the evangelical principle of equality, and it is worthwhile analyzing this use.

One of his treatises on Matthew's Gospel contains criticism of worldly ranks in a commentary to the blessing of "the poor in spirit": *Unde ille apud Deum sicut diximus potior est, non quem nobilitas generis vel dignitas saeculi, sed quem devotio fidei Deo et sancta vita commendat*.<sup>126</sup> ("Therein, as we said,

118 Ruf., apol. 1.4.

119 Ambrose of Milan, ep. 50.

120 Benedict XVI, *Saint Chromatius of Aquileia*, in: id., *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine*, San Francisco 2008, 155–160; T.P. Scheck, *Life and Career of Chromatius of Aquileia*, in: *Chromatius of Aquileia: Sermons and Tractates on Matthew* (T.P. Scheck trans.), New York 2018, 289–362 (loc. e-book); M. Starowieyski, *Chromacjusz*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 241–242; B. Studer, *Chromatius of Aquileia*, in: Di Bernardino (ed.), 1991, 572–574.

121 C. Cerami, *Le beatitudini in Cromazio d'Aquileia e Leone Magno*, in: *Laurentianum* 59 (2018), 399–423.

122 Chromat., serm. 2.4 (CCL 9A, 9, linea 53).

123 Chromat., serm. 23.3 (CCL 9A, 106, linea 81); id., Mat. 1.1 (CCL 9A, 193, linea 24).

124 Chromat., Mat. 57.78 (CCL 9A, 485, linea 78).

125 Chromat., serm. 41.3 (CCL 9A, 177, lineae 73–74).

126 Chromat., Mat. 57.3 (CCL 9A, 485, lineae 82–83).

they are more capable before God who are commended by piety of faith in God and the sanctity of life, not by family nobility or a generation's dignity.") This is why, according to Chromatius, Jesus warns His disciples not to disregard any of "those small ones", for they are precious in God's eyes. Chromatius also discussed the societal phenomenon of praising those of higher social standing. He clarified that it is rather those who seek peace that are of dignity: *Magna dignitas paci studentium, cum filiorum Dei appellatione censentur*.<sup>127</sup> ("Great is the dignity of those seeking peace, for they joined the ranks of God's sons.") Similar to the previous quotation, Chromatius stressed the new kind of order that disregards the ancient hierarchy of ranks built on the criteria of social standing. Instead, he proposed an egalitarian approach to people who form new orders and hierarchies on the basis of their achievements in promoting virtue—in this case, peacemaking—in the world.

Neither of these uses pertains to universal human dignity, yet both question the rationale of worldly ranks and promote an alternative kind of axiological order—a practice we already discussed in case of Minucius Felix, Lactantius, Cyprian of Carthage, Novatian, Hilary of Poitiers, Philastrius, Ambrosiaster, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, and Jerome of Stridon. Likewise, Chromatius' message contributed to an axiological reflection built on different criteria than social standing.

### 3.4 Jerome of Stridon

Given that it was Jerome who edited and corrected the existent Latin version of the Bible (*Vetus Latina*), as well as translating the missing parts of the Bible, which became available in its entirety for Latin readers after his work, he is likely to have been one of the most linguistically influential intellectuals in the history of Christianity. Yet the Vulgate, relevant passages of which I discuss below, is not the groundbreaking text of Jerome in the history of human dignity. The innovative anthropological uses of *dignitas*, such as a repeated phrase, *dignitas hominis*, placed within an imperative of self-knowledge, occur in his homilies to the Psalms prepared between 389–410, when he was residing in Bethlehem.<sup>128</sup> Although it is no surprise that another Christian author expressed an appeal to know one's dignity, Jerome's text stands out as the first to coin, use, and repeat the phrase *dignitas hominis* as a universal

<sup>127</sup> Chromat., serm. 41.7 (CCL 9A, 178, lineae 112–113).

<sup>128</sup> A. Capone, *Introduzione*, 14 in: id. (ed.), Hieronymus, *Tractatus 59 in psalmos (1–115). Homilia in psalmum 41 ad neophytos*, Rome 2018.



anthropological-axiological category.<sup>129</sup> The text is unique as to its conceptualization of human dignity and the form of the appeals he formulated—a form most unlike the ones by Basil, Ambrose, and, later, Leo the Great. Despite this important contribution to the understanding of the notion of human dignity, Jerome's appeal has never played a role in the history of the concept. In the present attempt, we analyze the relevant passages of the homilies on the Psalms and supplement them with a consideration of the relevant passages of the Vulgate as well as Jerome's letters.

### 3.4.1 *Jerome's Homilies on the Psalms*

Jerome's homilies on the Psalms have been historically ascribed to both Origen and Jerome, yet the discoveries of the past decade dispel the doubts related to Jerome's authorship. The publisher of the critical edition of the homilies from 1958 presented them as Jerome's work, following Germain Morin's findings, who at the end of the nineteenth century carried out scrupulous manuscript research and who in 1897 and 1903 published the texts under Jerome's name in Oxford.<sup>130</sup> In the late 1970s and early 1980s, some studies challenged the authorship by arguing that it was merely Jerome's translation and edition of Origen's homilies.<sup>131</sup> The ambiguity was increased by the fact that the time of preparation of the texts by Jerome coincides with the Origenist Crisis, in which Jerome played an important role. This led to one translation of the critical volume being published with both Origen and Jerome listed as the authors.<sup>132</sup> Most unexpectedly, Origen's lost Greek homilies of the psalms 15, 36, 67, 73–77, 80, and 81 were discovered in 2012 in Munich, which provided sufficient grounds for attribution of the Latin volume to Jerome alone, even

129 I have first described this use in: J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Utworzenie kategorii godności człowieka (dignitas hominis) przez Hieronima ze Strydonu*, in: *Vox Patrum* 87 (2023), 135–154. Selected parts from this chapter are identical to the contents of the Polish article.

130 G. Morin (ed.), *Jerome of Stridon, Tractatus LIX in psalmos*, CCL 78, Turnhout 1958. Previously published as: Jerome of Stridon, *Tractatus sive homiliae in psalmos, in Marci evangelium aliaque varia argumenta*, Oxford 1897, 1–316, and *Tractatus novissime reperti*, Oxford 1903, 1–94. Before Morin's work on the psalms, the texts were part of PL 26 (published in 1845).

131 V. Peri, *Omeliie origeniane sui Salmi: Contributo all'identificazione del testo latino*, Vatican 1980; id., *'Corruptores immo corruptores': Un saggio di critica testuale nella Roma del XII secolo*, in: *IMU* 20 (1977), 19–125.

132 Orygenes / Hieronim, *Homilie o księdze psalmów* (St. Kalinkowski trans.), Cracow 2004. In his introduction to this volume, Adam Bandura provides arguments for treating Origen as an author and Jerome as merely a translator and editor.

though he clearly consulted Origen's text and took much from it.<sup>133</sup> The newest two-volume critical edition of the homilies therefore found the older arguments presented in favor of Origen's authorship to be invalid.

The text was prepared by Jerome between 389–410, first possibly in the confinement of his legendary cave in Bethlehem, and later in a cloister established near to the Basilica of the Nativity.<sup>134</sup> The homilies were later publicly preached.<sup>135</sup> In Trier, where Jerome traveled after his education, he copied Hilary of Poitiers's *Tractatus super psalmos*, which in his opinion relied heavily on Origen's commentary.<sup>136</sup> Jerome's homilies also follow in Origen's footsteps, yet the historically groundbreaking category *dignitas hominis* does not have an equivalent in the Alexandrian commentator's text. The Latin homilies contain a number of significant claims about *dignitas hominis*, its use as an anthropological category, and two appeals to know one's dignity.

#### 3.4.1.1 Human Dignity: *Vide Hominis Dignitatem*

To start with, at the beginning of the homily on Psalm 81 (in today's editions it is Psalm 82, due to Septuagint's division of Psalm 9 into two), written around the year 397, Jerome formulated an imperative ordering his listeners to observe human dignity.<sup>137</sup> The call is very laconic, for it reads: *Vide hominis dignitatem*<sup>138</sup> ("Observe human dignity"). The suggestion was prompted by a discussion of the way human beings are treated by God. According to the Scriptures, in particular the first line of the psalm being discussed, God stands in the presence of human gatherings, although at times he also walks, sits or sleeps. According to Jerome, all these postures are indicative of God's attitude towards humans: walking indicates that God follows the human being after they sinned and parted from Him; sitting indicates God's power of judgement; sleeping

133 Capone, 2018, 9–23; A. Capone (ed.), *Hieronymus, Tractatus 59 in psalmos (119–149). Tractatus in psalmos series altera*, Rome 2018; Perrone / Molin Pradel / Prinziavalli / Cacciari (eds.), 2015; J.W. Trigg, *Introduction*, in: Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on the Psalms: Codex Monacensis Graecus 314* (J.W. Trigg trans.), Washington 2020, 3–5; L. Perrone, *Discovering Origen's Lost Homilies on the Psalms*, in: Piscitelli (ed.), 2012 19–46.

134 On Jerome's cave in Bethlehem, cf. J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Oxford Archeological Guide to the Holy Land*, Oxford 2008, 233. On the monasteries in Bethlehem and Jerome's life in them, cf. J. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies*, New York 1975, 129–130.

135 Capone, 2018, 12–14.

136 Hier., vir. ill. 100 (CSEA VI/1, 364, lineae 1264–1268).

137 G. Stefanelli, *Cristiani, giudei e pagani: lessico, esegesi e polemica nei Tractatus in Psalmos di Girolamo*, in: Aug. 57 (2017), 81–104; Capone, 2018, 13. Even though Capone describes many uncertainties concerning the dating of Jerome's commentary to the psalms, he is quite certain about the homily on Psalm 81.

138 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.1 (HO 9/1, 230).

indicates that God tests the human beings while they pray with no evident result. The fact that God *stands* among the human council is indicative of His high respect for the human creatures, which prompts Jerome to urge his listeners: “Observe human dignity.” It is, therefore, the respect shown to the human creature by God that explains human dignity.

Such a justification of dignity refers neither to human creation, nor to the incarnation, but instead accentuates the respect with which the human being is treated by God. When commenting on the first line of Psalm 81, Origen discusses the purpose of human life as consisting in sharing divine life and becoming a god.<sup>139</sup> His homily describes humanity’s exceptional axiology by means of describing human deification, yet does not formulate an appeal to observe human dignity. Instead, the dignity-related terminology of his homily utilizes a sociological meaning of dignity, when Origen describes various ways in which the king honors distinguished people.<sup>140</sup> These remarks might have been inspirational for Jerome, for they reference the idea of respect, yet the very appeal and category of human dignity do not originate in the Greek philosopher’s text.

Also, as we remember, in his dignitarian formula, Athanasius justified human dignity by the indignity Christ endured because of God’s kindness towards the human creature (φιλανθρωπία). Athanasius’ Greek notion of kindness, arguably implicitly entailing the idea of respect, referred, nonetheless, to incarnation. Hilary of Poitiers followed in these footsteps, justifying human nobility by incarnation. Basil founded human value on the price paid for the human creature by God during the redemptive act. Gregory of Nazianzus sought the bases for human dignity in the microcosmic nature resulting from incarnation and in iconicity; Gregory of Nyssa referenced anthropocentric finalism; John Chrysostom identified the foundation of human dignity in reason; and Nemesius of Emesa in microcosm, the creation of the universe for humans’ sake only, as well as incarnation. Ambrose linked human greatness with the beauty of the human soul, iconicity and being God’s glory. It was Jerome who singled out God’s respect as a main justification of human axiological status.

The linkage between dignity and respect remains a surprisingly modern idea, one familiar in contemporary European culture, which views dignity as demanding respect. The idea that dignity is revealed by the way the human creature is treated also draws on a classical meaning of dignity seen as an

139 Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 510–511, lineae 5–15).

140 Or., in ps. 81.2 (GCS 19, 513, lineae 7–9): Καὶ ὡσπερ ἐὰν βασιλεὺς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἰλαρᾷ βούληται ἕκαστον ἀμείψασθαι τῶν ἀξίων τιμῆς, τοιοῦτον κυρίως οὐκ ἂν “κρίσιν” ἀλλὰ “διάκρισιν” ὀνομάζομεν [...].

honorable office or rank. The honor of being met with God's standing attitude naturally reveals the rank of a creature treated with such an honor.

Significantly, Jerome confirmed the idea that divine respect relates to the actual value of the human creature. The first verse of Psalm 81 discusses God standing among "gods," which Jerome interprets as meaning "humans." In response to referring to human beings as "gods," Jerome explicates that the human beings were given not only the title, but also its merit. This merit is, presumably, the mentioned human dignity, *dignitas hominis*.

The very same homily discusses, additionally, the universality of the mentioned dignity of "gods" among whom God stands, and introduces also a notion of the dignity of sons of God. The expression "sons of God" might at first glance sound as if it is limited in scope (for example, restricted only to Christians or only to men), but it is explicitly related by Jerome to all human beings (*omnes*). The sixth line of Psalm 81 states: *dii estis, et filii Excelsi omnes*,<sup>141</sup> "You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you," and Jerome confirms the egalitarianism of this remark by explaining that "all of you" (*omnes*) means all who equally (*aequaliter*) have a body, soul, and spirit (*corpus, anima, spiritus*), and who were equally offered divinity and adoption by God to become his children (*donavit et deitatem et adoptionem*).<sup>142</sup> This phrasing is indicative of Origen's anthropology, which utilizes the threefold conception of the human being, comprising body, soul, and spirit, including in *Homily on Psalm 81*.<sup>143</sup> Finalizing his universalistic and egalitarian message, Jerome confirms that all humans, rulers and the poor alike (*et imperatores et pauperes*), are born, and all equally succumb to death. From this, we see that they all partake in God's divinity and in being adopted by Him. The paragraph thus formulates another dignity-related cognitive imperative: *Videte quanta sit dignitas: et dii vocamur, et filii*<sup>144</sup> ("Notice how great is our dignity: we are called gods and sons"). The egalitarianism of this message is additionally confirmed in the passage's conclusion: *Aequalis enim conditio est*<sup>145</sup> ("Equal is our condition").

Finally, the text of the homily on Psalm 81 incorporates a part of the Greek exchange formula, which we discussed in Chapter Two, as well as other Greek-inspired ideas. Following in Origen's footsteps, Jerome argues that God created human beings so that they could become gods: *Propterea feci hominem,*

141 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.1 (HO 9/1, 234).

142 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.6 (HO 9/1, 234).

143 Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 512, linea 8). Cf. J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *The Three Dimensions of a Human Being: Origen*, in: Guerrero van der Meijden, 2019, 88. The chapter lists the threefold anthropological models among the Church Fathers.

144 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.6 (HO 9/1, 234).

145 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.6 (HO 9/1, 234).

*ut de hominibus dii fiant*.<sup>146</sup> This comment serves as explanation of the title of “gods” bestowed upon human beings, and Jerome’s use of the exchange formula suggests that deification is not understood literally by him, but classically, as the glorification of human nature, which remains in possession of its human identity in the state of glory.

Additionally, Jerome remains Greek-inspired when he supplements the dignifying description of a human being with a mention of human finitude. This finitude on one hand justifies the mentioned equality of human beings, since—as he states—we all die. On the other, it stands in contradiction of human divinity, for—as he reasons on grounds of common sense—“gods” do not die. Inasmuch as humans are to become divine, they are immortal; yet, due to sin, they must temporarily suffer the consequence of original sin that makes them mortal in this world.<sup>147</sup> Such remarks place Jerome in line with the Greek Fathers, who complemented the recognition of human dignity with a message of humility, as did, for example, Ambrose of Milan.

Jerome’s two imperatives provide important evidence of applying the phrase “human dignity,” *dignitas hominis*, as an anthropological category—possibly, for the first time in European history. Jerome began his work on psalms in 389, and the research on the homily on Psalm 81 is still scarce—further studies may indicate the commentary was as written earlier than 397. As we shall see, shortly before or at the same time (the third book of *De libero arbitrio* was completed in 395), Augustine used the notion *dignitas naturae*, applying it to various natures (not just human) and concepts such as *dignitas humana* appear in his much later writings, written long after Jerome came up with the idea of *dignitas hominis*. Even though Jerome’s inspirations were largely Greek, in relation to this original category, the source of the exact phrase cannot be recognized in Origen’s homily on Psalm 81. Origen’s homily offers a discussion of human divination and repeatedly calls human beings “gods”; yet does not coin any name for human axiological status.<sup>148</sup> It was Jerome who, prompted by an observation about the respect paid by God to humans, formulated the original exclamation: “Observe human dignity!” Soon after this use, the phrasing *dignitas imaginis* was employed by Rufinus of Aquileia in a translation of Origen’s *De principiis*.<sup>149</sup>

Much, of course, has been written on Jerome’s complex and personally tragic relationship to the classical heritage, primarily Ciceronian. When writing

146 Hier, trac. in ps. 81.6 (HO 9/1, 234).

147 Hier, trac. in ps. 81.7.

148 Or., in ps. 81.1–2.

149 Or., princ. 3.6.1 (GCS 22, 280, lineae 12 and 15).

homilies on the Psalms in Bethlehem, Jerome's interests lay primarily in the earlier Christian attempts of this kind, yet Cicero's language and style, somehow always in the back of Jerome's mind, must have played a role, too. Cicero, after all, was a master of the Latin style. Studies have indicated that Jerome's use of Ciceronian language increased in the later part of his life, peaking around the year 402.<sup>150</sup> Cicero, nevertheless, never used the exact phrase *dignitas hominis* in a frequently commented and well-researched short passage of *De officiis* and, in other works, such as *De inventione*, he clearly made use of its social meaning.<sup>151</sup> In *De officiis*, while condemning practices beneath human honor, the ancient lawyer and philosopher mentioned *hominis praestantia*, and added, "for there are human beings only in name and not in fact" (*sunt enim quidam homines non re, sed nomine*).<sup>152</sup> His use indicates that *hominis praestantia* is a kind of a virtue towards which people should aspire, yet not an

150 Kelly, 1975, 12; H. Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics: A Study on the Apologists, Jerome, and other Christian Writers*, Gothenburg 1958, 150–155, 284–292, 309–311. Hagendahl, 292, estimates that the quotations of Cicero's philosophical writings increased in the later years of Jerome's life, peaking in the year 402. He therefore finds Jerome's declarative denial of the classical heritage not to be credible.

151 Cic., off. 1.106–107 (LCL 30, 108): *Ex quo intellegitur corporis voluptatem non satis esse dignam hominis praestantia, eamque contemni et reici oportere; sin sit quispiam, qui aliquid tribuat voluptati, diligenter ei tenendum esse eius fruendae modum. Itaque victus cultusque corporis ad valetudinem referatur et ad vires, non ad voluptatem. Atque etiam si considerare volumus, quae sit in natura excellentia et dignitas, intellegemus, quam sit turpe diffluere luxuria et delicate ac molliter vivere quamque honestum parce, continenter, severe, sobrie. Intellegendum etiam est duabus quasi nos a natura indutos esse personis; quarum una communis est ex eo, quod omnes participes sumus rationis praestantiaeque eius, qua antecellimus bestiis, a qua omne honestum decorumque trahitur, et ex qua ratio inveniendi officii exquiritur, altera autem, quae proprie singulis est tributa. Ut enim in corporibus magnae dissimilitudines sunt (alios videmus velocitate ad cursum, alios viribus ad luctandum valere, itemque in formis aliis dignitatem inesse, aliis venustatem), sic in animis existunt maiores etiam varietates.* In other works, Cicero uses a social meaning of *dignitas*; cf. inv. 2.160: *Iustitia est habitus animi communi utilitate conservata suam cuique attribuens dignitatem*; 2.166: *Dignitas est alicuius honesta et honore et verecundia digna auctoritas*; 2.161: *Observantia per quam homines aliqua dignitate antecedentes cultu quodam et honore dignantur.* On the concept of dignity in Cicero, cf. J. Lössl, *The Pre-Christian Concept of Human Dignity in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, in: Loughlin (ed.), 2019, 37–56.

Commentators observed that the possessive pronoun *nostra* was placed before *natura* in the fourteenth century manuscripts and does not originate from Cicero. Cf. K. Harper, *Christianity and the Roots of Human Dignity*, in: T.S. Shah / A.D. Hertzke (eds.), *Christianity and Freedom*, Cambridge 2016, 127–128: "It is not priggish to note that Cicero never quite says 'the dignity of man'—as a textual note, the 'our' (*nostra*) preceding nature is an editorial supplement; some modern commentaries supply 'of man' after dignity, but that textual variant is attested only from fourteenth century manuscripts on."

152 Cic., off. 1.105 (LCL 30, 106). J.G.M. trans.

unearned and inherent value of all. The remark, congruent with Cicero's views on natural slavery presented in *De re publica*, implies that human predominance is limited to some people, and as such it cannot comprise a foundation for universal human dignity.<sup>153</sup> The fundamental level of ontological value of each human life is not presupposed in the passage of Cicero's last work. In the same passage of *De officiis*, Cicero relates both *dignitas* and *excellētia* to nature (*excellētia et dignitas in natura*), and soon after uses *dignitas* in its aesthetic meaning as a quality of fitness of human bodies (*dignitas in formis*)<sup>154</sup> and defines *dignitas* as a specifically male form of physical beauty, complemented by *venustas* in women.<sup>155</sup> This linguistic variety does not favor or express *dignitas* in the universal anthropological meaning Jerome used—that of a special human axiological status—though it might have allowed Cicero's readers to be inspired by a range of expressions. Not many uses can be traced in the subsequent four centuries to prove that Cicero's *dignitas* was understood by his readers in the sense of universal human worth. As late as in the fourth century, for example, Ambrose did not use *dignitas* in this sense in his *De officiis ministrorum*, modelled after Cicero's *De officiis*; apparently, he was not inspired to do so by the ancient rhetorician. Cicero's inspiration can rather be identified in Tertullian's *De resurrectione mortuorum*, which once uses the phrase *carnis dignitas*, making use of the aesthetic meaning that Cicero applied to human body.<sup>156</sup> Later, Minucius Felix in his *Octavius* (strongly influenced by Cicero's *De natura deorum*) used *dignitas* to describe worldly nobility, which he criticized. Lactantius appropriated the Roman idea of *gradus dignitatis* to express an idea of *gradus dignitatis Deo iudice*, referring to a rank of virtue, yet except for that instance, he also used *dignitas* in its social sense of a worldly rank. Augustine picked up the idea of *dignitas naturae* possibly shortly before Jerome's homily was written, but not, however, *dignitas hominis*. Jerome was one to select a universal meaning of *dignitas* and to apply it in his homily to the human being—thus forming a category that made an impact in the centuries to come, *dignitas hominis*. Another undeniable mark of the classical Greco-Roman tradition in Jerome's homily on Psalm 81 is the implementation of an imperative of self-knowledge. The ancient imperative is, however, appropriated by him to the axiological dimension of the human being—and that constitutes a patristic *novum* in the history of the classical appeal.

153 Cic., rep. 3.36–37.

154 Cic., off. 1.107 (LCL 30, 108).

155 Cic., off. 1.130 (LCL 30, 130–132).

156 Tert., res. 5.2 (CCL 2, 926, linea 14). On Tertullian's idea of *dignitas carnis*, cf. M. Wysocki, *Godność ludzkiego ciała w dziele Tertuliana "O zmartwychwstaniu ciała"—wybrane fragmenty*, in: *Forum Teologiczne* 10 (2019), 215–228.

Let us move on to the commentary to a different psalm. Jerome's homily on Psalm 148 justifies a special human axiological status in yet another—although complementary—way, by adhering to the view already discussed in relation to the Greek Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa and Nemesius of Emesa in particular; that is, anthropocentric finalism. The human being is praised by Jerome because it is the only creature for whom the rest of creation was made. He lists in particular the sun, the moon and the stars mentioned by the psalmist. All of creation is made for humans' sake only, because angels do not belong to the material world and need no sun or earth. Thus, the human creature enjoys a special status of being the only creature in the universe for whom the universe exists. This special status is described by Jerome in the following way: *Grandem honorem habes, humana anima*<sup>157</sup> ("You have great honor, human soul"). The anthropocentrism of God's creation corresponds to the aforementioned divine respect for the human being, which is why the two approaches—one justifying human dignity through God's respect, and the other through the fact of the creation of the universe for the sake of the human creature—are complementary.

Similarly, as in earlier remarks on human dignity, in his approach to anthropocentric finalism, Jerome argues that the dignity manifested in the world's creation for the sake of the human being is at the same time the reason for human misery.<sup>158</sup> This is because creation itself serves the human being and obeys God's orders through exercising natural laws, while the human beings themselves forget about God. Human beings, in fact, not only forget, but also mistreat and reject God. This is why Jerome acknowledges: *Grandis hominis honor, et grandis infelicitas*<sup>159</sup> ("Great is human honor, and great is human misery"). Once again, the topic of a positive human axiological status goes hand in hand with observation of humanity's limitations.

#### 3.4.1.2 Christian Dignity: *Considerate, Monachi, Dignitatem Vestram!*

Jerome also explores the connection between dignity and indignity in more limited contexts; specifically, ones describing *dignitas Christiana*. He observes, for example, that even though it seems humbling to be a servant, it is of great dignity to be a servant of God: *Grandis dignitatis est et meriti, esse servum domini, et non servum peccati*<sup>160</sup> ("Being a servant of God, and not of sin, is of great dignity and merit"). In a homily on Psalm 133, written around 397,<sup>161</sup>

157 Hier., trac. in ps. 148.3 (HO 9/2, 182).

158 Hier., trac. in ps. 148.6.

159 Hier., trac. in ps. 148.6 (HO 9/2, 184).

160 Hier., trac. in ps. 115.16 (HO 9/1, 518).

161 Capone, 2018, 13.



Jerome adds: *Illi magna dignitas est, qui faciem Domini videt, et ministrat ei*<sup>162</sup> (“The one, who sees the face God and serves Him, is of great dignity”). The monk adheres to the same metaphor as Ambrose when he further differentiates the servants into, first, those who face their master daily, and second, those who live away from the master and depend on servants working closer to him to intercede on their behalf. This observation led Ambrose to discuss *dignitates orationis*, the dignitaries of prayer, whereas Jerome speculates as to whether those who face God should not be interpreted as meaning monks and virgins—those living closest to God on everyday basis. As a theoretician of monastic life, Jerome paid much attention to the monastic vocation, and his homily on the beginning of St. John’s Gospel formulated an appeal urging his listeners, who were monks, to consider their dignity: *Considerate, monachi, dignitatem vestram*<sup>163</sup> (“Consider, monks, your dignity!”). This claim is justified by pointing to none other than St. John the Baptist as the first monk in history. The remark also comprises a significant example of a yet another imperative in Jerome’s late homilies, written while he was residing in Bethlehem. The form of an appeal seems particularly fitting for the homiletic purpose.

The homily on Psalm 133 discusses, nonetheless, the *dignitas Christiana* of all servants of God, not just monks. In relation to this dignity, Jerome adds: [...] *sic infinita dignitas est, se dicere esse servum Domini*<sup>164</sup> (“Indeed, infinite is the dignity to call oneself the servant of God”). This line echoes Basil the Great’s homily on psalm 132, which appealed to the just to recognize their dignity (ἀξιωμα), for they are considered worthy of being the servants of so great a master.<sup>165</sup> Jerome’s characterization of human dignity as infinite in value had also been verbalized earlier by Basil in his analyses of the transaction between devil and God over the human creature. In this case, however, the property of infinity is related specifically to the dignity of the servants of God.

Finally, it is significant that (as noted), Jerome’s focus when developing his ideas of Christian dignity was on the universal vocation of all Christians to be servants of God, and not on external factors such as ranks among clergy. In one of his letters, he clearly opposed the idea that an office could contribute to being a Christian, famously writing a periphrasis of a well-known Roman saying, *barba non facit philosophum*, i.e., a beard does not make a philosopher: *non facit ecclesiastica dignitas Christianum*,<sup>166</sup> that is: “Ecclesiastical office does not

162 Hier., trac. in ps. 133.1 (HO 9/2, 72).

163 Hier., hom. in Io. Ev. 2 (CCL 78, 517, linea 24).

164 Hier., trac. in ps. 133.1 (HO 9/2, 72).

165 Basil. Caes., in ps. 32.1 (PG 31, 324).

166 Hier., ep. 14.9 (CSEL 54, 58, linea 3).

make a Christian". This sentence became significant enough to be incorporated in the Middle Ages into canon law, and was repeated by many Christian writers, for instance, Peter Abelard and John Wickliff.<sup>167</sup> The rationale behind this remark is simple and yet fundamental: titles and positions mean nothing for Christian life. This demonstrates that there is a connection between *dignitas Christiana* and the fundamental evangelical teaching that "God shows no favoritism for persons."<sup>168</sup> Jerome himself quoted this passage in one homily,<sup>169</sup> and in another he added that God pays no attention to honors, but only to actions: *non quaeritur dignitas apud Deum, sed opera.*<sup>170</sup>

### 3.4.1.3 Jerome on Human Axiology

To summarize the above passages, let us observe that Jerome, influenced by Origen of Alexandria's reading of the first line of Psalm 81, introduced the anthropologically relevant use of *dignitas* in the two appeals to observe human dignity. It was Origen who inspired an axiological reflection that led Jerome to coin the category of human dignity, and in this sense, Jerome received *lumen orientale*. To put it metaphorically, four hundred years after the birth of Christ, a star from the East brightened the skies above a cave in Bethlehem one more time—on this occasion, illuminating the birth of a new concept. And the inconspicuous newborn category from Bethlehem eventually grew to become one of the notions at the heart of European culture.

Origen is, in fact, behind one other anthropologically relevant use of *dignitas* employed by Jerome—in a letter commenting on Alexandrian exegete's writings, Jerome used the intriguing phrasing "the dignity of the human soul" (*animae dignitas*),<sup>171</sup> but without elaborating on its meaning and only in order to recapitulate a passage from the Greek philosopher that lists the mentioned dignity. Additionally, in his letters Jerome referred to *dignitas* almost solely in the context of an office, with the majority of the uses describing an ecclesiastical office such as that of a bishop or an apostle.<sup>172</sup>

As noted, the letters make little use of the notion of human dignity (except for one instance in which Jerome translates Origen), and commentaries to

167 Decretum magistri Gratiani, pars 2, causa 2, q. 7, canon 29, textus; Peter Abelard, Sic et non, q. 106, sententia 20, and q. 141, sententia 5; John Wycliff, Tractatus de civili dominio (Summa theologiae, III–V), lib. 2, cap. 9.

168 Gal 3:23; Rom 2:1; Jas 2:1; Jas 2:9; Jude 1:16.

169 Hier., trac. in ps. 140.4.

170 Hier., trac. in ps. 98.6 (HO 9/1, 388).

171 Hier., ep. 124.14.

172 Hier., ep. 58.5 (*honus*, an alternative form of *honor*); ep. 66.7 (*dignitas*); ep. 69.5; 69.9 (*dignus, dignitas*); c. Ioan. 8; 12; 37; 38.

biblical books (specifically to Isaiah, Ezekiel, books of prophets) use *dignitas* in its social sense, at times naming the office of a priest.<sup>173</sup> The homily on Psalm 81 is unique specifically because we can identify the instances in which Jerome discussed the subject of human axiological status, and did not employ *dignitas*.

One of his letters, criticizing some points of Pelagianism as well as Stoicism, stands as evidence that Jerome was capable of formulating and comprehending the topic of human dignity, yet would not necessarily employ the terminology relating to *dignitas*.

The second paragraph of the letter to Ctesiphon treats the subject of who the human being is, and of whether the Stoic teaching correctly describes the human condition. Jerome understands human creatures as necessarily embodied, and thus not capable of freeing themselves entirely in this world from carnal passions or sin. The Stoics claim, conversely, that it is possible, and in doing so, not only are they heretical (they argue that one can achieve a state of salvation from sin and bodily disturbances by human means, which according to Jerome is a form of Pelagianism), but also philosophically wrong, for they argue that it is possible.

According to Jerome (who bases his point, interestingly, on the Scriptures), we can talk of a possibility only when something has already happened at least once. Stoics themselves admit that no one has achieved such a condition, yet state that it is possible. Jerome argues that there is no foundation to claim possibility if something has never happened, and accuses the Stoics of philosophical incompetence.

In this context, Jerome formulates a critical remark stating that while trying to elevate human beings, the Stoics actually diminish God's power instead (*ostenditur hereticos non hominem in excelsa sustollere, sed Dei potentiae derogare*).<sup>174</sup> According to Jerome, it is only God who can save human creatures from their unfortunate condition, including difficult carnal passions.<sup>175</sup> In their anthropology, the Stoic philosophers forgot about humility, which teaches us that human creatures are embodied, and only God can transform their bodies by freeing them from all undesired passions.<sup>176</sup>

173 Hier., Is. 2.4 (VL 23, 223, linea 7: *dignitas bellatorum*); 4.2 (VL 23, 400, linea 36: *dignitas imperii*); 13.24 (VL 35, 1438, linea 45: *aetas, sex, dignitas*); id., Ezech. 7.23 (CCL 75, linea 1031: *dignitas regis et iudicum*); 13.42 (CCL 45, linea 333: *dignitas sacerdotalis*); 14.44 (CCL 75, linea 1878: *dignitas sacerdotum*); 14.45 (CCL 75, linea 234: *dignitas sacerdotalis*); id., Ion. 3 (CCL 76A, linea 225: *dignitas militantium*).

174 Hier., ep. 133.2.

175 Hier., ep. 133.2.

176 Hier., ep. 133.2.

This commentary places Jerome in line with Gregory of Nazianzus, who in his conception of the human microcosm pointed out that human beings are elevated by virtue of being an icon of God, yet are humiliated by virtue of being embodied.<sup>177</sup> Human beings should remember both these factors in order not to succumb to pride, which Jerome observed in the Stoics. In their discussion of human value, therefore, the early Christian Fathers, both Greek and Latin, take a perspective that sees human nature as both dignified by virtue of various factors, and at the same time undignified by its weaknesses and incapacity to save itself from this. This is perhaps where the Christian standpoint contrasts most strongly with some contemporary views on human dignity.

Much as with the phrasing *dignitas animae*, this short passage of Jerome's letter was prompted by the content of the theory Jerome criticized. It provides evidence, nevertheless, that the topic of human dignity was plausible for Jerome, even if, as a Biblicist and theoretician of monastic life, Jerome was not keen to pick up such an anthropological reflection on his own. He had, nevertheless, an idea of human value, as well as an idea of what conceptions of it are wrong.

Jerome's criticism of Stoicism as Pelagian reveals another point. *Dignitas* was not at all a natural "go to" anthropological axiological category for Jerome. The fact that the topic of dignity was not explicitly addressed in the context of elevating humans *in excelsa* indicates a point already observed in Ambrose's writings: in the fourth century the concept of dignity was not the commonly selected axiological category defining humanity's high axiological status that we are used to today. Jerome's terminological choices are particularly significant, for he was one of the best-educated translators and linguists of his time, someone well-acquainted with the semantic fields of the words to the consideration of which he dedicated his whole life. We have seen that he used the category of human dignity (*dignitas hominis*) in his homilies on the Psalms, as well as the idea of Christian dignity (*dignitas servorum Dei, dignitas monachorum*), and implemented the phrases *honor animae* and *dignitas animae*. The imperatives of self-knowledge, expressed in the homily on Psalm 81, constitute, of course, milestones for the category of human dignity. Yet apart from that, Jerome used *dignitas* in the classical Latin meaning of an office or a title (*dignitas Romana*). Similarly, his translations—first among which is the Vulgate—demonstrate the employment of *dignitas* in socially relevant contexts.

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177 See Chapter Two in this monograph, section *Gregory of Nazianzus*, subsection *Dignity of the Microcosm Binding the Earthly and the Divine*.

### 3.4.2 *Human Axiology in the Vulgate*

The Vulgate was the version of the Bible that was read and quoted among its Latin audience as soon as it became available. Jerome worked with a cooperative, and it is not possible to identify the authorship of all the passages, although it is certain that he himself edited the Book of Psalms and the four Gospels from the Old Latin versions, consulting their Hebrew and Greek originals, and oversaw the rest. According to Jerome, the original formulation was the basis for the interpretation of the ambiguous passages of the Bible, not a Greek translation of Septuagint, even though it was considered divinely inspired by the early Christian writers. Jerome always considered the text in its original language. Having been educated in Rome, and having studied under Gregory of Nazianzus for two years, he was aware of the depth and complexity of the Greek texts. He was also taught Hebrew in 375–377 by a Jewish teacher in the desert of Chalcis, and mastered an advanced level of the language. Given his biblical enterprise and its widespread effects, it is no surprise that he was one of the four first proclaimed Doctors in the history of the Church.<sup>178</sup> In fact, the early definition of the achievement associated with the doctoral title, namely the formulation of the “eminent doctrine,” was defined through the criterion of illuminating the Scriptures.<sup>179</sup> This was designed to describe Jerome’s achievement. His linguistic proficiency remained unrivalled by most in his time.

What is significant in the development of terminology and conceptions pertaining to dignity in late ancient and medieval Europe is not the accuracy of Jerome’s Vulgate, but its eventual form, one read and quoted by most thinkers in the Latin West throughout the centuries. The text, proclaimed the Catholic Church’s official version of the Bible under Pope Clement VIII in the late sixteenth century, underwent some revisions by Alcuin during the Carolingian Renaissance, which were included in the thirteenth-century Paris Bible, the basis for the first print by Johannes Guttenberg in 1450s. This most common text of the Vulgate includes a number of passages that we have already encountered as inspirational in the debate over human worth, such as Psalms 8 or 48, repeatedly occurring in patristic axiological deliberations.

178 R. Weber / R. Gryson (eds.), *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, Stuttgart 2007, XXXIII (subsequent footnote references to the Vulgate Bible [vulg.] provide the page numbers from this edition, while the biblical references concerned appear in the main text); M. Graves, *Jerome’s Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on his Commentary on Jeremiah*, Leiden 2007, 196–198; Benedict XVI, 2008, 133–143; J. Gribomont, *The Translations: Jerome and Rufinus*, in: Di Bernardino (ed.), 1991, 195–245; Kelly, 1975, 15–14.50.

179 Benedict XIV, *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*, lib. IV, pars II, cap. 11.

Psalm 8 famously asks what the human being is, that God remembers them (*quid est homo quod memor es eius?*), and adds that the human being was made only a little lesser than the angels (*paulo minus ab angelis*), crowned with glory and honor (*gloria et honore conorasti eum*), and placed above other works of God's hands (*super opera manuum tuarum*).<sup>180</sup>

Psalm 48, commented on by Basil the Great, states that fools (*insipientes*) boast about their riches and know not that no one can pay the price of their salvation (*praetium redemptionis*) or that of their brothers. A fool or someone unlearned (*insipiens et indoctus*) is thus similar to brute beasts (*adsimilatus est iumentis*), a thought repeated at the end of the Psalm and concluding it (*comparavit se iumentis*).<sup>181</sup>

These are the two psalms pertaining to the subject of human axiology, the terminology of which does not include the noun *dignitas* for the simple reason that original text does not call for it.

The word *dignitas* is in fact used less than twenty times altogether in the Vulgate, and none of the cases carries the meaning of specifically human dignity (*dignitas hominis*). The Book of Esther, for instance, mentions court dignitaries supporting the Jews (Esth 9:3); the Book of Proverbs mentions royal dignity (Prov 14:28) and the dignity of the old (Prov 20:29); Ecclesiastes mentions a priestly dignity (Eccl 10:6); the First Book of Maccabees mentions the dignity in which Alexander Balas wants to partake by marrying King Ptolemy VI Philometor's daughter, Cleopatra Thea (1 Mac 10:54); and the Wisdom of Sirach mentions a prophet's dignity (Sir 44:4). The New Testament does not use the noun at all.

This absence of the now-common concept of dignity seems indicative of the fact that *dignitas* was used primarily in the meaning of an office, rank or social status.

As for a pressing question concerning the biblical description of the creation of humankind, Jerome did not offer any discussion of the verses pertaining to the making of human beings in his Hebrew commentary to Genesis.<sup>182</sup>

Summarizing Jerome's contribution to the history of human dignity, we can on one hand observe his crucial role in formulating the category of human dignity, but on the other, repeat the pressing question concerning the period in history in which the noun *dignitas* entered into the first league of anthropological concepts defining a human's positive axiological status and came into standard use in discussions of human axiology. We will come back to this

180 Vulg. 776.

181 Vulg. 829.

182 Hier., qu. Hebr. Gen. 1–2.

topic in the next Chapter, in which I analyze Leo the Great's speeches (with their famous imperatives to know human dignity) that accentuate *dignitas* as a privileged, systematic category in the anthropological discourse.

At this point in history, we find little proof that *dignitas* is a select, privileged term that is naturally employed when the subject of human worth is raised in Latin European culture. A milestone has, nevertheless, been reached. The category of human dignity (*dignitas hominis*) was made plausible by Jerome's commentary prepared in Bethlehem and later delivered to the public around the year 397. And this is not to be underestimated. Before any category can spread—even the one that eventually enters the very DNA of European culture—it must be formulated. One reason that we today speak of “human dignity” is because someone first coined the term. In fact, ironically, when a contemporary scholar claims that the ancient and medieval Christian writers “have little to say” about human dignity, they are ignorant of the point that they utter the words “human dignity” because Jerome of Stridon, upon rereading Origen's speech, worked out the notion *dignitas hominis* and—in a way—put it in their mouths.

### 3.5 Augustine of Hippo<sup>183</sup>

Augustine of Hippo is one of the most popular authorities in Christianity; a Father of the Church and (since 1295) one of the first four officially proclaimed Doctors of the Church, next to Jerome, Ambrose and Pope Gregory I. For 300 years, until 1568, these four were the only Doctors officially recognized by the Church.<sup>184</sup> Augustine is thus one of the longest recognized and formally established Christian intellectual authorities. He also remains a crucial authority and a reference point for the Orthodox and Protestant Churches.

Due to his well-known criticism of Manicheism, Augustine worked on an optimistic ontology in which everything that is, is good, and evil is seen as a privation of good that does not have a reality of its own. This doctrine has some consequences for human nature, which is seen by Augustine as unconditionally good, and deteriorated only insofar as free will forfeits the greater good by turning to the lesser good.<sup>185</sup>

183 Parts of this discussion of Augustine of Hippo's views are an edited part of a chapter of my book *Person and Dignity* (Guerrero van der Meijden, 2019, 274–281). I thank Albrecht Doehnert from De Gruyter for the permission to reprint.

184 P.B. Wodrazka, *Eminente Dottrina: La procedura per il conferimento del titolo di Dottore della Chiesa*, Verona 2019, 20–23.

185 August., *enchr.* 10–13.

As an educated rhetorician Augustine, just like Jerome, was heavily influenced by Cicero. Augustine's language includes the concept of dignity as well as its discussion.<sup>186</sup> The last book of an early anti-Manichean work, *De libero arbitrio*, contains evidence of Augustine's appreciation of human nature despite its deterioration through sin and the use of the concept *dignitas naturae*, though applied not only to human nature.<sup>187</sup> In *De civitate Dei*, written in between 413–426,<sup>188</sup> Augustine stressed that the dignity of a rational soul indeed surpasses all other beings (*verum etiam subiciantur propter rationalis animae dignitatem*).<sup>189</sup> and confirms that human nature is full of dignity (*hominis [...] certe natura tantae est dignitatis*).<sup>190</sup> Following the idea expressed in *Asclepius*, the Bishop of Hippo also proclaimed that, “above all the miracles that the human being can make, is the miracle of the human being themselves” (*Nam et omni miraculo, quod fit per hominem, maius miraculum est homo*).<sup>191</sup> *Dignitas hominis naturae* is not, nevertheless, what one could call a significant idea of his. On one hand the use of the concept is not entirely absent from Augustine's vocabulary—it occurs a number of times in an anthropologically significant context—yet, on the other hand, if contrasted with the sheer body of work that Augustine wrote, these uses are not regular. They occur in texts written in the last decade of the fourth century and later, around the years 413–414, and since 419.<sup>192</sup> Augustine's texts are one of the most numerous preserved ancient Christian writings, even though we know of only a small proportion of what originally comprised about five million words, and over a

186 E.g., in August., trin. 4.1,3; 9.7,12–13; 12.2,2–12.3,3; 14.23–15.24; 15.10,17–15.11,20; civ. 11.15–16; solil. 1.8,15.

187 August., lib. 3.5,15–16; cf. also 3.20,56 and 3.22,65.

188 A. Trapè, *Saint Augustine*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 1991, 363; J. van Oort, *De civitate Dei*, in: V.H. Drecoll (ed.), *Augustin Handbuch*, Tübingen 2007, 349.

189 August., civ. 8.15 (CSEL 40/1, 380, lineae 10–11).

190 August., civ. 11.16 (CSEL 40/1, 535, lineae 23–24).

191 August., civ. 10.12 (CSEL 40/1, 468, lineae 25–27). Cf. (Ps.)Apul., Asc. 6 (CCCM 143, 179, linea 101).

192 There is a debate concerning the chronology of Augustine works; nonetheless, we can situate *De civitate Dei* between 413–426 (books I–III, in which the expression *dignitas humana* is utilized, were completed in 413 or 414), and as for *De Trinitate*, only books I–XII were written between 399–413, and later books (in particular book XIV, in which *dignitas* is used as an anthropological concept) were not written before 419. Cf. Trapè, 1991, 363,371; J. Brachtendorf, *De Trinitate*, in: Drecoll (ed.), 2007, 363–377; van Oort, 2007, 349; Starowieyski, *Augustyn z Hippony*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 138, 140; R. Chevalier, *Saint Augustin et la pensée grecque: Les relations trinitaires*, Fribourg 1940, 15–28.



thousand works.<sup>193</sup> Given this, uses of the concept of human dignity are not frequent, nor is the term defined or selected as a leading anthropological category. It does, nevertheless, appear within meaningful contexts.

Apart from Augustine's use of the term *dignitas* in its various contexts, his famous conceptualization of human iconicity presented in *De Trinitate*, (the conceptualization which influenced many later classical formulations), is relevant.<sup>194</sup> I will start with a brief reconstruction of the most important points of this conception, before moving on to the analysis of Augustine's use of *dignitas* in anthropologically-relevant contexts, and specifically in his discussion of various kinds of hierarchies of beings. Finally, I will discuss Augustine's views regarding slavery, for they were one of the most commonly referenced opinions on this issue in late antiquity, and because a link between slavery and human dignity had already been observed in European culture—by Gregory of Nyssa.

### 3.5.1 *The Dignity of a Direct Icon of the Trinity*

A hallmark of the Augustinian understanding of iconicity is its direct character. Contrary to authors such as Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers and his own teacher, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine argued that each human creature is a direct icon of the Trinity, not an icon of one divine person, Christ, by way of whom all others are icons.<sup>195</sup> Pointing out the plural form used in the Hebrew text of Genesis (“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’”),<sup>196</sup> Augustine argued that if it is “us” who makes, and if it is “our” likeness, then the iconicity of a human being is shaped after the whole Trinity, which speaks of itself as “we” and “our.” The conception of direct iconicity was therefore defended with exegetic arguments, just like the conception of indirect iconicity, although Augustine and Ambrose referred to different passages of the Scriptures.

As a proponent of the direct iconicity of Trinity, Augustine had to demonstrate the way in which the Trinity is reflected in human icons. He pointed out the various triads present in the structure of the human soul (*mens—notitia—amor*, i.e., mind—knowledge—love, in Book IX, and

193 The number of Augustine's works is usually repeated based on the partial list put forward by a contemporary to Augustine and his colleague, Possidius of Calama, who wrote the Saint's first biography. Possidius named 1030 works, remarking that his list was not exhaustive. Indeed, some of the surviving works are not included in it. Augustine's *Retractationes* also includes a list of Augustine's works. Cf. Trapè, 1991, 55–365.

194 E.g. Anselm of Canterbury (*Monologion*), Pseudo-Bonaventure (*De imagine Dei*).

195 August., *trin.* 7.6,12.

196 Gen 1:26, NRSV-CE trans.

*memoria—intelligentia—voluntas*, i.e., memory—reason—will, in Book X), arguing that such threefold structure of the soul's faculties resembles God's triune nature.<sup>197</sup> His viewpoint can therefore be classified as descriptive of the human structural resemblance of God, although elements of functional similarity are also contained in his theory: the function of these faculties characterized as directedness towards the highest good, God.

As with most of the Fathers, Augustine found it implausible that the human body could be a carrier of an image of God. He argued that what is temporal and changing cannot reflect that which is eternal and unchanging.<sup>198</sup> Interestingly, Irenaeus of Lyon assumed iconicity to pertain to the whole of a human being, inclusive of their body, precisely because the human body is subject to salvation and eternal life.<sup>199</sup> Augustine ignored the eschatological perspective of human corporality, and argued the opposite. Relying on the same premise, he excluded faith as a possible criterion of iconicity: human faith is not eternal, because it will be replaced by seeing "face to face" through *visio beatifica* in eternity.<sup>200</sup> It is therefore that which is eternal in a human being that comprises the foundation of *imago Dei*: the immortal soul, with its three faculties structurally resembling the Trinity—memory, reason and will.

Since these faculties are the same in all human beings, men and women, they should all be iconic as participants in one human nature. In a passage of *De Trinitate*, however, Augustine added nuance to that point in regard to male and female functions. He interpreted the Scriptural argument from Genesis 1:27 ("male and female he created them") to suggest that one human nature comprises two complementary counterparts: male and female. The entire twofold human nature, consisting of male and female, is iconic according to Genesis 1:28; however, one can ask whether the counterparts themselves, when considered in abstraction from one nature of which they are a part, are iconic as well. In the passage, Augustine was willing to concede that women, when considered in abstraction from the common human nature—that is, seen merely from the point of view of their function (being men's assistance)—should not be considered iconic at all, while men, when considered in

197 August., trin. 9; 10.

198 August., trin. 14.2,4.

199 Iren., haer. 6.1; cf. also 5.35,2.

200 August., trin. 14.2,4 (CCL 50A, 425): *Mens quippe humana cum fidem suam videt, qua credit quod non videt, non aliquid sempiternum videt. Non enim semper hoc erit, quod utique non erit, quando ista peregrinatione finita, qua peregrinamur a Domino, ut per fidem ambulare necesse sit, species illa succedet, per quam videbimus facie ad faciem (1 Cor 13,12): sicut modo non videntes, tamen quia credimus, videre merebimur, atque ad speciem nos per fidem perductos esse gaudebimus.*

abstraction from one common human nature—that is, from the perspective of their function (associated more clearly with spiritual activity)—should be.<sup>201</sup> Augustine added that men are completely and fully iconic both as part of one nature and in themselves, whereas women are not. This reflection seeks to do justice to the Apostle Paul's remarks that men are "the glory of God". As a result, Augustine emphasized the commonality of human nature, which is iconic in its entirety but at the same time introduced a hierarchy between the sexes considered in abstraction from their common nature. One could argue that this non-egalitarian element of his theory of iconicity undermines the application of this theory to the topic of universal human dignity. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that, firstly, when Augustine discussed human dignity explicitly, he did not raise the mentioned point of inequality of male and female function and therefore their iconicity, focusing on being human in general; and secondly, right after he affirmed this inequality of iconicity, he stressed the equality of male and female participation in God and His redemption.

This is because the motive of the distinct functions men and women have led him to specify the actions that develop human iconicity. And so, iconicity is properly identified not only in soul itself, in its triune faculties, but more specifically in the highest part of the soul, which he at times localized "in the spirit of the mind" (*in spiritu mentis*), when it is directed toward God—and this part is common to men and women equally.<sup>202</sup> Further elaborations of these developments refer to individual acts, primarily moral acts, as constitutive of the icon's similitude to the divine archetype, and stress that such actions, which properly demonstrate participation in Christ and His redemption, are equally available to men and women. While the just-discussed inequality of iconicity considered from the point of view of male or female functions was based on St. Paul's passage regarding men as "the glory of God," the point highlighting the equality of male and female alike in their participation in Christ and in their ability to use their spiritual minds to contemplate God is, in turn, an attempt to explain Paul's view that "there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."<sup>203</sup>

It is worth adding that Augustine was not systematic in his terminology for describing the highest part of the soul, which contemplates God. At times, the faculty operating during *visio beatifica* is called *ratio superior*, and at times *oculus interior atque intelligibilis* (the internal and intelligible eye) or, famously,

201 August., trin. 7.10.

202 August., trin. 12.7,12. Cf. Eph 4:24–24. Compare August., trin. 12.4,3–4.

203 Gal 3:28, NRSV-CE trans. August., trin. 12.7,12.

*oculus cordis* (the eye of the heart).<sup>204</sup> In one of his sermons, Augustine went so far as to say that all the efforts of our earthly life come down to healing this faculty, through which God is contemplated: *Tota igitur opera nostra, fratres, in hac vita est sanere oculum cordis unde videatur Deus.*<sup>205</sup>

Let us return to the theory of direct Trinitarian iconicity. A threefold iconic image of God is imprinted in one human nature, yet it can be perfected or distorted, and the process of its perfection demonstrates the functional resemblance to God. The perfection of an image is achieved through achieving unity with the archetype: *Honor enim hominis verus est imago et similitudo Dei quae non custoditur nisi ad ipsum a quo imprimitur.*<sup>206</sup> (“The true honor of humans is in their image and similarity to God which is preserved in no other way than by reference to the one who imprinted them.”) Once the faculties of the soul, memory, reason and will, become directed towards the object that the icon is to depict, i.e., towards God (in other words, once memory remembers God, reason knows God, and will loves God), the soul becomes an icon in the strongest sense possible, carrying “the closest similarity” (*similitudo proxima*).<sup>207</sup>

An image present in the human soul has the power to bind the soul to that which it depicts. As Augustine writes regarding the soul, *Denique cum Illi penitus adhaeserit, unus erit spiritus [...]*.<sup>208</sup> (“In the end it will inwardly cling to Him, and will become one spirit [...].”) Once united with God, the soul achieves the highest place in the hierarchy of beings, a place superseded only by God himself: *Sic enim ordinata est naturarum ordine, non locorum, ut supra illam non sit nisi Ille.*<sup>209</sup> (“So, therefore, it was ordered not by place but by the order of nature, not to be superseded by anything but God.”) As we shall see, Augustine adjusted this view elsewhere.

Iconicity thus has a functional aspect, and remains strongly connected to the human *capacitas Dei*, the capacity to be filled with God in the sense of sharing God’s spirit by directing all the soul’s crucial faculties to Him. As such,

204 August., quaest. 46.2; id., serm. 88.6; id., solil. 1.6,12. For a commentary to Augustine’s theory of contemplating God, cf. J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Augustyńska koncepcja rationes aeternae a badania Edyty Stein nad zagadnieniem sensu*, in: Zeszyty Naukowe Centrum Badań im. Edyty Stein 15 (2016), 179–190.

205 August., serm. 88.6 (PL 38, 542).

206 August., trin. 12.11,16 (CCL 50, 370).

207 August., civ. 11.26 (CSEL 40/1, 550): *Et nos quidem in nobis, tametsi non aequalem, immo valde longeque distantem, neque coaeternam et, quo brevius totum dicitur, non eiusdem substantiae, cuius Deus est, tamen qua Deo nihil sit in rebus ab eo factis natura propinquius, imaginem Dei, hoc est illius summae trinitatis, agnoscimus, adhuc reformatione perficiendam, ut sit etiam similitudine proxima.*

208 August., trin. 14.14,20 (CCL 50A, 448).

209 August., trin. 14.14,20 (CCL 50A, 448).

the Augustinian conception describes a direct icon of God, but discusses both the structural and functional resemblance of a human icon to their archetype.

### 3.5.2 *Deformations of the Icon*

As we saw, the image of God can be perfected, but it can also be deformed, eventually losing its similarity to the archetype. Augustine described the problem of dynamicity or the gradational character of iconicity *expressis verbis* in *De Trinitate* and remarked on it in *De civitate Dei*. First of all, Augustine explains why iconicity can be deformed:

*Quamquam enim magna natura sit, tamen vitari potuit, quia summa non est, et quamquam vitari potuerit, quia summa non est, tamen quia summae naturae capax est, et esse particeps potest, magna natura est.*<sup>210</sup>

Despite being great, human nature could be deformed because it is not the highest nature, and although it can be deformed in the future, because it is not the highest nature, however, being a vessel of the highest nature, and being capable of participating in it, human nature is a great nature.

The loss of a similarity to God is gradational, and thus, in *De civitate Dei*, Augustine warned against the deceptiveness of the slow and slippery process of losing similarity to God. Those who are not cautious enough might not realize that they have arrived at the last stage of this process, which makes them—originally created in the image of the most perfect being—suddenly exhibit similarity to animals (*similitudo pecorum*).<sup>211</sup> The first stage of the process is a treacherous desire to be like God, the incentive that pushed Eve into accepting the Devil's temptation, and the one that makes the human creature rely on their own finite powers. Since a human being is an icon of God, when they decide to rely on themselves and believe that they themselves can be like God, they break the connection to that which they were created to depict. As a result, they are overthrown from the noble position they were placed in, and start to find pleasure in things that animals are satisfied with, such as bodily desires. Thus—as Augustine puts it, following Psalm 48—while it was a human being's honor to be similar to God, it is their disgrace to be like an animal: *atque ita cum sit honor eius similitudo Dei, dedecus autem eius similitudo pecoris*.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>210</sup> August., trin. 14.4,6 (CCL 50A, 429).

<sup>211</sup> August., trin. 12.11,16 (CCL 50, 370).

<sup>212</sup> Ibidem. In this passage Augustine refers to Psalm 49, in particular to verses 12–14, comparing a man to a beast: "People, despite their wealth, do not endure; they are like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who

If it has become deformed and deprived of similarity to God, the image present in the human soul can be renewed by the intervention of God's grace, for an icon cannot renew its resemblance on its own.<sup>213</sup> In *De Trinitate*, Augustine stressed that only participation in God can make a distorted icon beautiful again. If this happens, *Iam enim se non diligit perverse, sed recte, cum Deum diligit, cuius participatione imago illa non solum est, verum etiam ex vetustate renovatur, ex deformitate reformatur, ex infelicitate beatificatur.*<sup>214</sup> ("It no more loves itself perversely, but righteously, because it loves God whose image it is not only by participation but also it is renewed from old age, reformed from deformation, brought into happiness from unhappiness.") The image that lost its reflection can be recreated again: *Sed peccando, iustitiam et sanctitatem veritatis amisit; propter quod haec imago deformis et decolor facta est: hanc recipit, cum reformatur et renovatur.*<sup>215</sup> ("But by sinning the soul lost justice and holiness of truth; as a result, this image was made deformed and discolored: it regains this image when it is reformed and renovated.")

It is important that in the later part of his life, Augustine insisted that no matter how distorted the image has become, the human soul always remains an icon of God.<sup>216</sup> *De civitate Dei* stresses this point by stating that the nature of both good and evil people is exactly the same. What differentiates good creatures from evil ones is their will: good or vicious.<sup>217</sup> In *in statu viae*, the human creature always has a chance to regain its full similarity to God, no matter how grave the deformation has become.

Interestingly, in the context of the distortion of iconicity, Augustine employed the concept of dignity (*dignitas*) and formulated the expression describing the deformation of dignity (*deformitas dignitatis*).<sup>218</sup> As stressed above, this deformation does not have the power to overshadow the image of God, but, as Augustine suggested in *De Trinitate* and *De civitate Dei*, it results in a change in a being's place in the hierarchy of beings.

What are the implications of deforming iconicity for human axiology? Augustine described the change in a value of a human being in the context of the human icon's shameful similarity to animals, discussed in *De Trinitate*. Instead of being God's icon, human value becomes narrowed to its own limited

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approve their sayings. They are like sheep and are destined to die; death will be their shepherd."

213 August., trin. 12.11,16.

214 August., trin. 14.14 (CCL 50A, 446, linea 18).

215 August., trin. 14.16,22 (CCL 50A, 452).

216 August., trin. 14.4,6; 14.8,11.

217 August., civ. 12.1–8.

218 August., trin. 14.4,6 (CCL 50A, 428).

worth, as well as to the value of things in which animals find pleasure (*ad ea quibus pecora laetantur.*)<sup>219</sup> In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine presented an extended passage concerning the change in the hierarchy of beings following a creature's immoral behavior.

### 3.5.3 *Nature and Justice as Criteria for the Dignity of a Rational Being*

A very good example of the deformation of an icon comes from Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. In Book XI, Augustine described the two alternative hierarchies of being: one that is built based on the consideration of the nature of being; the other, which is less truthful according to him, based on the being's utility.

The natural hierarchy classifies animated beings as higher than inanimate ones, animated beings (which have senses) higher than inanimate, rational creatures higher than non-rational ones, and, finally, immortal rational creatures higher than rational mortal beings. Augustine therefore draws the obvious conclusion that angelic nature is greater than human, mortal nature.<sup>220</sup> This view expressed is soon to be refined by adding one final criterion to the hierarchy of beings. Before we develop this point, let us observe that, in *De Trinitate*, Augustine affirmed that within the hierarchy of beings, the human soul is second only to God.<sup>221</sup> Additionally, in his early dialogue, *De libero arbitrio*, he affirmed numerous times that human nature is greater than that of material creation and spoke of the levels of dignity (*gradus dignitatis*) in various natures, using terminology resembling that of Lactantius.<sup>222</sup>

On the other hand, if the utility of beings is considered a criterion of a being's value, material beings might be considered better than animate things; for, Augustine rhetorically asks, who would not rather have bread than mice in their house? He likewise observes: a horse is valued higher than a slave, a pearl much higher than a female servant, even though—and this is certain—human nature is of a greater dignity than a material object. He thus explains: *Sed quid mirum, cum in ipsorum etiam hominum aestimatione, quorum certe natura tantae est dignitatis, plerumque carius comparetur equus quam servus, gemma quam famula?*<sup>223</sup> (“But what wonder, that in people's own estimations, whose nature is full of dignity, a horse is estimated by the majority as dearer than a slave, a pearl dearer than a female servant?”). This hierarchy of utility is dictated by need, and it therefore does not consider the nature of things and the

219 August., trin. 12.11,16 (CCL 50, 370).

220 August., civ. 11.15 (CSEL 40/1, 535): [...] *quanto magis angelica creatura, quae omnia cetera, quae Deus condidit, naturae dignitate praecedit!*

221 August., trin. 14.14,20 (CCL 50A, 448).

222 August., lib. 3.5,15–16. Cf. Lact., inst. 5.15,6 (CSEL 19, 448, linea 9).

223 August., civ. 11.16 (CSEL 40/1, 535).

truth about them, as does the first classification, one apparently closer to the truth.

It is particularly significant that Augustine adds one final criterion to the classification based on nature. Although the nature of a being (animated or inanimate, rational or lacking rationality, mortal or immortal) comprises the true criterion of a being's value, in the case of rational beings, the classification requires a second measure. "The weight of will and of love" (*pondus voluntatis et amoris*) is so great in rational creatures, he argues, that even though an angelic creature is by nature better than a human being, from the point of view of the laws of justice, a morally good human being is better than a fallen angel: *Sed tantum valet in naturis rationalibus quoddam veluti pondus voluntatis et amoris, ut, cum ordine naturae angeli hominibus, tamen lege iustitiae boni homines malis angelis praeferantur.*<sup>224</sup>

Considering this principle of the weight of will and love (*pondus voluntatis et amoris*) shows how significant morality is to the axiological hierarchy of rational beings. According to Augustine, disobeying rules of justice can alter the natural value of a being (not a being's nature) and result in a change in its place in the axiological hierarchy that was built upon the criterion of the perfection of nature. Justice, therefore, weighs heavily on dignity. The example of the fallen angels shows that the two criteria of a rational being's value (nature and justice) themselves form a kind of hierarchy: justice seems to weigh more heavily than nature, for it can overrule it. This thesis is of great importance to the question of the gradational or dynamic character of dignity: the natural value of a being can be overshadowed by moral indignity. In general terms, the realization of moral indignity results in the lowering of a being's axiological status (*gradus dignitatis*). This is why Augustine already affirmed in *De libero arbitrio* that the dignity of the human soul is valued by God so highly that He made human happiness dependent on human free choice.<sup>225</sup>

### 3.5.4 *Offences to Human Dignity (Dignitas Humana)*

The early parts of *De civitate Dei*, completed in the year 413 or 414, offer a short description of pagan practices, which Augustine judges in a strikingly modern fashion as ones that "defile human dignity" (*humana dignitas inquinatur*),<sup>226</sup> therein employing the category of specifically human dignity, *dignitas humana*.

224 August., civ. 11.16 (CSEL 40/1, 536). Cf. id., trin., 13.17,22, where Augustine argues that no demon should be seen as superior to the human being.

225 August., lib. 3.22,65. Later, around 413, Pelagius took this thought to extremes, arguing that human honor and dignity comprise in free choice understood as a capacity to choose between two alternatives, good and evil. Pelagius, *Epistola ad Demetriadem*, 2.

226 August., civ. 2.29 (CSEL 40/1, 108).



The occurrence of this phrasing is significant, although not because of the kinds of acts Augustine points out (all are strongly embedded in ancient practices unknown today: offerings to pagan gods and the rituals accompanying these), but rather due to the very occurrence of the category of human dignity and the established opinion that some acts constitute an offence to human dignity.

There are at least three assumptions to be observed about this remark. First, the underlying assumption is that there is a *dignitas humana*, a human dignity; one that is present in Roman people, yet apparently common to all human beings. Second, this human dignity has a normative character, for it presents norms to be observed precisely because of this dignity. Third, if those norms are not met, that constitutes an offence to human dignity. These assumptions regarding human dignity are surprisingly modern and could well be found in international legal as well as ecclesiastical formulations that list a number of practices offensive to human dignity. Augustine's examples are not what we would encounter today, yet the rationale behind his description is the same: human dignity is a value that demands actions of its bearers that are worthy of their value. Succumbing to primitive pagan beliefs (such as the idea that burning a number of material goods could alter one's fate) is beneath human dignity, for it makes no use of human reason. The bearers of dignity are obliged by their dignity to act according to their great nobility, and to use reason. Even though this remark is made by Augustine in passing and shows little explicit conceptualization of human dignity, its assumptions are significant. Furthermore, precisely the way in which the remark is formulated seems to suggest that both the concept of human dignity and the idea that certain actions are beneath human dignity were obvious to Augustine and his readers. Similar logic was spelled out earlier by Basil the Great in regard to child slaves, yet Augustine's tone is—as we may stress—also very close to the appeals by Ambrose or Jerome, both urging audiences to know human dignity and to live according to it.

Finally, it is worth noting that the phrasing *dignitas humana* seems close to Jerome's idea of *dignitas hominis*. However, while Jerome used *dignitas* only in reference to human specific axiological status, differentiating humans from the rest of creation, Augustine used *dignitas* in reference to various natures (*dignitates naturae*), instituting hierarchies of rank (*gradus dignitatis*) between them.<sup>227</sup> His use is, therefore, less relevant to the post-Second World War notion of human dignity, which relates specifically to humans and was designed to protect their rights. In Augustine's view, *dignitas* is hierarchical

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227 August., lib. 3,5,15–16.

and applicable also to material beings, which is surprising to the contemporary reader. Nonetheless, in being associated with natures, Augustine's *dignitas* remains inherent in nature and thus unearned and universal. As such it is fundamentally relevant to contemporary debates: it refers to an ontological perfection from which particular duties of and towards dignity-bearers result.

### 3.5.5 *Message of Humility*

Augustine's view on the importance of justice for the axiological status of the human being is perhaps why his sermons advise knowing one's humility rather than knowing one's dignity. Commenting on John the Baptist's actions, in his sermons on St. John's Gospel, Augustine praises the Baptist's humility as resembling the humility of Christ. Both these men demonstrated the "glory of God, not the glory of the human being" (*gloria Christi, non gloria hominis*).<sup>228</sup> Augustine explains that God shares his divinity with humans so that the human beings can realize their humility. (*ut agnoscat homo humilitatem suam, impertiat Deus divinitatem suam*).<sup>229</sup> A similar phrase, which is not found in Augustine's preserved writings but was attributed to him during the Carolingian Renaissance by Alcuin, was adapted in the Middle Ages.<sup>230</sup>

Another allegedly Augustinian line commenting dignity can be traced back to a collection of sermons called *Eusebius Gallicanus*. It formulates an appeal to know both how great and how dependent the human creature is: *Agnoscat homo quantum valeat, quantum debeat et, dum pretium suum cogitat, vilis esse sibi desinat*<sup>231</sup> ("May a human being know how much they are worth and how much they owe, and so long as they consider their price, they stop seeming worthless to themselves.") This appeal is closest to that which Leo the Great formulated in the fifth century, indicating that the line is likely to originate from a non-Augustinian source. It remains a fact, however, that the line's medieval reception identifies Augustine as an author, and that the Bishop of Hippo formulated an influential message concerning human humility in his popular sermons on St. John's Gospel.

### 3.5.6 *Treatment of Slaves*

The reconstruction of Augustine's views on human axiology and his use of *dignitas* in anthropologically relevant contexts that has been presented here does

228 August., serm. ad pop. 380.6 (REAug 61 [2015], 265, linea 199).

229 Ibidem.

230 Alcuin of York, *Commentaria in sancti Iohannis Evangelium*, col. 787, linea 31; Hermannus of Runa, *Sermones festuales*, sermo 70, linea 113.

231 Eus. Gall., hom. 24.7 (CCL 101, 286, lineae 147–149); Stephan of Bourbon, *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, pars I, titulus 8, cap. 9.

not include Augustine's views on slavery, for he himself did not relate this problematic to the question of human dignity. Such an inference is obvious from a twenty-first-century point of view due to international laws on human rights, which are founded on the principle of respect for human dignity. It amounts to an anachronism, however, to assume that this was obvious for all ancient writers. As we observed, the problem of subsumption (i.e., the application of the principle of human dignity to different cases) took a long time to resolve. The Latin Father related the topic of human dignity to the poor, as we already observed, but not specifically to slaves, like Gregory of Nyssa did. This is worth mentioning before we concisely recapitulate Augustine's views on slavery. A key Augustinian view in this topic is the belief that slavery is a result of sin, and as such does not belong to the order of nature. In this, Augustine negates both the Aristotelian and to large extent the then-contemporary Roman view of slavery.<sup>232</sup>

The Bishop of Hippo presented two arguments in defense of his view, one exegetic and one etymological. The exegetic argument points out that the word for slavery does not appear in the Bible prior to Noah's story, and only in relation to the sons of his sons.<sup>233</sup> The etymological argument suggests that the noun slave (*servus*) comes from the gerundive *servandus*, meaning the one who is to be saved, or the verb *servare*, to maintain or preserve. During early wars in humanity's history, fighters who were captured and liable to die were at times saved, and this is how slavery, and the word "slaves," came into being. This demonstrates that slavery originated in war and sin.<sup>234</sup>

The origin of slavery justifies, according to Augustine, why slaves might be treated severely when necessary. Augustine argued—formulating one of his most troubling and disappointing views—that the whipping of slaves is not only permissible, but advisable if the slave was guilty of a serious crime.<sup>235</sup> However, in a commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, he surprisingly drew a relation between the slaves' wounds and the wounds of the Apostle Paul. Augustine compared the stigmata that the Apostle Paul carried on his body to the wounds that slaves suffer in consequence of punishment or damage, and which make them eligible for manumission.<sup>236</sup> He understood Paul's stigmas to be a consequence of sin, in particular, Paul's earlier violent prosecution of

232 J.A. Cabrera, *Schiavitù*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 2008, 4776–4778; C.L. de Wet, *The Punishment of Slaves in Early Christianity: The Views of Some Selected Church Fathers*, in: *Acta Theologica* 23 (2016), 263–282.

233 August., civ. 19.15.

234 Ibidem.

235 August., psal. 102.14.

236 August., Gal. 64 (CSEL 84, 141, linea 9).

God's Church. The Apostle's wounds were nevertheless transformed through the remission of sins in baptism—into Paul's crown of glory (*ad coronam victoriae*). And so can the wounds of slaves, presumably, be transformed.

Augustine's treatment of the doctrine of original sin, one to which he paid significantly more attention than his Eastern contemporaries, weighs significantly on his account of slavery, one also taken to be a consequence of sinful behavior. Although, in his view, sin in general causes troubling effects, the sacrament of baptism can wash them away, including in the case of slavery. On one hand, therefore, Augustine justified wounds caused by third parties to the slaves as a consequence of the slaves' previous sins; on the other, he affirmed that there is no place for such consequences among the saved.

The Bishop of Hippo, who did not dedicate any extended treatise to the subject of slavery but rather remarked on it in a number of places, shaped many opinions in the Latin West and Greek East (for example, those of John Chrysostom).<sup>237</sup> His views on slavery, which to some extent express the Roman *forma mentis*, break free from the Roman core belief of natural slavery, and introduce the notion of salvation into the topic of human beings suffering in captivity. They also formulate a troubling remark concerning the punishment of slaves, which the author apparently does not see as an offence to human dignity. At the same time, however, they make it clear that slavery has no place in the kingdom of God.

### 3.6 Female Christian Intellectuals

It would be valuable to consider at least one text written by a female ancient author in any history of an idea, for the simple reason that women, with their discourses and ideas, make up about a half of any society. However, it is notoriously difficult to reconstruct these ideas in antiquity because of the limited availability of the sources. Nevertheless, there were ancient Christian female intellectuals in the fourth century of whom (and of whose texts) we know, counting examples such as Faltonia Betitia Proba's *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi* (composed around the year 360) and Egeria's *Itinerarium seu Peregrinatio ad loca Sancta* (describing a pilgrimage undertaken by Egeria in between 381–384).<sup>238</sup> Additionally, the first part of *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*

<sup>237</sup> De Wet, 2016, 267.

<sup>238</sup> M. Starowieyski, *Proba*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 830; N. Natalucci, *La datazione*, in: ead. (ed), *Egeria, Itinerarium Egeriae*, Firenze 1991, 37–43; M. Starowieyski, *Egeria*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 303–304.

(written around 202/203), was traditionally attributed to the female narrator, although the debate about authorship (possibly by Tertullian) is inconclusive, and it is most likely that the text was written by a man.<sup>239</sup> Let us examine these sources, starting with those that testify to what ancient and medieval thinkers assumed to be a female voice, and moving on to those that were written by women.

*Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* remains a historically precious description of the imprisonment and passion of two female martyrs who were executed in 207 through partially ineffective *damnatio ad bestias*. The first part of the text is a first-person narration written by someone claiming to be the imprisoned female martyr, Vibia Perpetua of Carthage. This narrator's account is supplemented by a third-person eyewitness report of the passion. Even though one can hardly expect a theoretical treatment of the problem of human dignity in a description of martyrdom, the text remains a clear example of a culturally significant change brought forth by Christianity. Early Christians celebrated and praised female sanctity alongside the male: Perpetua and Felicity are mentioned together with many female saints in the *Nobis quoque peccatoribus* prayer of the Roman Canon, and their death has been commemorated since antiquity, recognized as a holiday in the liturgical calendar throughout the ages. This egalitarian approach to both male and female sanctity marks a significant shift away from Roman societal habits, particularly in the realms of law, politics, and education.<sup>240</sup>

Egeria's text, the unique Latin of which suggests that the author was a pilgrim of Spanish origin, describes her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and contains a number of the earliest accounts of Jerusalem's late fourth-century liturgy. Given the pilgrim's purposes, it is not surprising that the text cannot illuminate matters of anthropology, let alone anthropological axiology. Sadly, it does not employ *dignitas*, not even in a social sense.<sup>241</sup>

Finally, Proba's *Cento* is an anthropologically-orientated poem insofar as it relays the history of humankind according to the Christian faith, starting with human creation and ending with an account of Christ's redemption and the sending of the Holy Spirit. This is expressed by a mixture of Virgil's verses extracted from a number of his works: *Aeneid*, *Georgics*, and *Bucolics*. Some of the lines implicitly contain axiologically-relevant messages; for example, by calling a human being the image of God.

239 M. Starowieyski, *Perpetuy i Felicity męczeństwo*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 803.

240 A. Badini / A. Rizzi (eds.), *Proba, Il centone*, Bologna 2011.

241 Cf. Egeria, *Itinerarium* (BP 17).

Although Proba, limited by Virgil's vocabulary, did not use the expression *imago Dei*, she described the creation of Adam as planned by God to be *imago pietatis* ("the image of piety"),<sup>242</sup> *cari Genitoris imago* ("the image of the beloved Father"),<sup>243</sup> and *nova forma viri pulcherrima* ("the new most beautiful form of a man").<sup>244</sup> Significantly, in the next verse Proba related the property of God-likeness only to Adam, and not to Eve.<sup>245</sup> Additionally, Proba coined rare vocabulary descriptive of human image after the sin. As we remember, Basil the Great described "the earthly image" (εἰκὼν τοῦ χροῖκοῦ), Gregory of Nazianzus mentioned "the form of the snake" (μορφὴ τοῦ ὄφεως), Ambrose coined the Latin term "the earthly image" (*effigies terrestris*), and Augustine identified beast-likeness (*similitudo pecoris*), each in order to describe a human being succumbing to sin. All these writers focused on the objective difference of human ontology before and after the sin. They also used two basic categories of an image: one positive and one negative.

Proba, on the other hand, described a remorseful Adam self-identifying after the original sin as *imago tristis* ("the sad image").<sup>246</sup> The expression opens Adam's speech to God, yet its subsequent two lines are missing, making the interpretation of the expression difficult. In this expression itself, however, the female poet focused, presumably, on the internal experience of sorrow accompanying Adam's self-accusation. The expression could be a unique attempt to identify the existential situation of a penitent human icon, one admitting their wrongdoing and awaiting forgiveness; thus, neither unblemished by sin, nor persisting in it. No other Christian writer coined terminology for this particular stage of human iconicity.<sup>247</sup>

The expressions, *imago pietatis*, *cari Genitoris imago* and *nova pulcherrima forma viri* as well as *imago tristis*, serve a poetic purpose and are thus not elaborated on, yet they mark an original interpretation of the anthropological notion of an image. Moreover, Proba explicitly confirmed female worthiness in God's glory in a passage describing God's prohibition given in the garden of Eden. God warns: *femina, nec te ullius violentia vincat, si te digna manet divini gloria ruris*<sup>248</sup> ("women, may you not be conquered by anyone's violence, since the

242 Proba, cent. 118 (BP 47, 86).

243 Proba, cent. 349 (BP 47, 108).

244 Proba, cent. 119 (BP 47, 86).

245 Proba, cent. 120 (BP 47, 86).

246 Proba, cent. 233 (BP 47, 96).

247 August., civ. 22.33.

248 Proba, cent. 155–156 (BP 47, 88).

worthy glory of the divine kingdom awaits you”). This demonstrates Proba’s understanding of a woman’s final purpose: the glory of divine kingdom.<sup>249</sup>

The poem making use of Virgil’s verses, with its few lines interpreting human creation in God’s image, remains the most relevant passage written by a Christian woman with regard to the history of human dignity. *Cento* did not pass unnoticed by the learned men of ancient Christianity: Jerome, Augustine, and John Chrysostom.<sup>250</sup>

Finally, it is worth adding that we know of a number of learned ancient Christian female intellectuals, sometimes forming a center whose aim can be described as scholarly. For example, we know that Melania the Elder, companion of Rufinus of Aquileia and the founder of two monastic communities on the Mount of Olives, was a keen follower of Origen, and thus was undoubtedly competent philosophically. Olympia, a wife of Nebridius and later deaconess and the founder of a monastic community, was another well-educated aristocrat and a friend of Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom. Chrysostom addressed seventeen letters to her, which testify to his appreciation of Olympia’s intellect and her community. We know that Emmelia, the mother of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, was a woman of substantial knowledge, for her sons attribute their early knowledge of Christian doctrine to their mother. She also educated her daughter, Macrina the Younger, whose theological competence is implied by Gregory of Nyssa’s *De anima et resurrectione* and *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*. There are numerous others of whom we know, Christian and pagan, without knowing their views, for sometimes not even their letters are preserved.<sup>251</sup>

Interestingly, one of these women’s distinctions evoked a passage employing the phrase *dignitas personae*, not in the legal sense common to Roman Law but in the modern sense of the dignity of a person. Paulinus of Nola met Melania the Elder upon her return from Jerusalem to Rome in 399 and expressed his opinion of her in a letter written in 400 to Severus. His short report contains a number of dignifying expressions: Paulinus calls Melania *tanta anima*<sup>252</sup>

249 On Proba’s approach to femininity, largely informed by Virgil’s negative approach to women, see E.A. Clark, *Faltonia Betitia Proba and her Virgilian Poem: The Christian Matron as Artist*, in: ead., *Ascetic Piety and Women’s Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*, New York 1986, 124–152.

250 Hier., ep. 53.7 (PL 22, 544); Augustine of Hippo, *Epistula* 130 (ad Probam) (CSEL 44, 40–70); John Chrysostom, *Epistulae* 169–170 (PG 52, 710). Jerome simply offended Proba by calling her “a talkative granny” (*garrula anus*).

251 P. Wilson-Kastner, *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church*, Washington 1982; A. Stępniewska, *Matki Ojców Kościoła*, Lublin 2015.

252 P. Nol., ep. 29.6 (CSEL 34/2, 251, linea 26).

(“such a soul”), *femina nobilis* (“noble woman”) or *femina sancta*<sup>253</sup> (“holy woman”), only to question right away if she can at all be called a woman, when she is such a brave Christian: *At quam tandem feminam, si feminam dici licet, tam viriliter Christianam.*<sup>254</sup> Additionally, Paulinus feels obliged to explain he is not capable of describing Melania’s excellence adequately, yet will try to do so in order to do justice to the divine grace she works with and her own *dignitas personae*, the dignity of her person.<sup>255</sup> Melania, to whom a whole chapter is dedicated in Palladius’ *Historia Lausiaca*, made such an impression on Paulinus that he stated that, despite the inferiority of her sex (*interior sexus*), she appeared more noble than her male ancestors, who were consuls (*dedit se nobiliorem consulibus avis*).<sup>256</sup>

The passage quoted above is intriguing for a number of reasons. First, it is precisely despite his prejudice towards femininity that Paulinus praises the lady in question, showing that the Christian search for sanctity could overrule a societal partiality. Second, Paulinus contrasts the *dignitas Romana* of Melania’s family (called *nobilitas*) with her own distinction, which results not from circumstantial factors such as birth, but from her own choices. This illustrates the trend we have already witnessed in other Christian writers of challenging the worldly hierarchies and conceiving of alternative axiological orders. Third, Paulinus calls Melania’s distinction *dignitas personae*, among other terms. This demonstrates the shift from *dignitas Romana* to *dignitas* applied more broadly, though not yet universally. The dignity of birth is called *nobilitas* by Paulinus, and *dignitas* is used to name one’s personal excellence. A step towards a universal category of dignity, consisting in the application of *dignitas* to figures seen habitually as inferior, is being made—and just around three years after Jerome, hidden in the confinement of his monastery in Bethlehem, wrote the appeal containing the category of human dignity: *Vide hominis dignitatem*.

To finalize the investigation into the female writers of the fourth century, let us add that some of the Christian learned women assembled to study the Scripture, inclusive of ancient biblical languages, and practice Christian virtues. One of the most well-known circles of this type is that formed by Marcella on the Aventine Hill, guided, after the founder’s insistence, by none other than Jerome. The Aventine Hill brought together Marcella and her mother Albina, along with Asella, Melania, Fabiola, Sophronia, Furia, Principia, Felicita, Lea, and Paula of Rome with her daughters and daughter in law, Blaesilla,

253 P. Nol., ep. 29.6 (CSEL 34/2, 251, linea 20).

254 P. Nol., ep. 29.6, (CSEL 34/2, 251, lineae 21–22).

255 P. Nol., ep. 29.6 (CSEL 34/2, 251, linea 25).

256 P. Nol., ep. 29.6 (CSEL 34/2, 252, lineae 6–7).



Eustochium, Rufina, Paula, Leta, as well as a sister of Ambrose of Milan, Marcellina, and a sister of Pope Damasus, Irene.<sup>257</sup> Some excelled in Hebrew and Greek, as testified to by Jerome's letters, and Paula and Eustochium in particular entered into life-long debates with him over textual and exegetic matters, having followed him when he left Rome for Palestine. Jerome dedicated translations of some books of his Vulgate to Paula and Eustochium, and his commentaries—to Marcella. Marcella's theological competence allowed her to engage with the debate about the views of Rufinus of Aquileia, which led to his condemnation by Pope Anastasius, and she is likely to have been part of early controversy surrounding Pelagius.<sup>258</sup>

Although the aim of such gatherings was religious and ascetic, often leading to the establishment of female monastic centers, the discussion that took place there required theological and linguistic competence due to its focus on the original version of the Scripture. Unfortunately, although we know that the learned ancient Christian women expressed their views, there are no sources allowing us to investigate them. We can only relay their names and identify their main intellectual interests.

### 3.7 Conclusions Concerning the Latin West

The investigated examples of the leading fourth-century texts demonstrate a linguistic void in ancient Christian Latin anthropology, which lacked a specific, systematic name for human axiological status up until the end of the fourth century. At the same time, the topics of human value, greatness or dignity were discussed and described, and people were even commanded to know the phenomenon of human greatness. These fourth-century descriptions of human axiology provide evidence that the term *dignitas* was not commonly used in its anthropological sense. At the very end of the fourth century, Jerome's and Augustine's writings provide examples of a change, initiating a new practice of calling human axiological status *dignitas hominis* or simply *dignitas*, and later—in the early fifth century—*dignitas humana*.

Among the mentioned fourth-century anthropological discussions, a significant cultural phenomenon took hold: a formulation of calls to recognize the axiological status of a human being. This tradition, originating from Greek

257 L. Mirri, *La dolcezza nella lotta: Donne e asceti secondo Girolamo*, Bose 1996, 149–167; B. Degórski, *Starochrześcijańskie mniszki czasów św. Hieronima*, in: Hieronim, *Listy do Eustochium* (B. Degórski trans.), Cracow 2004, 11–50; Stępniewska, 2015, 92.

258 Hier., ep. 127.8 (PL 22, 1092); Stępniewska, 2015, 105.

Cappadocia, builds on an ancient practice of verbalizing maxims such as γνώθι σεαυτόν. The new trend of designing axiological appeals was transmitted to the West through the educated, Greek-reading Latin scholar, Ambrose of Milan. Once a formula adapting a culturally significant trend to express and inscribe various versions of the ancient maxim γνώθι σεαυτόν appeared in Ambrose's writings, it prompted a new homiletic (and, later, philosophical and anthropological) practice: to call for the recognition of human dignity. Ambrose thus laid the foundations for one of the most famous lines by Leo the Great, one to be quoted and paraphrased as a kind of *bon mot* throughout the Middle Ages, and carried on to the present day. This significant development of a practice of demanding observance of the individual's value remained in European culture as one of its distinctive characteristics, all the stronger as it built on an age-old tradition.

This development led to another, also prevalent in the European culture: the identification of the notion of human value as a normative concept. Ambrose's calls require not only knowing one's own value, but also acting according to this great nobility. This is why he commanded his listeners: *adtende tibi!, miles es!, athleta es!* The same norm required human creatures to be humble, a point which was to be evoked by Ambrose's calls to remember one's finitude, specifically in reference to human corporality. Paradoxically, however, human corporality was praised by the Bishop of Milan, following in the footsteps of his Cappadocian master, Basil.

The social meaning of *dignitas*, *dignitas Romana*, was also adapted by the Bishop of Milan to express a different, meritocratic and spiritual kind of order among the faithful. As we saw, a criticism of worldly hierarches was also expressed by Chromatius of Aquileia, and earlier, by Minucius Felix, Lactantius, Cyprian of Carthage, Novatian, Hilary of Poitiers, Lucifer of Cagliari, and Philastrius. Ambrose's influential sermons on Psalm 118 proclaim that not only Romans but also Christians have their own dignities. The Bishop of Milan distinguished the order of the servants, i.e., apostles, prophets, and teachers (*ordo administrantium*), the order of the virtues among the ordinary members of the Church, i.e., the faithful (*ordo privatorum*), as well as the order among those who pray (*ordo orationis*), descriptive of the phenomenon of spiritual intercession. This adaptation of the social practice of differentiating various offices, together with Ambrose's remarks on the poor, show that the social meaning of *dignitas* prevailed, but its message was regarded critically by Christians, who believed that "God shows no favoritism for persons". Ambrose's descriptions of human value thus promote the idea of a universal, natural greatness that all humans share in equal measure, and which must be observed and respected. At the same time, they propose a hierarchy based on criteria relating to free

human efforts to achieve sanctity, not on circumstantial factors such as sex, wealth, or birth, over which one often had little or no influence.

After Ambrose of Milan's death, Jerome of Stridon continued the practice of calling for the recognition of human dignity. His homily on Psalm 81, prepared around the year 397 in the monastery in Bethlehem where Jerome resided towards the end of his life, clearly followed Origen's reflection on the same psalm. The commentary, highly influenced by a text by Origen of Alexandria, formulates two appeals to observe human dignity which relate explicitly to universal human dignity. The text justifies human dignity by way of the respect with which the human creature is treated by God; another homily does so by way of the classical anthropocentric finalism, pointing out that the whole of the universe was made and exists for humanity's sake only. Even though Jerome's homilies were known throughout the ages, his unique and groundbreaking discussion of human dignity was never part of any history of human dignity. Undoubtedly, however, the text contains the earliest application of *dignitas hominis* as an anthropological category, one congruent with Augustine's and later Leo the Great's linguistic practices. It also represents an important early chapter of the Christian tradition to appeal to know human dignity.

In the early fifth century, Ambrose's follower Augustine of Hippo used *dignitas humana* in an anthropological sense alongside the classical social meaning, which we have called *dignitas Romana*. His earliest uses of *dignitas*, contained in the third book of *De libero arbitrio* completed in 395, are not limited to anthropology but rather applied to all kinds of beings and represent their respective value, one often limited, yet inherent. A philosopher who dedicated a significant amount of his intellectual efforts to investigating anthropology offered an axiological analysis of not only human beings, but of the whole created world. Formulating his famous optimistic ontology, inclusive of the privative theory of evil, he set the framework for later Christian discussions of good and evil, which adopted his theory.

In anthropology itself, Augustine firstly formulated a conception of the direct, structural iconicity of God, and secondly, presented two models of the hierarchy of goods in which a human creature's dignity was assessed according to two criteria: perfection of nature and justice of behavior. Augustine's views differ significantly from the East-inspired remarks by Ambrose, introducing a number of originally Western points to axiology.

In contrast with the Greek Church Fathers, Augustine saw human nature as inferior to angelic nature, due to human mortality resulting from original sin; he made an exception, however, in the case of an immortal angel forsaking his dignity by violating justice. Augustine's stance is thus a good example of what is sometimes called the Western anthropological tendency

to focus on the consequences of original sin, although in fact this trend is evident precisely from Augustine onward. The Bishop of Hippo developed his own interpretation of original sin, and paid more attention to the reality of sin than did his contemporaries in the East. Despite his insistence on the fact that sin does not diminish human iconicity or dignity entirely, the theory of sin remained most relevant to his axiology of a human being. This means that his anthropology does not link human dignity with the act of incarnation or redemption (as was done by the Greeks, who as a result were led to proclaim human superiority over the angels, as the latter are not subjects of the incarnation and redemption). Instead, Augustine made use of the classical model of the hierarchy of natures, modified so as to integrate the criterion of just actions. This provides a good context for linking human dignity with human free choice, which Augustine once stressed in his early work, *De libero arbitrio*, and Pelagius took to extremes. This idea resonated in later influential and mature conceptions of human dignity developed in advanced Middle Ages; specifically, in the theory of Bernard of Clairvaux, who defined human dignity through freedom.

In his terminological choices, Augustine, an educated rhetorician, utilized the anthropological meaning of *dignitas*; however, his commentaries on the soul show that this was not a leading anthropological category for him, but rather one of many possible ways of expressing the phenomenon of human axiological status. *Dignitas* was also not a uniquely human status for Augustine, since he was ready to discuss the ranks of dignity (*gradus dignitatis*) specific to various natures, not just human.

All the three discussed Latin writers who shaped the anthropological-axiological debates of the fourth or early fifth century—Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine—were influenced by Cicero. So was Lactantius, who first proposed to name the idea of the hierarchy of honor and virtue with the expression *gradus dignitatis Deo iudice*. Cicero was the one to use expressions such as *praestantia* in relation to some human beings and *excellentia et dignitas* in relation to nature. His Latin style remained a model for generations of Latin writers. However, as pointed out, he never used the exact phrase *dignitas hominis*, and in the single fragment that prompted him to discuss human *praestantia*, he stressed that it does not apply to all human beings, nor did he assume it is unearned and unconditional. He also used *dignitas* in the sense of the fitness of the male bodily form. This ambiguity is perhaps why Ambrose, who modelled one his works after *De officiis*, was never led to discuss “human dignity,” despite paying much attention to human greatness. Jerome—and, later, Augustine—were the ones to do so, and the monk of Bethlehem takes precedence in that.

Looking back at the writings and translations of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, which coin and employ but do not favor *dignitas* as a leading anthropological-axiological category, we can ask one final time: what happened in the Western Latin tradition that eventually led to the use of “dignity” as in its principal notion in anthropology? Arguably, the watershed in the European discourse was not defined in the fourth century—hence, it was yet to come.

## Leo the Great and His Secretary. *Spiritus Movens*

In this chapter, dedicated primarily to Pope Leo the Great, I look into his fully developed theory of human dignity, which was influenced by the Greek approach and is strongly linked with the Christmas celebrations. Because the figure of Leo the Great is typically reduced in the histories of dignity to his appeal to recognize one's dignity, I document all five versions of this appeal, and argue for the heavy reliance of the Pope on the text by Basil of Caesarea. I also discuss all other deliberations of dignity in Leo's preserved orations, as well as the relevant texts by the Pope's secretary, Prosper of Aquitaine. Leo's appeal is ingrained in a conception of dignity so far unresearched, yet one to have influenced the Latin liturgy, as well as numerous later thinkers, whose reception of Leo's thought is traced throughout late antiquity and medieval times. This investigation of Leo's reception (from the late fifth-century *Eusebius Gallicanus* to Catherine of Siena) documents a history of over a dozen appeals to know one's dignity which were formulated by the leading Christian authorities following Leo up until the fourteenth century. In addition, biblical and ancient Greek and Roman inspirations of the axiological appeal are identified. In the conclusion, I consider the hypothesis that Leo's use of *dignitas* is a watershed in the popularization the concept in European culture, for it was during his papacy that *dignitas* was propagated as a systematically applied anthropological category.



Pope Leo I, born at the beginning of the fifth century into an aristocratic Roman family, was undoubtedly one of the most influential figures of late ancient Christianity. For 21 years, between 29 September 440 and 10 November 461, he led the Church as Bishop of Rome, and his papacy is considered one of the most influential in history. Alongside Gregory I and Nicholas I, he is one of three popes whose names are appended with the title “the Great,” and the first to be so titled.<sup>1</sup> During the heated Christological debate that spawned the

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1 See B. Studer, *Leone I papa*, in: Di Berardino, 2007, 2768–2772; D. Wyrwa, *Leone I Magno*, in: Döpp / Geerlings / Noce (eds.), 2006, 533–535; M. Starowieyski, *Leon I Wielki*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 646–649; B. Studer, *Leo the Great*, in: A. Di Berardino (ed.), *Patrology 4: The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature: From the Council of Nicea to*

organization of the Church Council of Chalcedon in 451, Leo issued what is known as Leo's Tome, *Tomus ad Flavianum*, a dogmatic letter refuting mistakes spread by Eutyches concerning the nature of Christ, and clarifying the Christological dogma. Twelve years into his pontificate, in 452, he famously led the imperial embassy that stopped Attila the Hun from invading Rome, relying not on military power (which he, as Pope, did not have) but on the sheer power of argumentation and his authority. Soon after, he prevented the destruction of Rome and the massacre of its people during the Vandal invasion, once again by negotiating with the invader, Genseric. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Leo I was considered responsible for issuing the Verona Sacramentary (since called the Leonine Sacramentary), a liturgical book containing prayers for the organization of Masses in the Roman Rite. This attribution is wrong by at least a century, even though many prayers gathered in the Sacramentary stem from Leonian times. However, Leo's theological reflection on the birth of Christ did contribute to setting the framework for the celebration of Christmas, which in the fifth century grew to be one of the biggest Christian holidays, next to Easter and Epiphany. His reign, troubled by the invasions of the eternal city, strengthened the position of the Roman Bishop in the Church and the role of papacy in European societies. Leo is thus often called a precursor of the medieval style of papacy, in which the Bishop of Rome is not just a moral, but also a political leader.<sup>2</sup>

After 29 September 440, the beginning of his pontificate, Leo the Great's vocabulary, as demonstrated in his sermons and letters, included the notion of dignity as one of his key concepts.<sup>3</sup> Leo authored influential Christmas sermons that accentuated the concept of dignity and formulated a clarion call to recognize human dignity (*Agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam*—"Realize, o Christian, your dignity!")<sup>4</sup> This famous call was to be repeated

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*the Council of Chalcedon*, Notre Dame 1991, 589–612; M. Welsh / J. Kelly, *Leo I*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, Oxford 2015, 166–170. For the recent use of the title "great" in reference to John Paul II, see Benedict XVI, *The Letter on the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of John Paul II*, 18 May 2020 and Papa Francesco / Luigi Maria Epicoco, *San Giovanni Paolo Magno*, Milan 2020.

- 2 C. Bartnik, *Nauka Leona Wielkiego o Prymacie Biskupa Rzymu*, in: *Vox Patrum* 24 (2004), 311–322; B. Green, *The Soteriology of Leo the Great*, Oxford 2008, 1–22; S. Wessel, *Leo the Great and the Spiritual Rebuilding of a Universal Rome*, Leiden 2008, 1–9; K. Panuś, *Święty Leon Wielki*, Cracow 2005, 5–40; J.P. Freeland / A.J. Conway, *Introduction*, in: *Leo the Great, Sermons*, Washington 1996, 4–11.
- 3 See the following sermons (I follow CCL 138–138A numeration): 2; 3; 4; 5; 12; 20; 21; 22; 24; 25; 26; 27; 29; 30; 32; 33; 35; 38; 39; 42; 45; 48; 51; 56; 57; 59; 64; 66; 69; 71; 72; 73; 76; 82; 83; 94; 95.
- 4 Leo. M., *trac. 21.3*. In this quotation, the translation of the Latin *agnosce* into the English "realize" might suggest not just the theoretical activity of getting to know something, but

after Leo, and paraphrased by significant late ancient and medieval intellectuals of various lands all over Europe, for centuries to come (e.g. a late fifth century collection of sermons, *Eusebius Gallicanus*; the anonymous author of *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*; an anonymous Master of Verona; William of Saint-Thierry; Bernard of Clairvaux; Richard of Saint Victor; Godfrey of St. Victor; Peter Cantor; Gerard Iterius; Thomas Aquinas; an anonymous author of *De humanitate Christi*; Catherine of Siena; Denis the Carthusian),<sup>5</sup> sometimes during Christmas celebrations. Lengthy quotations from Leo's sermons appear throughout the Carolingian Renaissance and the Middle Ages, and not only his concept but also his conception of human dignity is included in one of the prayers gathered in the Verona Sacramentary, some of which were collected from the Roman Churches under his pontificate, and which were used all over the Latin West until Vaticanum II. This reception itself testifies to Leo's influence in popularizing the notion of dignity as a leading anthropological category. A careful analysis of these references and paraphrases, presented below, provides evidence that the Pope contributed to the practice of using the word with an anthropological meaning (*dignitas hominis*) subscribed to earlier by Jerome of Stridon and Augustine of Hippo, as well as an axiological reflection on human value, which was henceforth more commonly called *dignitas*.

I will thus argue in this Chapter that it was Leo's call for dignity and his use of the term, as well as his conception of the idea, that contributed to the concept of dignity entering the first league of anthropological terms in European Latin culture. As we have seen, Jerome of Stridon used the phrase *dignitas hominis* in his commentary on the psalms, yet not in other writings. Augustine of Hippo, who died just ten years before Leo's election to the Throne of Saint Peter, used the concept of dignity as one of many similar positive axiological designations. Earlier, the terminological choices of Ambrose of Milan demonstrate that *dignitas* was not popular in the anthropological meaning (*dignitas hominis*) and that its social use, applicable to ranks and offices (*dignitas Romana*), prevailed

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also a practical involvement in making something happen. The Latin carries only the prior meaning.

- 5 Eus. Gall., hom. 53.14 (CCL 101A, 623, lineae 172–176) and hom. 24.7 (CCL 101, 286, lineae 144–149); (Ps.)Max. Taur., 3 bapt. 1, in: *Omellie mistagogiche e catechetiche*, 127, lineae 32–39; Guillelmus de Sancto Theodorico, exp. Cant. 12 (CCCM 87, 51, linea 62); Bernardus Claraevallensis, sermo 2.1, (SBO 4, 252, linea 6); Richardus de Sancto Victore, De contemplatione (Beniamin maior) 3.13 (SRSA 13, 312); a loose paraphrase of Leo's imperative in to be found in: Godefridus de Sancto Victore, micr. 3.237 (SRSA 16, 492); Petrus Cantor, Summa quae dicitur Verbum abbreviatum (textus prior) 11 (CCCM 196A, 100, linea 114); Scriptores ordinis Grandimontis, expl. sent. (CCCM 8, 452, linea 1018); Thomas de Aquino, Sth. III, q. 1, a. 2, corp.; Anonymus (Ps.)Thomas de Aquino, hum., a. 2.2 (Parma 1864, 190); Catharina Senensis, dial. 35 (Siena 1995, 91); Dionysius Cartusianus, comm. 3.1, q. 1, col. 2 (DCOO 23, 36).



at the time, even if this meaning was adapted to new circumstances, such as that of Christian martyrs.

The hypothesis I propose is that *dignitas* became a leading term for human axiological status in the European Latin tradition due to (among other factors) firstly Leo's choice of words, and in particular, his emphasis on *dignitas hominis*, as well as his concise and emphatic expressions that employ *dignitas* in the anthropological sense; secondly, his exceptional and exceptionally long-held position as head of the Church, addressing all levels of the late ancient Roman society; thirdly, his promotion of Christmas as one of the most significant Christian holidays (during which the Pope celebrated human dignity). These factors contributed to the widespread reception of his call and sermons in subsequent centuries.

As will be also argued in this Chapter, the famous call is likely to originate in Basil the Great's commentary on the psalms, which was discussed in Chapter Two, and the similarity of which to Leo's is demonstrated in this Chapter. The exact means by which Basil's commentary was transmitted to the West is not only unknown but—due to the lack of historical evidence—mysterious. In fact, we have grounds to assume that the Pope did not know Greek and could not rely on a Greek passage; the Latin translation of the time is not preserved. This is why I present arguments indicating the similarity of ideas, form, and style in the passages by these two authors, in order to argue that Basil's text was transmitted to the Latin West in the fifth century, and specifically, that it influenced (perhaps indirectly) Leo's sermons.

To reveal the origins of the form of the call to know one's dignity, I also discuss other, similar appeals formulated in the Latin tradition before Leo, and specifically, a relevant passage by Ambrose of Milan, a keen reader of Basil and one of Leo's possible sources of inspiration. Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* is likely to be the intermediate text through which Leo learned of the form of the call to recognize human dignity and became inspired by the rhetorical value of the axiological imperative. In addition to the similarity of the form, I also discuss the similarity of the content of the analyzed fragments. Studying both the content and form of axiological appeals, including Leo's most famous formula, reveals their ancient Greek, Roman, and biblical roots.

It would be a mistake to limit the investigation of Leo's role in the history of the idea of human dignity to the aforementioned famous call to recognize it. He used the term on many occasions, and in many contexts. Leo's ninety-seven speeches (sermons, in fact), spoken in Rome's churches at the Lateran, St. Clement's, and St. Peter's, illuminate different aspects of his conception of human dignity; moreover, some 143 letters written during his pontificate

(addressed to various political leaders, bishops, abbots, and priests) include anthropologically significant uses of *dignitas*. The letters were prepared by Roman Curia and serve to illustrate their function, and the influence that the Pope's secretary, Prosper of Aquitaine, had over them can be identified. Prosper discussed the idea of human dignity himself in his commentary to psalms, written either a decade before or a decade into Leo's pontificate.<sup>6</sup> Of the mentioned 143 letters (published with an additional thirty from Leo's addressees), the authenticity of only two, numbers 40 and 140, is questioned.<sup>7</sup> We will briefly discuss these to promote a comprehensive understanding of Leo's concept of dignity.

The exploration of Leo's contribution to the history of the concept of dignity is ordered in the following way. We start with the most general personalist uses (an anthropological meaning of the word), move on to the narrower uses (a sociological sense of the word), and finish with non-personalist use (which I thus call *dignitas eventi*), hoping to illuminate the wider spectrum of the application of the word *dignitas* in late ancient Europe. We will begin, therefore, with an exposition of Leo's most famous call to recognize human dignity, and then move on to his conception of human dignity (*dignitas hominis*), with its two main justifications: human creation and God's incarnation leading to redemption. We shall also address Leo's idea of the final transformation of human dignity through partaking in God's glory. The next step is to investigate Leo's understanding of the dignities specific to certain groups (such as the poor or priests), and then the mentions of the dignities of the papal office and of particular events (*dignitas Romana* applied to new contexts).

We will then consider Leo's sources, in the ancient Greek, Latin and Hebrew traditions, as well as his reception in medieval Europe up until the fourteenth century. The Chapter ends with an estimation of Leo's standpoint in light of the leading questions of this study (presented in Chapter One), showing the philosophical underpinnings of his theory of dignity and an assessment of the role this conception played in history. I argue that we can identify a fully developed conception of dignity in Leo's writings, one that had not been fully formulated before among the Latin writers, and one that brought a significant change to European intellectual and linguistic culture.

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6 A. Hamman, *Prosper of Aquitaine*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 1991, 554.

7 Starowieyski, 2022, 648.

#### 4.1 The Clarion Call to Recognize One's Dignity

Let us start with the most famous of Leo's passages.<sup>8</sup> His call to recognize human dignity has been described as one of the most significant appeals of this kind in history. The appeal itself, in slightly different forms, is repeated five times in Leo's preserved writings, including at least three times during Christmas celebrations (the date of the speeches containing the other two uses is uncertain).<sup>9</sup> There are, moreover, other formulations resembling the call in various other sermons. The phrases differ in their details, yet all point to a similar need to recognize that humans are dignified, and an urgent imperative to do so.

*Agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam*<sup>10</sup> ("Recognize, o Christian, your dignity!"), Leo cried out during his first Christmas celebrations as a pope in 440, presumably during *missa secunda in die* held at St. Peter's at 9 o'clock on 25 December.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of the fifth century, Christmas day was celebrated in Rome with two masses: *in media nocte* (at midnight) and *in die* (during the day). The third celebration, *missa in aurora*, was introduced in St. Anastasia's church between 458–470, after the relics of the saint martyred under Diocletian on 25 December were transferred to Rome, possibly still during the end stage of Leo's long pontificate.<sup>12</sup> The quotes above are the most famous of Leo's phrases, spoken during the 9 o'clock Christmas mass, and are followed by a lengthy justification of its message, which I will discuss below. In its rich late ancient and medieval reception, this call is typically not quoted exactly, but with the vocative *Christiane* replaced by *homo*—a noun present in two other versions of the call. However, the exact phrasing, *Agnosce, o homo, dignitatem tuam*, is not to be found in Leo's speeches.

8 I have first described this use in: J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Późnostarozżytne apele o rozpoznanie godności ludzkiej: Bazyl i Cezarei Kapadockiej, Ambroży z Mediolanu, Leon Wielki, Mistrz z Werony*, in: *Vox Patrum* 83 (2022), 141–162. Selected sentences from this chapter are identical to the contents of the Polish article.

9 Cf. A. Chavasse's remarks about the dating of tract. 94; 95 (CCL 138, CXCVIII–CCI).

10 Leo. M., trac. 21.3,1 (CCL 138, 88, lineae 70–71). In order to make the Latin quotations presented in the book uniform, I do not follow CCL insofar as I replace the letter "u" with the letter "v" in Leo's sermons, where it is orthographically justified. To ensure uniformity of terminology, I translate most direct Latin quotations myself, having reviewed them against available English texts published in *The Fathers of the Church* series: Leo the Great, *Sermons* (J.P. Freeland / A.J. Conway trans.), USA 1996.

11 M. Pratesi, *Introduzione*, in: E. Montanari / M. Naldini / M. Pratesi (eds.), *Leone Magno, I sermoni del ciclo natalizio*, Florence 1998, 11.

12 Pratesi, 1998, 10–13.

On Christmas morning in 451, Leo appealed: *Expergiscere, o homo, et dignitatem tuae agnosce naturae*.<sup>13</sup> (“Wake up, o human, and realize the dignity of your nature!”) Although perhaps rhetorically stronger and broader in scope, this appeal was less popular, probably because the passage uttered in 440 was inaugural for the pontificate, when all eyes were fixed on a new pope, and also simpler in its form. As stated, the appeal from Christmas of 440 was most often repeated in the Middle Ages—and still is today—with the vocative *Christiane* replaced with *homo*, thus reaching a universal form of reference applicable to the whole of humankind, not simply the faithful.

The universal reference of *homo* is indisputable. Latin *homo*, similarly to the Greek ἄνθρωπος, was spoken *de utriusque sexus*, thus naming both men and women.<sup>14</sup> This is made apparent by the practice of addressing speeches dedicated to men only with other vocatives, such as *virī* (“o, men”) or more specifically: *senatores, milites, iuvenes*, etc. *Homo* can, naturally, be addressed to exclusively male gatherings, who are then addressed as human beings, as indicated by a historical or conceptual context. The common use of *homo*, however, does not function within a male-female opposition, which would be exclusive of women. Exceptionally rare instances of using *homo* within an opposition *homo-mulier* (*mi homo, mea mulier*) do not form a lasting linguistic *usus*.<sup>15</sup> They also remained marginal in medieval Latin.<sup>16</sup> Such contexts are also not applicable to Leo’s calls, since we know who his addressees were: both men and women attending mass gatherings. We will consider Leo’s understanding of dignity as pertaining to human nature in general, but we can already detect it in another version of the call.

*Agnoscat homo sui generis dignitatem*,<sup>17</sup> (“May a human being acknowledge the dignity of their own kind,” or even “A human being ought to acknowledge the dignity of their own kind”), Leo stated again during a sermon dating possibly to the year 458. Leo justifies this late exclamation, spoken approximately three years before his death, through the doctrine of human iconicity:

13 Leo. M., trac. 27.6 (CCL 138, 137).

14 Cf. L&S Dictionary and DMLBS for *homo*. I stress this because some studies suggest that Leo’s call, addressing the human being (*homo*), were understood by Leo’s Latin listeners (both ancient and medieval) to address men only. See: M. Lebech, *European Sources of Human Dignity*, Oxford 2019, 85. The source of this confusion might come from commenting on the English translation (“Realize, o man, your dignity!”). Based on this, the commentator speculates that medieval women could have been offended by “a possible insult”. Nothing in the Latin source material validates such claims—*homo* addresses men and women equally.

15 L&S Dictionary for *homo*.

16 DMLBS for *homo*.

17 Leo. M., trac. 94.2 (CCL 138A, 579, lineae 39–40).

*Agnoscat homo sui generis dignitatem, factumque se ad imaginem et similitudinem sui Creatoris intellegat, nec ita de miseris quas per peccatum illud maximum et commune incidit expavescat, ut non se ad misericordiam sui Reparatoris adtolat. Ipse enim dicit: Sancti estote, quia sanctus sum, hoc est me elegite, et his quae mihi displicent abstinete. Facite quod amo, amate quod facio.*<sup>18</sup>

May a human being acknowledge the dignity of their own kind, and may they understand that they are created in the image and likeness of their Creator, thus may they not dread the misery, which they fall into through that great common sin so much, that they fail to raise themselves to the mercy of their Redeemer. For He says: be holy, because I am holy, i.e., choose me, and refrain from what displeases me. Do what I love, love what I do.

This call to recognize human dignity, justified by iconicity, therefore serves to prevent fear and encourage participation in redemption. As we will see, according to Leo iconicity is only one—and the lesser of two—factors that justify human dignity.

In a yet another version of his appeal (in 441, during his second Christmas as a Pope), Leo formulated a cognitive imperative, addressing the idea of the value of the act of redemption. He introduced it with a description of “human nature purified from the ancient contagion” (*ab antiquis contagiis purata natura*), which “returns to its dignity” (*redit in honorem suum*).<sup>19</sup> And he appealed right after: *Quisque igitur christiano nomine pie et fideliter gloriaris, reconciliationis huius gratiam iusto perpende iudicio.*<sup>20</sup> (“Whoever of you, therefore, piously and faithfully boasts with the name of a Christian, examine the grace of this reconciliation with a fair judgment”). We will examine Leo’s justifications of dignity to show the relationship between iconicity and redemption in reference to dignity.

To finalize the list of appeals, let us quote a sermon, the dating of which is not certain but can be placed between 446 and 461.<sup>21</sup> Leo appealed one final time, *Agnosce, Christiane, tuae sapientiae dignitatem, et qualium disciplinarum artibus ad quae praemia voceris intellige*<sup>22</sup> (“Recognize, o Christian, the dignity

18 Leo. M., trac. 94.2 (CCL 138A, 579, lineae 39–42).

19 Leo. M., trac. 22.4 (CCL 138, 97, linea 175): *Redit in honorem suum ab antiquis contagiis purata natura, mors morte destruitur, nativitas nativitate reparatur, quoniam simul et redemptio aufert servitudinem, et regeneratio mutat originem, et fides iustificat peccatorem.*

20 Leo. M., trac. 22.5 (CCL 138, 97–98, lineae 179–180).

21 I follow A. Chavasse’s dating. This sermon is compared to a sermon on the blessing by Chromatius of Aquileia by: C. Cerami, *Le beatitudini in Cromazio d’Aquileia e Leone Magno*, in: *Laurentianum* 59 (2018), 399–423.

22 Leo. M., trac. 95.7 (CCL 138A, 588, lineae 138–139).

of your wisdom and understand to what rewards you are called by the practice of which teachings”), in a sermon *de beatitudinibus* (“On the blessings”).

As we see, the appeal took many forms, some addressing humans in general (thus pertaining to *dignitas hominis*), some more specifically addressing Christians listening to the sermons (*dignitas Christiana*), and some talking about the dignity of a feature, such as wisdom. All of these various forms, however, share the urgent tone and the rhetorical force of an imperative (once expressed by a subjunctive), pleading for the cognitive action of acknowledging one’s dignity, and once for the recognition of “the grace of reconciliation” (*gratia reconciliationis*), which leads to the reclaiming of lost dignity. The most famous call remains the simplest, uttered in Rome on the first Christmas day in 440: *Agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam*.<sup>23</sup> As noted, this appeal is typically merged in later reception with the appeals spoken in 451 and 458, insofar as the *homo* present in the latter two replaced the original *Christiane*.

In summary, Leo’s appeal to recognize dignity was not a one-time incident, nor was it a catchphrase that became popular but was bereft of deeper meaning. The idea of dignity was one of the Pope’s persistent thoughts, and one that was incorporated into a fully-fledged conception of dignity and repeated at various stages in Leo’s 21-year-long papacy, often during important Church celebrations. We will investigate this conception below in order to show the context of the appeal, but it remains true that, despite being encompassed in a broader reflection, the cognitive imperative became famous as a catchphrase. Before we investigate numerous later quotations of the short call, let us follow Leo’s lead and identify the meaning of “human dignity”. This will reveal the conceptual context of the call and illustrate the mature conception of dignity formulated in late antiquity.

#### 4.2 *Dignitas Generis Nostrī: Dignity of Human Nature*

Leo the Great proclaimed human nature to be dignified using a range of terminology, starting from expressions such as “the honor of human nature” (*honor*

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23 Leo. M., trac. 21.3 (CCL 138, 88, lineae 70–71).

*naturae*)<sup>24</sup> or “the dignity of our race” (*dignitas generis nostri*),<sup>25</sup> and ending with superlatives such as “the most splendid dignity” or the “very splendid dignity” (*dignitas speciosissima*) of a human being.<sup>26</sup> It will come as no surprise that Leo justified these anthropological descriptions using the doctrine of iconicity, among other things—a justification, however, that he developed beyond the standard vocabulary of iconicity and likeness (*imago et similitudo*), originating in the Book of Genesis and already visible in a version of an appeal dated around 458.

Leo employed almost poetic figures of speech in his description of God’s human iconicity, such as the “brilliance of imitation” (*splendor imitationis*)<sup>27</sup>, living as if a “ray in the mirror” (*tamquam in speculi nitore*)<sup>28</sup> of God’s goodness (*bonitas*),<sup>29</sup> justice (*iustitia*),<sup>30</sup> kindness (*benignitas*),<sup>31</sup> or will (*voluntas*).<sup>32</sup> Although eloquent, the thought was not novel. It takes us back to the beginning of the Book of Genesis, where it is proclaimed that God created man and woman in His own image and likeness—to resemble Himself, “the Designer” (*auctor*), as Leo put it, following an old tradition.<sup>33</sup> Leo is likewise mindful of the fact that humanity fell, tempted by the Devil, the inventor of death (*inventor mortis Diabolus*), and needed redemption in order to restore its wounded nature and dignity.<sup>34</sup> The second justification for human dignity arises in this context, one that explains the link between dignity and the Christmas celebrations. It is also the one justification of dignity that demonstrates Leo’s continuity with the fourth-century Greek Fathers, Athanasius of Alexandria and Basil of Caesarea. Before we come to this, let us focus on the nature of iconicity in

24 Leo. M., trac. 20.2 (CCL 138, 82, lineae 46–47). Compare lineae 45–56 surrounding this passage: *Homo enim ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei factus, nihil habet in naturae suae honore tam proprium quam ut bonitatem sui imitetur auctoris, qui donorum suorum sicut misericors largitor est, ita est et iustus exactor, volens nos operum suorum esse consortes, ut quamvis nullam nos valeamus creare naturam, possimus tamen acceptam per dei gratiam exercere materiam, quia non ita usui nostro bona terrena conlata sunt, ut carnalium tantum sensuum voluptati satietatique servirent, alioquin nihil a pecudibus, nihil distaremus a bestiis, quae alienis necessitatibus consulere nesciunt et solam sui ac suorum fetuum curam habere noverunt.*

25 Leo. M., trac. 12.1 (CCL 138, 48, linea 4).

26 Leo. M., trac. 24.2 (CCL 138, 111, linea 52).

27 Leo. M., trac. 24.2 (CCL 138, 111, linea 51).

28 Leo. M., trac. 24.2 (CCL 138, 111, linea 52). See also trac. 12.1.

29 Leo. M., trac. 24.2 (CCL 138, 111, linea 50).

30 Leo. M., trac. 24.2 (CCL 138, 111, linea 51).

31 Leo. M., trac. 12.1 (CCL 138, 48, linea 5).

32 Leo. M., trac. 12.1 (CCL 138, 49, linea 32).

33 Leo. M., trac. 12.1 (CCL 138, 48, linea 3).

34 Leo. M., trac. 21.1 (CCL 138, 85, lineae 13–15).

Leo's view, and in particular on the dignity of a creature made in the image of God that has, however, fallen.

#### 4.2.1 *Imago Dei and a History of a Loss of Dignity*

Let us start with a strong statement concerning dignity. In a sermon spoken during the Christmas celebrations in 444, Leo described the beginnings of human nature in the following way:

*Adam praecepta Dei neglegens, peccati induxit dominationem, Iesus factus sub lege, reddit iustitiae libertatem. [...] Ille cupidus honoris Angelici, naturae suae perdidit dignitatem, hic infirmitatis nostrae suscipiens conditionem, propter quos ad inferna descendit, eosdem in caelestibus conlocavit.*<sup>35</sup>

Adam, neglecting God's teachings, introduced the rule of sin, and Jesus, who was created under the law, restored the freedom of justice. [...] One, greedy of the honor of angels, ruined the dignity of his own nature, the other stooping to the condition of our infirmity, descended to hell because of all, and placed them in the heavens.

Leo did not discuss wounded or impoverished dignity, but dignity that was ruined in consequence of sin. This is why, in his terms, the history of human dignity cannot be told without reference to the redemption achieved by Christ. Something that is lost and not merely wounded must be reclaimed. God's incarnation, and the sacrifice resulting from it, were a way of restoring the dignity once lost by humanity. Even if redeemed, however, in the so-called postlapsarian or pilgrim's condition, human nature bears the signs of its fall, which makes it weak and prone to evil. This is precisely why Leo formulates his famous call: *Agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam [...] noli in veterem vilitatem degeneri conversatione recidere.* ("Recognize, o human being, your dignity [...] and do not return to your old vileness by degenerate behavior.")<sup>36</sup> According to Leo, dignity was not given to humans once and for all. Rather, it was given, lost, and reclaimed; hence, it ought to be preserved and looked after as a delicate and precious gift. This is the fundamental truth concerning dignity that the Pope repeated on various occasions.

In a sermon delivered on 17 December 450, Leo opened his speech by recalling the creation of human nature in the image of God, *ut imitator sui esset auctoris*<sup>37</sup> ("so it imitates its designer.") Such imitation is constitutive of human axiology, since, as proclaimed in *Tractatus 20, Homo enim ad imaginem*

35 Leo. M., trac. 25.5 (CCL 138, 123, lineae 137–138).

36 Leo. M., trac. 21.3 (CCL 138, 88, lineae 71–72).

37 Leo. M., trac. 12.1 (CCL 138, 48, linea 3).



*et similitudinem Dei factus, nihil habet in naturae suae honore tam proprium quam ut bonitatem sui imitetur auctoris.*<sup>38</sup> (“Made in the image and likeness of God, humans do not have anything in the dignity of their nature so particular as to match the goodness of their creator.”) This ought to be stressed: on the one hand Leo claims that God-likeness is a dignified aspect of human nature, and on the other, that human nature, bereft of this likeness, has nothing in itself of similar grandiosity. Thus, *inveniemus [...] hanc esse naturalem nostri generis dignitatem si in nobis quasi in quodam speculo divinae benignitatis forma resplendeat.*<sup>39</sup> (“we will find [...] that there is in us this natural dignity of our kind if the form of divine kindness reflects in us like in a mirror.”) The conditional character of this statement is significant. Having nothing of their own to match the dignity of their archetype, human icons ought to resemble God in order to be dignified. Sin and weakness misshape the human reflection of God’s goodness, distorting the image. For the image to be present, nonetheless, in weak human nature, it has to be reshaped daily through cooperation with divine grace. This is why Leo states that God refashions us according to His image by loving (*Diligendo itaque nos Deus ad imaginem suam nos reparat.*)<sup>40</sup>

The exact criterion for reshaping the human image according to its archetype is identified by the Pope in two ways, and specified in a yet another way.<sup>41</sup> Firstly, in *Tractatus 12* spoken on 17 December 450, the criterion is identified as *imitatio voluntatis Dei*, the imitation of God’s will. The Pope refers to the greatest of all commandments: to love God with all one’s heart and soul, and your neighbor (who also is an image of God) as yourself. The love demanded by the commandment ought to take the form of unity between human and divine wills. Just as two friends are strongest in their friendship if their wills agree, the God-human relationship will be strongest if their respective wills unite. Since one is the archetype and the other a mirror, it is people who must imitate God’s will, *quia non aliter in nobis erit dignitas divinae maiestatis, nisi imitatio fuerit voluntatis*<sup>42</sup> (literally, “because the dignity of the divine majesty will be in us in no other way than by imitating will”). To be in God’s image, in Leo’s terms, is to imitate God’s will.

Two years later, in *Tractatus 45*, spoken on 10 February 452, Leo explained the criterion of God-likeness in a yet another, although complementary, way. Firstly, he stated that, *Forma igitur conversationis fidelium ab exemplo venit*

38 Leo. M., trac. 20.2 (CCL 138, 82, lineae 45–48).

39 Leo. M., trac. 12.1 (CCL 138, 48, lineae 3–5).

40 Leo. M., trac. 12.1 (CCL 138, 49, linea 20).

41 Compare Studer, 1991, 572. Studer reconstructs Leo’s notion of *imago Dei* based on a passage of trac. 45.2; therefore, he accentuates love as a single factor determining *similitudo*.

42 Leo. M., trac. 12.1 (CCL 138, 49, lineae 30–33).

*operum divinorum, merito Deus imitationem sui ab eis exigit quos ad imaginem et similitudinem suam fecit.*<sup>43</sup> (“The form of life that the faithful lead comes from the example of divine works, God therefore rightfully demands His imitation from those whom he created in His image and likeness.”). The sermon specifies God’s two attributes, mercy and truth, to be imitated by the icons: *Cuius utique gloriae dignitate non aliter potiemur quam in nobis et misericordia inveniatur et veritas* (“Undoubtedly, we will attain the dignity of His glory in no other way than if both mercy and truth are found in us”),<sup>44</sup> because, *nos et misericordia Dei misericordes, et veritas faciat esse veraces*<sup>45</sup> (“God’s mercy makes us merciful and God’s truth makes us truthful”). As we see, the sermon spoken in 452 identifies the imitation of God’s mercy and truth rather than God’s will as a criterion of God-likeness. These two approaches are not contradictory; rather, they complement one another, for the later conception refines the earlier one. God’s will assumes loving and being truthful, and both the criterion of God’s will and the criterion of God’s mercy and truth indicate a functional similarity between the icon and the archetype.

Interestingly, therefore—and shortly after the influential voice of Augustine in the debate over iconicity, which placed a very strong accent on the structural similarity between the Trinity and the human soul—the Pope’s understanding of iconicity can be summarized as *imitatio voluntatis Dei* (imitation of God’s will) or *imitatio misericordiae veritatisque Dei*. It is thus not a structural but a functional similarity between God and His creature; this constituting an original voice in the ages-long debate.

There is a third, very specific description of human iconicity in Leo’s sermons. In the previously-mentioned early sermon from 445, Leo discussed the three practices whose exercise *ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei pervenit et a sancto Spiritu inseparabiles facit*<sup>46</sup> (“leads to the image and likeness of God and makes [us] inseparable from the Holy Spirit.”) The three are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (*oratio, ieiunium et elemosina*),<sup>47</sup> because, *oratione enim propitiatio Dei quaeritur, ieiunio concupiscentia carnis extinguitur, elemosinis peccata redimuntur*<sup>48</sup> (“God’s propitiation is sought by prayer, fasting extinguishes concupiscentia of the flesh, and almsgiving is an atonement for sins.”)<sup>49</sup> One can interpret this criterion as a specification of either the criterion of God’s will or

43 Leo. M., trac. 45.2 (CCL 138A, 264, lineae 36–37).

44 Leo. M., trac. 45.2 (CCL 138A, 264, lineae 38–39).

45 Leo. M., trac. 45.2 (CCL 138A, 264, linea 39).

46 Leo. M., trac. 12.4 (CCL 138, 53, 110–111).

47 Leo. M., trac. 12.4 (CCL 138, 53, linea 101).

48 Leo. M., trac. 12.4 (CCL 138, 53, lineae 104–109).

49 Cf. Dan 4:27; Sir 3:33; 1 Pet 4:8.

of the criterion of God's mercy. The precisely delineated practices offer specific ways to serve God's will or to be merciful like God.

These suggested interconnections of the various criteria of iconicity come together in the late *Tractatus 94*, dated around 458, in which a version of Leo's call is formulated. In this speech, Leo adheres to the idea of the imitation of God's will through the practice of fasting performed by God's icon: *Quid autem iustius quam ut homo, cuius fert imaginem, faciat voluntatem, et per abstinentiam cibi ieiunet a lege peccati?*<sup>50</sup> ("What is more just than that a human being may exercise the will of the one whose image they carry, and through abstinence from food they may fast from the law of sin?"). This clearly shows that the imitation of God's will, the first criterion of God-likeness, is compatible with the specific practices of charity and mercy referred to by Leo, such as fasting and almsgiving. The dignity of the human race after the fall is the dignity of an image insofar as it reflects God's will, specifically through truthfulness, charity, and mercy, which in practice means prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Many of Leo's sermons are dedicated to the virtue of charity (*caritas*), without which, in his opinion, Christian life cannot be accomplished. Leo insisted that all other virtues are in vain once love (exercised through charity) is forfeited (*nudae tamen sunt omnes sine caritate virtutes*).<sup>51</sup> The Pope also often stressed the dignity of the poor in this context, which is why we will come back to this point below.

So far, one could conclude that the conditional character of *imago Dei*, lost in consequence of sin, indicates the weakness of human dignity, and is visible in the fluctuating likeness or dissimilarity to its archetype. Such dignity seems vulnerable, especially when contrasted with the original dignity bestowed in the act of creation and unblemished by such fluctuations. It is nothing of the sort, however. Leo argued that, after the fall, humanity was offered a nobility of greater dignity still. This is a hallmark of the Pope's original stance and is why his words are often recalled during Christmas celebrations.

#### 4.2.2 Felix Culpa: *Reacquisition of a Greater Dignity after Incarnation*

In *Tractatus 22* (prepared in its initial form for the celebration of the first day of Christmas in 441), only one year into his pontificate, the Pope discussed the need for purification from *antiquum contagium*, ancient contagion, or in

50 Leo. M., trac. 94.3 (CCL 579–580, lineae 57–59).

51 Leo. M., trac. 48.3 (CCL 282, lineae 73–88): *Quamvis enim magnum sit habere fidem rectam sanamque doctrinam, et multa laude sit digna gulae, lenitas mansuetudinis, puritas castitatis, nudae tamen sunt omnes sine caritate virtutes, nec potest dici in qualibet morum excellentia fructuosum quod non dilectionis partus ediderit.*

other words, original sin.<sup>52</sup> There were many ways in which God might have redeemed the human race and restored the human dignity that had been lost. The one solution He chose, redemption accomplished by God Himself taking on a human form, opened the gates for humanity to be united with God even more closely than it had been previously, after creation. Humanity receives a new, greater dignity through incarnation: human beings no longer merely originate from God the Creator, but are united with Him in one shared nature. Since the incarnation, humanity is the only nature in the universe to be united with God so closely, and this is a point that situates humans above the angels.<sup>53</sup> As we remember, Athanasius of Alexandria and Basil of Caesarea acknowledged the same thing: a greater human dignity after uniting with God in one human nature.<sup>54</sup> The act of incarnation introduces humanity's special glory, a topic that Leo approaches through a list of opposing features leading to a paradox resulting from incarnation, as observed earlier by Gregory of Nazianzus in one of the first preserved Christmas sermons of the Christian tradition.

Leo follows in Gregory's footsteps by describing incarnation as a paradoxical event:

*invisibilis in suis visibilis est factus in nostris, incomprehensibilis voluit comprehendī, ante tempora manens esse coepit ex tempore, universitatis dominus servilem formam obumbrata maiestatis suae dignitate suscepit, impassibilis Deus non dedignatus est homo esse passibilis, et immortalis mortis legibus subiacere.*<sup>55</sup>

invisible in His [scil. nature]—He became visible in ours, incomprehensible—He willed to be comprehended, existing before time—He began to exist in time, the Lord of the universe undertook the form of a servant by overshadowing the dignity of his majesty, passionless God descended to being a man with passions, and the immortal subjected Himself to the laws of death.<sup>56</sup>

This list of opposing features follows and enriches that of Gregory of Nazianzus: it follows by pairing “the one existing before time” with “beginning to exist in time,” “incomprehensible” with “comprehended,” and “the Lord of a universe” with “a servant”; and it enriches by pairing the “invisible” with “visible”. Specifically, both Gregory and Leo argue that by disguising His dignity in human form, God restored human dignity and elevated it above all creation, and above the dignity of an icon. Leo thus issues another cognitive imperative,

52 Leo. M., trac. 22.4 (CCL 138, 97, linea 175). Cf. Luke 20:36.

53 Leo. M., trac. 73.3 (CCL 138A, 453, lineae 64–70).

54 See Chapter Two, subsections *Athanasius of Alexandria* and *Basil the Great*.

55 Leo. M., trac. 22.2 (CCL 138, 91–92, lineae 36–41).

56 Cf. Phil 2:7.

one resembling Athanasius of Alexandria's and Hilary of Poitiers' "dignitarian formulas": *Agnoscat igitur catholica fides in humilitate Domini gloriam suam*.<sup>57</sup> ("May, therefore, the Catholic faith recognize its glory in the humility of the Lord".)

This glory which must be observed is greater still than the glory of human creation in the image and likeness of God, which Leo affirms explicitly: *ultra propriae originis dignitatem proficeret secunda conditio*.<sup>58</sup> ("the second creation has advanced beyond the dignity of its own origin"). Leo thus develops his own version of *felix culpa*, "a happy fault," which, despite being evil, led to something good:

*Felix si ab eo non decideret quod Deus fecit, sed felicior si in eo maneat quod refecit. Multum fuit a Christo accepisse formam, sed plus est in Christo habere substantiam*.<sup>59</sup>

Happy is nature if it has not fallen from what God has made, but happier still it is if it persists in what God has remade. Great it was to receive the form from Christ, but greater still to have nature in Christ.

While creation constituted a generic relationship between a creature and God, incarnation constitutes a close unity of the two: they share one nature, one substance. This unity is achieved not through the transformation of a human being into God, but rather by God stooping to honor human nature with His presence. The second creation (*conditio secunda*), as Leo calls the restored humanity after incarnation and redemption, therefore brings forth a greater dignity than the first that was lost.<sup>60</sup> The first Judeo-Christian justification of dignity (human creation in God's image) is thus supplemented in Leo's thought by another, yielding a stronger sense of human greatness: one involving God's unity with the human substance. This argument and this conception of dignity, based on incarnation leading up to redemption, is as uniquely Christian as is the doctrine of incarnation.

57 Leo. M., trac. 25.5 (CCL 138, 122, lineae 119–120).

58 Leo. M., trac. 72.2 (CCL 138A, 442, lineae 30–31): *Conlapsa enim in parentibus primis humani generis plenitudine, ita misericors Deus creaturae ad imaginem suam factae per unigenitum suum Iesum Christum voluit subvenire, ut nec extra naturam esset naturae reparatio, et ultra propriae originis dignitatem proficeret secunda conditio*.

59 Leo. M., trac. 72.2 (CCL 138A, 442, lineae 31–34).

60 At times, Leo describes the second dignity as a restored original dignity, cf. trac. 22.4 (CCL 138, 97, lineae 175–178): *Redit in honorem suum ab antiquis contagiis purgata natura, i.e. "Purged from the ancient contagion, nature returns to its dignity."*

Such a justification of human dignity—indicating a shared nature with God—is why dignity was a permanent theme in Leo’s Christmas sermons celebrating the birth of Christ. The birth of Christ is the moment in history when God took on a creature’s nature, and human nature was elevated beyond the dignity of an icon. Leo introduced a strong conceptual link between human dignity and Christmas by celebrating not just the birth of the Savior but, at the same time, the growth of human dignity resulting from the incarnation. As we saw in Chapter Two, discussing Athanasius’s explication of incarnation, there is a philosophical, ontological difference between originating from someone and uniting with someone in the same nature. Hence, there is a greater dignity after incarnation.

In the fifth century, Christmas was not as popular as it is today, as the first documented celebration in Rome only took place around the year 330, according to the *Chronograph of 354* written by Dionysius Filocalus.<sup>61</sup> Leo’s understanding of this holiday as the beginning of the act of redemption, leading to the sacrifice of Easter Friday, contributed to establishing the significance of Christmas as one of the biggest Christian holidays, next to Epiphany and Easter.<sup>62</sup> On this occasion, Leo celebrated the divine nature taking on a human form and praised the dignity awarded to humans. This is why he appealed during the first day of Christmas, specifically:

*Expergiscere, o homo, et dignitatem tuae agnosce naturae. Recordare te factum ad imaginem Dei, quae, etsi in Adam corrupta, in Christo tamen est reformata.*<sup>63</sup>

Wake up, o human being, and recognize the dignity of your nature. Recall that you were created in the image of God, which, despite being corrupted in Adam, was, however, reformed in Christ.

61 Pratesi states that it was around 330 (Pratesi, 1991, 9); Heid and Förster state that the first celebrations were in 336, and Naumowicz, who considers a more up-to-date body of research, names the year 335. See S. Heid, *Natale*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 2007, 3423–3424; H. Förster, *Christmas*, in: *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online* [https://referenceworks-brillonline-1com-1ime2ovjtceec.hps.bj.uj.edu.pl/entries/brill-encyclopedia-of-early-christianity-online/christmas-SIM\\_00000628?s.num=14](https://referenceworks-brillonline-1com-1ime2ovjtceec.hps.bj.uj.edu.pl/entries/brill-encyclopedia-of-early-christianity-online/christmas-SIM_00000628?s.num=14) (accessed 1.09.2022); Naumowicz, 2016, 68–69, 113–129.

62 Similar opinion in Pratesi, 1991, 10. On Leo’s understanding of the meaning of the Holy Week, see J.M. Armitage, *Cures of the Soul and Correction of the Heart: Pope Leo the Great on the Healing Power of the Holy Week*, in: S. Hahn (ed.), *The Bible and the Church Fathers: The Liturgical Context of Patristic Exegesis*, Steubenville 2011, 13–34.

63 Leo. M., trac. 27.6 (CCL 138, 137, lineae 121–123).

Such dignity, twice created, is to be recognized by those to whom Leo appeals. Although these two factors, creation and incarnation leading to redemption, are the two fundamental justifications for human dignity, there is more to be said about Leo's anthropology and the place of human dignity in it. One point is certain, however. The emphasis Leo the Great placed on the dignity humans receive in consequence of incarnation leading to redemption marks his perspective and its continuity with the Greek Fathers. This anchoring of dignity in incarnation is a uniquely Christian view of dignity, and is typical of the late ancient Church Fathers who, having adopted the notion of an image from Judaism, adapted it to the teaching of God taking on a human form, thus transforming the ancient doctrine. Justifying dignity through the incarnation is a point that makes Leo's approach prone to certain criticism, however, which I will discuss at the end of the book.

#### 4.2.3 *Human Dignity Glorified and Made Equal to God's Dignity*

Thus far, we have observed Leo's conception of human dignity as twice received: during creation as the dignity of an icon, and during incarnation as the dignity of a creature whose nature is shared and redeemed by God. The consequence of linking human nature with God's person is that when Christ's person is glorified, so is human nature. The celebration of the ascension in 444, therefore, resulted in Leo spelling out the final elevation of human nature (*glorificatio naturae hominis*)<sup>64</sup> above all creation, all angels, and all hierarchies—to the very Throne of God and no less than God's glory and God's dignity:

*Et revera magna et ineffabilis erat causa gaudendi, cum in conspectu sanctae multitudinis supra omnium creaturarum caelestium dignitatem humani generis natura conscenderet, supergressura angelicos ordines, et ultra archangelorum altitudines elevanda, nec ullis sublimitatibus modum suae provectionis habitura, nisi aeterni Patris recepta consessu, illius gloriae sociaretur in throno, cuius naturae copulabatur in Filio. Quia igitur Christi ascensio, nostra provectio est, et quo praecessit gloria capitis, eo spes vocatur et corporis, dignis, dilectissimi, exultemus gaudiis et pia gratiarum actione laetemur. Hodie enim non solum paradisi possessores firmati sumus, sed etiam caelorum in Christo superna penetravimus, ampliora adepti per ineffabilem Christi gratiam quam per diaboli amiseramus invidiam.*<sup>65</sup>

And indeed great and ineffable has been the reason for our joy, since before the holy plentitude the nature of humankind has been elevated above the dignity of all heavenly creation, about to surpass angelic orders and having to rise above the heights of archangels, and not reaching a limit to its advancement in any form of elevation unless it is received by the audience of the eternal Father, and

64 Leo. M., trac. 73.2 (CCL 138A, 452, linea 41).

65 Leo. M., trac. 73.3 (CCL 138A, 444, lineae 64–77).

is united at the throne of glory of the one to whose nature it was bound in the Son. Since Christ's ascension is our promotion, and where preceded the glory of the head, there the hope of the body [scil. mystical body of Christ, i.e., the faithful] can be proclaimed, therefore, dearly beloved, let us exult with dignified joy and let us rejoice in pious work of graces. Today we have not only been strengthened as possessors of paradise but also entered the heights of heaven in Christ, through the ineffable grace of Christ, which obtained more than we had lost due to the envy of the devil.

This poetic and descriptive passage from Leo's ascension sermon demonstrates that Leo's conception of human axiology understands human nature as receiving the highest dignity possible among created beings: the dignity of God's glory.

Some commentators refer to the Christian Middle Ages, including late Christian antiquity, as an era that only stressed human insignificance, specifically in comparison to God's infinite value, or as an era focused solely on God's greatness, when human creatures were disregarded.<sup>66</sup> Leo's conception of dignity, and the above-quoted flowing ode to humanity's surpassing greatness, contradict this view. By connecting the notion of human dignity not only with creation in God's image but also with the fact of the incarnation, Leo concluded that human beings share in none other than God's glory and dignity. There is no contrast or competition between the axiology of humans and God because human dignity is elevated by joining with God's glory—through unity with the Son of God. This final elevation of human nature to God's glory, poetically described by Leo as human nature surpassing angelic orders and celestial firmaments, expresses the Pope's adoration of human nature and his belief in its foremost axiological status. There is nothing left for a Christian to say about a being's value or dignity other than that it is equal to God.

66 J. Kowalski, *Średniowiecze: Obalenie mitów*, Warsaw 2019, 105–108; J. Le Goff / N. Troung, *Historia ciała w średniowieczu*, trans. I. Kania, Warsaw 2018, 44; S. Wielgus, *O micie "ciemnego" średniowiecza i "światłej" nowożytności polemicznie*, Zielona Góra 1967, 23; W. Bajor / M. Gruchola, *Mit "ciemnego średniowiecza" w dyskursie społecznym*, in: *Roczniki Kulturoznawcze* 11 (2020), 91–94. Cf. also M. Green, author of *Know Thyself: The Value and Limits of Self Knowledge*, New York 2018, who argues that the tendency to investigate oneself was present in antiquity, forgotten during the Middle Ages and reintroduced in the Renaissance: "think about the Middle Ages. There's a case in which we don't get a whole lot of emphasis on knowing the self, instead the focus was on knowing God. It's only when Descartes comes on the scene centuries later that we begin to get more of a focus on introspection and understanding ourselves by looking within." Cf. M. Green, *Know Thyself: The Philosophy of Self-Knowledge*, Interview for the University of Connecticut, 20.02.2022, online: <https://today.uconn.edu/2018/08/know-thyself-philosophy-self-knowledge/#>.



### 4.3 Dignities Specific to Certain Groups

#### 4.3.1 *Dignitas Tabernaculorum*

Let us move on to the recapitulation of the Leonian vision of human dignity. We have already observed that human nature is Godlike in consequence of creation, that it is united with God more closely due to the incarnation, and that it finally came to be elevated to God's glory during ascension. These factors concern all people without exception. There are some aspects of human dignity which the Pope discussed only in relation to specific groups of people, however—for example, the dignity specific to people living in close relation to God, such as prophets, priests, or the baptized in general. Human nature, created in God's image and united with God as one kind, might, moreover, become a vessel of God's presence. In the same way that two people might be united not only by one being similar to the other (like a child who is similar to a parent), or by sharing the same human nature (in the same way that a child and a parent are of one nature), but by being present next to one another (like a child and a parent meeting face to face), so humans can be united with God in such a way—or even more closely than two people, for God is present *in* the human being, not next to them. This establishes the closest unity possible between God and the creature: the unity of a communion constituted by the presence of one united with another. This aspect of human dignity might seem to have a narrower scope of reference than the dignity of nature, for it pertains only to those living in close relation to God; those whom God inhabits as His temple, a concept traditionally called *capax Dei*, a vessel of God. This notion was also used in a text attributed to Basil of Caesarea (whose wording was *σκεῦος θεόπλαστον*), for whom, as we remember, being a vessel is a characteristic of a human being as such. Similarly to Basil, Leo acknowledges that inasmuch as everyone is capable of living in union with God, everyone is also capable of achieving dignity corresponding to this intimate unity. Some choose to neglect this, however, and willingly oppose the presence of grace and God within them, thus limiting the scope of reference for this particular dignity.

The idea of human *capacitas Dei* (the capacity for being filled with God) is expressed by Leo in various ways. To start with, in one oration, he called human beings *speciosissima tabernacula Dei*,<sup>67</sup> “very splendid” or “the most splendid tabernacles of God”. Moreover, the Pope expressed a certainty that the presence of many such tabernacles (i.e., listeners) before him meant that God's presence was strengthened in the community. In a sermon given in 445, Leo

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67 Leo. M., trac. 2.2 (CCL 138, 8, linea 31).

recalled St. Paul's words which gave rise to significant analyses of the human *capax Dei*. The quotation is as follows: *Si enim templum Dei sumus et mentium nostrarum Spiritus sanctus habitator est, multa nobis vigilantia laborandum est ut cordis nostri receptaculum tanto hospite non sit indignum.*<sup>68</sup> "If we are in fact the temple of God and the Holy Spirit is an inhabitant of our minds, we must work with much vigilance, so that the retreat of our heart is not unworthy of so great a guest." However unworthy of the divine guest, the human heart is dignified by the very presence of God within it, which gives rise to Leo's description of exceptional human axiology: *Si enim templum Dei sumus et Spiritus sanctus habitat in nobis, plus est quod fidelis quisque in suo habet animo, quam quod miratur in caelo*<sup>69</sup> ("If we are the temple of God and the Holy Spirit lives in us, what each faithful has in their soul means more than what can be marveled at in heaven")<sup>70</sup>. Leo adds: *nobis cum [est] puritas sacrificii, baptismi veritas, honor templi*<sup>71</sup> ("the purity of sacrifice, the truth of baptism, the honor of the temple is with us"). This honor is a nobility; one added to the fundamental dignity of human nature created in God's image and shared by God through His incarnation.

*Noblesse oblige*, which is why Pope Leo time after time advises the honorable "temples of God" to be cleaned and renewed regularly, although not without the help of the divine builder, *ne quid in nostris animis incompositum, ne quid inventiantur inmundum*<sup>72</sup> ("so that in our souls nothing disorderly, nothing dirty can be found"). A flawed doctrine can create one kind of significant disorder. Leo lived in times when Roman practices such as praising the Sun were still ongoing, and he is known to have opposed them. This is why he appealed to the Christians:

*Nihil vobis commune sit cum eis qui catholicae adversantes fidei solo sunt nomine christiani. Non enim templum Spiritus Dei, nec membra sunt Christi, sed falsis opinionibus implicati, tot species habent diaboli, quot simulacra mendacii.*<sup>73</sup>

68 Leo. M., trac. 43.1 (CCL 138A, 251, lineae 3–7).

69 Leo. M., trac. 27.6 (CCL 138, 137, lineae 133–135).

70 The expression *in animo habere* is used here not as an idiom (to plan), but quite literally as having in one's soul.

71 Leo. M., trac. 66.2 (CCL 138A, 402, lineae 51–52): *Nobis cum est signaculum circumcisionis, sanctificatio chrismatum, consecratio sacerdotum, nobis cum puritas sacrificii, baptismi veritas, honor templi, ut merito cessarent nuntii, postquam nuntiata venerunt, nec vacuetur reverentia promissionum, quia plenitudo manifestata est gratiarum.* Typically for Leo, *-cum* is written separately.

72 Leo. M., trac. 43.1 (CCL 138A, 251, lineae 11–12).

73 Leo. M., trac. 69.5 (CCL 138A, 423, lineae 110–113).

May you have nothing in common with those who are Christians only nominally, opposing the Catholic faith. For they are not the temple of the Holy Spirit, nor the members of Christ, but, entangled by false opinions, they have as many faces of the devil as representations of falsehood.

In Sermon 48, Leo picks up this point again, employing axiological terminology in reference to all the members of the Church:

*omne corpus Ecclesiae univsumque fidelium numerum, ab omnibus contaminationibus oportet esse purgatum, ut templum Dei, cui fundamentum est ipse fundator, in omnibus lapidibus speciosum, et in tota sui parte sit lucidum. Nam si regum aedes et sublimiorum praetoria potestatum omni ornatu rationabiliter excoluntur, ut excellentiora sint eorum domicilia quorum ampliora sunt merita, quanto opere aedificandum, quanto est honore decorandum ipsius deitatis habitaculum!*<sup>74</sup>

the entire body of the Church, and the complete number of the faithful, should be purified from all contamination, so that the temple of God, of which the foundation is the Founder himself, can be beautified in every stone and enlightened in all its parts. If the kings' houses and the higher officials' courts are reasonably praised with every decoration, so that the houses of those whose merits are greater were more excellent, then how great a labor should this shelter of divinity itself be built, and how great an honor should decorate it!

The passage uses metaphoric language to describe the process of dynamically enriching a human being. Leo also appealed to the architectonic metaphor when he named the required unity of three essential components—life, reason, and free will—in the construction of a human creature: *Viva enim rationalisque materies ad extructionem templi huius adsumitur, et per spiritum gratiae ut voluntarie in unam compagem congruat incitatur.*<sup>75</sup> (“For living and rational material is brought for the construction of this temple, and through the spirit of grace is stimulated so that it voluntarily unites into a single bond.”) Thus, although created Godlike—equipped with life and reason—humans can shape the tabernacles of God’s presence with their own free will into a single whole. This emphasis on human freedom, especially in the context of self-formation and self-creation, is worth mentioning. Leo, a significant authority in the Church, a pope whose name was later taken by twelve other successors of St. Peter, saw humans as capable of reshaping the natural image of God present in them from creation into either a “splendor of the mirror” reflecting God’s benevolence, or “so many faces of the devil” (*tot species diaboli*).<sup>76</sup> To

74 Leo. M., tract. 48.1 (CCL 138A, 279–280, liniae 16–24).

75 Leo. M., tract. 48.1 (CCL 138A, 280, lineae 27–29).

76 Leo. M., tract. 69.5 (CCL 138A, 423, linea 113).

see the human being as pliable enough to be shaped into either of these two forms, and to be capable of self-formation in these directions, is significant, for it also assumes human freedom in respect to self-formation. As such, humans ultimately self-author their design. This view anticipates the twelfth century definition of human dignity as free will, formulated by Bernard of Clairvaux.

This point about the flexibility of human nature is the context within which Leo's most famous cognitive imperative of recognizing one's dignity was formulated. The full appeal reads as follows:

*Agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam, et divinae consors factus naturae, noli in veterem vilitatem degeneri conversatione recidere. Memento capitis, et cuius sis corporis membrum. Reminiscere quia erutus de potestate tenebrarum, translatus es in Dei lumen et regnum. Per baptismatis sacramentum Spiritus sancti factus es templum, noli tantum habitatorem pravis de te actibus effugare et diaboli te iterum subicere servituti, quia pretium tuum sanguis est Christi, quia in veritate te iudicabit, qui misericorditer te redemit, Christus Dominus noster.<sup>77</sup>*

Realize, o Christian, your dignity, and, created a participant in the divine nature, do not return to your old vileness by degenerate behavior. Remember whose head and whose body you are a part of. Recall that you were plucked out of the power of darkness and transferred into God's light and kingdom. Through the sacrament of baptism you were created as a temple of the Holy Spirit; do not deter such an inhabitant away from you through crooked actions, and subject yourself again to the devil's servitude, because your price is Christ's blood, because he who has redeemed you in mercy, Christ our Lord, will judge you in truth.

This famous passage contains all the most significant points of Leo's understanding of human dignity. It recalls human creation in image and likeness; it tells the story of the loss and reacquisition of dignity, and supplements it with the mention of the dignity of a temple. It shows, moreover, dignity not as given once and for all, but as susceptible to loss, and thus it finishes with a call to recognize and preserve it. The urging tone of Leo's message during the Christmas celebrations in 440 echoes that of Basil the Great, formulated at least sixty and perhaps eighty years earlier. What is the link between the two appeals? I will present a comparative analysis of the two calls below in order to formulate a hypothesis that one is influenced by another. First, let us finish analyzing the types of dignity specific to certain groups in Leo's writings.

#### 4.3.2 **Dignitas Pauperum**

Let us move on to other uses of dignity pertaining to human groups that are narrower in scope than the whole of humanity. Apart from God's tabernacles,

<sup>77</sup> Leo. M., trac. 21.3 (CCL 138, 88–89, lineae 70–79).

there are certain groups to whom Leo applied the notion of dignity. In particular, Leo made it a point that the dignity of the poor deserves recognition just as much as anyone else's, or even more.

*Non sit vilis homini homo*<sup>78</sup> (“No human being should be worthless to another”), Leo argued in the context of the poor in November 443, recalling the incarnation which we identified as a justification of dignity. Every human being shares a form which God Himself took as His own, and therefore: *nec in quodam despiciatur illa natura quam rerum conditor suam fecit*<sup>79</sup> (“that nature which the Creator of the things made His own should not be disdained in anyone”). The Pope thus formulated the principle of unconditional respect for all people, regardless of their social standing. In November 445, Leo stressed additionally: *Una est divitum pauperumque natura*.<sup>80</sup> (“The nature of poor and rich is one.”) Thus, he formulated another appeal, *Agnoscat se in quibuscumque hominibus mutabilis et caduca mortalitas, et pro conditione communi socialem generi suo reddat affectum*.<sup>81</sup> (“May the mutable and low mortality recognize themselves in each human being and may they offer sympathy [*affectus socialis*] towards their own race according to their common condition.”) Moreover, on the fourth anniversary of his election, he applied the principle of equality of dignity to Christians to whom he spoke, as all of them share the same sacraments: *In unitate igitur fidei atque baptismatis, indiscreta nobis societas, dilectissimi, et generalis est dignitas*.<sup>82</sup> (“In the unity of faith and baptism we have an undistinguishable communion, dearly beloved, and general dignity.”)

The main justification for respecting the poor lies in their nature, a nature chosen by God to be His own (indicating the incarnation, the main justification of human dignity according to Leo) and already dignified by Him in the act of creation (the original justification of dignity), and finally also dignified by sharing in God's glory and being God's temples (this latter being yet another justification of human dignity). The poor are, moreover, additionally dignified because Jesus is specifically present in them. Leo argued that the Son of God unites with the poor and awaits recognition specifically in them, regardless of their faith, simply by virtue of them being in need, as He once was. All this, derived from the Gospel, constitutes the foundation of dignity specific to those in need, and not any other human group. Thus, the Pope appeals: *qui egeno*

78 Leo. M., trac. 9.2 (CCL 138, 35, lineae 59–61).

79 Leo. M., trac. 9.2 (CCL 138, 35, lineae 59–61).

80 Leo. M., trac. 11.1 (CCL 138, 45–46, lineae 30–31).

81 Leo. M., trac. 11.1 (CCL 138, 46, lineae 33–35).

82 Leo. M., trac. 4.1 (CCL 138, 16, linea 11).

*subvenit, Deo se impendere quod largitur intellegat.* (“May the one who supports those in need understand that he spends on God, what he gives away.”).<sup>83</sup>

The November 443 sermon, the one that raises the point of respecting the poor, proposes practical, organized engagement for the cause of the poor.<sup>84</sup> Leo encourages the people to contribute to the collection for the sake of those in need. This practice was adopted by the early Church from the Apostles, who, in turn, took it from Judaism. Leo’s contribution to understanding the fulfillment of this obligation amounts to highlighting the discretion with which the poor ought to be approached, for there are people in need who are too ashamed to admit their problems and openly ask for charity, and it is the role of Christians to be clever and sensitive in helping them with their hidden need. This, Leo argues, will double the joy of poor people, for not only their need but also their self-respect is honored by such an action. Charity must therefore be based on both respect for the dignity of the poor and thoughtfulness in approaching them in their difficult situation. Such mercifulness grants one similarity to God, who recognizes Himself in those who act with mercy towards the poor. In March 455, the Pope argued that: *ubi curam misericordiae invenit, ibi imaginem suae pietatis agnoscit*<sup>85</sup> (“where God finds merciful care, he recognizes the image of His sanctity”). There is, therefore, a strong link between God’s image present in humans and being merciful towards those in need.

Leo was a great advocate on behalf of the poor, who should be approached, in his opinion, with the virtue of charity on the part of those who are more privileged. He formulated, moreover, an exceptional view regarding virtues. He argued that Christian life simply cannot be accomplished without charity, for charity is essential to salvation. As Leo stated in a sermon delivered in November 444, *Verum haec tanta est, ut sine illa ceterae, etiam si sint, prodesse non possint*<sup>86</sup> (“But so great is that [scil. virtue] that without it the others, even if they are [scil. developed], cannot help”). What if, Leo pondered, a rich person lives as a good, obedient Christian, fulfilling all ten commandments, but lacks in this one aspect, charitable work? A Christian like that cannot expect mercy from God, since *Beati misericordes, quoniam ipsorum miserebitur Deus*<sup>87</sup> (“Blessed are the merciful, for God will be merciful to them.”) Those who are short of compassion for those in need will hear the accusation the Gospel talks about: “I was hungry, and you gave me no food”.<sup>88</sup>

83 Leo. M., trac. 11.2 (CCL 138, 46, lineae 55–56).

84 Leo. M., trac. 9.3 (CCL 138, 36, lineae 76–77).

85 Leo. M., trac. 48.5 (CCL 138A, 283, lineae 114–116).

86 Leo. M., trac. 10.2 (CCL 138, 41, lineae 46–47).

87 Matt 5:7. Quoted by Leo in trac. 10.2 (CCL 138, 41–42, lineae 50–51).

88 Matt 25:42 (NRSV-CE trans.).

Coming back to the justification of the dignity of the poor, as described in the year 451, those who deny the poor thus deny the one who promised to be present in those in need.<sup>89</sup> *Sinistris vero quid obicietur, nisi neglectus dilectionis, duritia inhumanitatis et pauperibus misericordia denegata?*<sup>90</sup> (“What do we object to in those indeed on the left [scil. side of Christ during the final judgment] if not their neglect of love, inhuman severity, and denying mercy to the poor?”) asks Leo, commenting on the Last Judgment. The rich who gather their goods to themselves and abstain from charitable works therefore cannot expect eternal life even if they otherwise live according to God’s commandments. They are, in fact, the real poor, for their hands are empty before God: *Huiusmodi divites egentiores omnibus sunt egenis.*<sup>91</sup> (“Such rich men are more in need than all those in need.”) In Sermon 16, Leo adds: *nihil est uniuscuiusque tam proprium quam quod inpendit in proximum.*<sup>92</sup> (“nothing is so much one’s own than what was spent on one’s fellow human.”) Charity is a key virtue: *Nulla enim devotione fidelium magis Dominus delectatur, quam ista pauperibus eius inpenditur.*<sup>93</sup> (“God is pleased by no pious practice of the faithful more than devotion to his poor.”) By helping the poor, Christians thus serve God present in those in need, and thereby serve their own souls: *qui reficit [pauperes] animam suam pascit.*<sup>94</sup> (“who restores the poor, feeds their own souls.”) Thus, it is the poor who help the rich, which is why God made both part of the Church: *Mirabiliter autem providentia divina disposuit ut essent in Ecclesia et sancti pauperes et divites boni, qui invicem sibi ex diversitate prodessent.*<sup>95</sup> (“Wondrously thus the divine providence organized it, so there are both holy poor and good rich men in the Church, who mutually help one another out of diversity.”)

All these remarks about the great value of the poor and the poverty of the rich turn the classical Roman social order upside down. As we remember, Ambrose of Milan relayed the remark by Lawrence of Rome, who called the poor *thesauri ecclesiae*, “the treasures of the Church,” when asked to deliver the Church’s precious possessions to the Roman officials. Leo’s sermons demonstrate the prevalence of such egalitarian principles which questioned the worldly order typical to ancient Rome. The honoring of the poor, specifically in a society still practicing slavery, contradicts Roman social elitism, thus making way for the universal application of the category of human dignity to all

89 Leo. M., trac. 18.3 (CCL 138, 74–75, lineae 57–63).

90 Leo. M., trac. 10.2 (CCL 138, 42, lineae 58–60).

91 Leo. M., trac. 10.1 (CCL 138, 41, lineae 35–36).

92 Leo. M., trac. 16.2 (CCL 138, 62, lineae 44–46).

93 Leo. M., trac. 48.5 (CCL 138A, 283, lineae 113–116).

94 Leo. M., trac. 86.1 (CCL 138A, 540, lineae 12–13).

95 Leo. M., trac. 89.6 (CCL 138A, 555, lineae 90–92).

human beings, among whom “there is no longer Jew or Gentile, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.”<sup>96</sup>

### 4.3.3 *Dignitas Sacerdotalis, Dignitas Episcopalis and Dignitas Eventi*

Apart from the already-discussed groups of the faithful filled with God’s presence (tabernacles of God) and the poor representing Christ, a third group that stands out in Leo’s writings as explicitly dignified are the priests, with their special, royal (*regalis*) dignity. This last group ought to be understood more broadly than it might seem, since universal priesthood is taken to be common among Christians. On many occasions Leo nevertheless stressed the dignity of the consecrated servants of God, including the first in honor among them, the successor of St. Peter.

For example, during the sermon celebrating the first anniversary of his pontificate on 29 September 441, Leo referred to the “dignity” and “honor” (*dignitas* and *honor*) of his office, thus marking a typical Latin use of the noun “*dignitas*,” namely that of a rank or status. *Dignitas* in reference to the papal office is also mentioned in the context of St. Peter as the first “in dignity” among the Apostles<sup>97</sup> or as the leader of the Church in general.<sup>98</sup> At times, dignity is also used in reference to Peter’s “episcopal dignity” (*episcopalis dignitas*),<sup>99</sup> and once also in reference to the Jewish Sanhedrin, in particular Caiaphas, the high priest at the time of Jesus’ prosecution, who *sacerdotali se honore privavit*.<sup>100</sup> (“diminished his priestly honor.”) In a letter to the bishops of Vienne, the Pope mentions their and their churches’ dignity numerous times as *dignitas divinitus data* (dignity given from heaven),<sup>101</sup> as he does in a letter to the bishops of Mauretania Caesariensis, where he (or the Roman Curia) use *dignitas* interchangeably with *honor*.<sup>102</sup> The association between priesthood and dignity thus pertains to an office rather than to a specific person holding this position. Caiaphas, whose actions opposed the dignity of an office he represented, forfeits the dignity of his rank.

Applying dignity to offices is typical of the era and is consistent with that era’s linguistic practice, and it is of little consequence for the understanding

96 Gal 3:28 (NRSV-CE trans.).

97 Leo. M., trac. 4.2 (CCL 138, 18, linea 60); trac. 83.1 (CCL 138A, 519, linea 4).

98 Leo. M., trac. 3.4 (CCL 138, 13, linea 87); trac. 4.4 (CCL 138, 20, linea 107).

99 Leo. M., trac. 5.4 (CCL 138, 24, linea 78).

100 Leo. M., trac. 57.2 (CCL 138A, 334, linea 27). Here, Latin *honor* is in use.

101 Leo. M., ep. 10.2 (*dignitas divinitus data, dignitas sacerdotis, dignitas Petri*) and 10.3 (*pax et dignitas vestrae*); PL 54, 630–631.636.

102 Leo. M., ep. 12.2 (*honor sacerdotalis*), 12.3 (*honor presbyteri*), 12.4 (*honores mundi, dignitas caelestis, dignitas sacerdotis*); PL 54, 647.648.651.



of specifically human dignity. We ought to note, however, that Leo, or his Roman Curia, never used the word in reference to laic offices or purely worldly honors, which in one letter are called *honores mundi*, the worldly honors.<sup>103</sup> Leo's sermons and letter reserve *dignitas* for the disciples of Jesus only, and in particular for one holding the highest authority among them, the Bishop of Rome. Leo justified such use by pointing to the source of their anointment. The papal office receives its dignity from the one it represents, namely Christ, whose presence should be detected even in the lowliness of a particular person holding this office; for example, in Leo. Christ's dignity *in indigno herede non deficit*,<sup>104</sup> ("does not deteriorate in an unworthy heir") the Pope argues. The ultimate source of such dignity is to be found in the realm of the sacred, and thus it is in fact not *dignitas Romana*, but *dignitas sacri*—dignity of the sacrum emanating onto the servants of God.

As stated, Leo avoids applying the term *dignitas* outside the realm of sacrum, reserving it only for those connected to it. They are dignified in their offices by virtue of a connection with the sacred; for example, due to the fact that they represent the Son of God. This tendency to reserve *dignitas* for a person or office connected with the sacred (or in Leo's own words, *dignitas caelestis*)<sup>105</sup> is also seen in the application of the term to a particular event.

Leo discussed the dignity of Epiphany (6 January), deriving it from the person of God whose manifestation is being honored.<sup>106</sup> *Dignitas* used in reference to a holy office (*dignitas sacerdotalis*) or an occasion (*dignitas eventi*) thus indicates, in Leo's vocabulary, the realm of *sacrum*. This shows that even in non-personalistic uses (such as those referring to a particular occasion), Leo develops the use of *dignitas* from an action of a person celebrated during the event. On the whole, therefore, when uses connected to an event or office are considered, we can conclude that a specifically personalist understanding of *dignitas* is dominant overall in Leo's vocabulary.

#### 4.4 Origins of Leo's Call

Having exhausted Leo's uses of *dignitas* (including his conception of *dignitas hominis* and *dignitas Christiana*, his appreciation of *dignitas pauperum*, his characteristic use of *dignitas Romana* as *dignitas sacri*, such as in the case of

103 Leo. M., ep. 12.4 (PL 54, 651).

104 Leo. M., trac. 3.4 (CCL 138, 13, lineae 87).

105 Leo. M., ep. 12.4 (PL 54, 651).

106 Leo. M., trac. 32.2 (CCL 138, 166, lineae 25–26).

*dignitas sacerdotalis*, as well as *dignitas eventi*) we can come back to the historically urgent question of whether Leo authored the call to recognize human dignity or repeated it from someone else. Given that we will later consider the rich ancient and medieval history of this call, it is crucial to establish whose call it actually is. We will investigate all earlier appeals of this kind, by Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose of Milan, and Jerome of Stridon, but before we do that, we should discuss a highly relevant passage on human dignity written by Leo's secretary in the Roman Curia, Prosper of Aquitaine.

#### 4.4.1 *Prosper of Aquitaine*

Between 431 and 449, Prosper of Aquitaine, Leo's secretary, wrote a commentary to the last fifty psalms, *Expositio psalmorem a centesimo usque ad centesimum quinquagesimum*, a work largely inspired by Augustine of Hippo's *Enarrationes in psalmos*. The Augustinian impact is, however, not to be detected in the case of psalms relevant to the discussion of human dignity; that is, psalms 143, 144 and 145 (in contemporary editions, following Septuagint's division of Psalm 9 into two separate psalms, these are numbered as 144, 145 and 146). The exact dating of Prosper's commentary remains ambiguous, which is problematic specifically in relation to Leo's *Tractatus 21* from the year 440, for the secretary's text might either be an inspiration for or a product of Leo's sermon spoken on December 25, 440. Prosper's commentary was certainly written before 449, which makes it earlier by two years than the Pope's *Tractatus 27*, containing the second, explicitly universal form of the call (*Expergiscere, o homo, et dignitatem tuae agnosce naturae*) and before all other later calls. Prosper's *Expositio psalmorem* did not receive much scholarly attention, with its first critical edition published in 1972 and few translations available. Let us analyze a passage to shed more light on the link between the two texts, one by a pope and one by his secretary.

While commenting on Psalm 143, Prosper relates its content to the battle between Goliath and David, understood metaphorically as the fight between Christ and evil. Anyone can be said to participate in this battle as a spiritual warrior when they fight against passions and temptations with God's assistance and support. Having referenced God's protection, Prosper quotes the famous line of Psalm 143, reading, *Domine quid est homo quoniam innotuisti ei, aut filius hominis, quoniam aestimas eum?*<sup>107</sup> ("Lord, what is the human beings that you notice them and what is the Son of Man that you value him?").<sup>108</sup> The

107 Prosp., psal. 143 (CCL 68A, 189, linea 44).

108 Ps 144:3, trans. J. Guerrero van der Meijden. In this instance I cannot reference NRSV-CE, which reads "O Lord, what are human beings that you regard them, or mortals that you

direct commentary to this line discusses human dignity in a similar manner to Leo's call from 440, except that it does not take the form of an imperative. Prosper writes: *Magna dignitas hominis, qui sic a Deo creatus est ut suum nosset auctorem, et tanti aestimatus est ut unigenitus Dei [scil. filius] sanguinem pro redemptione eius impenderet*<sup>109</sup> ("Great is the dignity of the human being, who indeed was created by God so that they know their Creator and who is valued so much that the only-begotten [scil. Son of] God spends his blood for their redemption").

Clearly, therefore, the mentioned line of the psalm (*Domine quid est homo*) was a direct inspiration for Prosper to recall "great human dignity" (*magna dignitas hominis*), a category which he knew either from Leo or from an earlier source: Jerome of Stridon's *Tractatus in psalmos* or Augustine of Hippo's *De libero arbitrio*, *De civitate Dei*, and *De Trinitate*. Even though little is available in this commentary, the very link between the line of the psalm and the category of human dignity is striking, for as much as it is commonly observed today, it was not apparent in the early ages of Christianity, nor was the very category of "human dignity." One is, in fact, tempted to wonder if the now common interpretation of the third line of psalm 143 as expressive of human dignity should not be traced back to Prosper of Aquitaine as an early (or even its earliest) source. The fact that Prosper observes this link between God "valuing" the human being and employs the category *dignitas hominis* as a name for human axiological status demonstrates a change in the previously anthropological nomenclature, which seems to have found one specific name for human value, *dignitas*.

Given that the third line of the psalm evoked for Prosper the category "human dignity" (*dignitas hominis*), his commentary might have been inspired by some earlier writings preparatory of this fixed terminology; possibly Leo's sermon from 440 (that is, *Tractatus 21*), Jerome's commentary to Psalm 81, or Augustine's *De Trinitate* or *De civitate Dei*. Both the category of dignity and its price, named *sanguis Christi*, appear in Leo's *Tractatus 21*. Nonetheless, as we remember, the call formulated in 440 appeals to "Christians" to know their dignity, not to "humans"; therefore it does not actually use the phrase *dignitas hominis*, even if—arguably—it implies that Christians should know their human dignity, not only *Christian* dignity. It is therefore likely that Prosper read Jerome's commentary to the psalms which appeals for the recognition of human dignity (*Vide hominis dignitatem*) and adopted the notion highlighted

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think of them?". I translate myself in order to demonstrate the Latin formulation Prosper writes about as closely as possible.

109 Prosp., psal. 143 (CCL 68A, 189, linea 148).

there, *dignitas hominis*. If so, his own commentary might have been inspirational for Leo's sermon from 440, as it most certainly was inspirational for Leo's sermons discussing human dignity after the year 449 (that is, *Tractatus 94*). In fact, Prosper, whose vocabulary included the category *dignitas hominis*, may have been the one behind Leo's sermons taking on a more universal message concerning human dignity, one that can be seen in Leo's call from 451. Prosper is known to have been engaged in theological attempts at justifying universal human vocation in his *De vocatione omnium gentium*, which altered his earlier views regarding predestination. Such an influence upon Leo, however, cannot be established with certainty until the dating of Prosper's commentary on psalms is determined with more precision.

Immediately after proclaiming great human dignity, Prosper quotes a further line of the psalm, which introduces the idea of the misery of the human condition: *Homo vanitati similis factus est, dies eius sicut umbra praetereunt. Naturae suae homo immemor in similitudinem vanitatis voluntaria praevaricatione mutatus est.*<sup>110</sup> ("The human being was created as similar to misery, and their days pass by like shadow. Having forgotten their nature and voluntarily having transgressed, the human being is transformed into a similarity to misery.") The intertwining of the idea of human dignity with the idea of human finitude and sin—dictated by Psalm 143 itself—situates Prosper in line with many earlier Fathers, such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose of Milan, and Jerome of Stridon.

Other commentaries to psalms that discuss dignity pertain to Psalm 142 and Psalm 144 and refer either to the great dignity of being a servant of God (*Quanta dignitas et quanta beatitudo est esse Dei servum?*)<sup>111</sup> ("How great are the dignity and happiness of being a servant of God?") or to the idea of human dignity being in need of preservation from corruption in order not be made lesser (*minuere*).<sup>112</sup> This first remark shows evident similarity to the second of Jerome's calls: *Videte quanta sit dignitas: et dii vocamur, et filii*<sup>113</sup> ("Notice how great is our dignity: we are called gods and sons"), thus strengthening the hypothesis that Prosper read Jerome's homilies. Inasmuch as both Jerome and Prosper discuss the dignity of servants or sons of God and both wonder at this dignity's greatness (*quanta sit* or *quanta est*), the thoughts are strongly related. We will observe that later patristic writers continue this tradition of describing *dignitas Christiana*.

110 Prosp., psal. 143 (CCL 68A, 189, linea 150).

111 Prosp., psal. 142 (CCL 68A, 187, linea 114).

112 Prosp., psal. 145 (CCL 68A, 197, linea 13).

113 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.6 (HO 9/1, 234).

Stressing the need for the preservation of dignity is, in turn, familiar to Leo's *Tractatus 21*, which insists on the need for acting in accordance with human dignity. As such, the link between Prosper's commentary and Leo's sermons—that is, between a text by a secretary and his pope—seems undeniable. A similar message was formulated earlier by Basil of Caesarea and Ambrose of Milan.

Prosper's texts certainly could have been an inspiration for Leo's later sermons dating past the year 449. Whether Leo's inaugural Christmas sermon from 440 was inspired by Prosper's vocabulary, one possibly influenced by Jerome's commentary on the psalms, remains uncertain. The figure of the Pope's secretary seems, therefore, to be at the same time likely to be "inspirational for" and "inspired by" Leo's conceptualization of dignity. This is, in fact, quite common between people working closely with one another. We can assume the two talked on an everyday basis, specifically about documents produced by Leo as pontifex, and Prosper, therefore, is likely to have been one of Leo's key inspirations. He certainly implemented the category of human dignity in his own texts synchronously to Leo's pontificate, which he served until his early death around year 455. By that time, *dignitas hominis* was a regular anthropological category.<sup>114</sup>

#### 4.4.2 *Basil of Caesarea's Commentary to Psalm 48*

In previous Chapters, we have already discussed Basil the Great's appeal to know one's worth, Ambrose's imperatives to know oneself and one's greatness, and Jerome's calls to observe human dignity. We also mentioned Basil's commentaries on the ancient maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν in his *Hexaemeron*,<sup>115</sup> and relevant passages by Augustine of Hippo. We can, therefore, start the comparative analyses of Leo's call with Basil's, the earliest among the axiologically-orientated imperatives, and one that bears a surprising similarity to Leo's passage.

Clear proof to indicate whether or not Leo knew of Basil the Great's commentary on the psalms, and specifically his commentary on Psalm 48, remains hidden in the shadows of history. We can, however, demonstrate that Leo's call contains all three elements of the appeal formulated by Basil in the fourth century, repeated in a similar sequence. We can also consider the similarity of terminology and grammatical forms used by the two authors to study a hypothesis of one being a translation of the other. Finally, we can investigate the context in which the calls are formulated. Let us start with the first question. What were the three elements?

114 A. Hamman, *Prosper of Aquitaine*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 1991, 552.

115 Basil. Caes., hex. 6.1 (SGL 1990, 166); hex. 9.6 (SGL 1990, 293–294).

In Chapter Two we identified the following three building blocks of Basil's call:

1. A cognitive imperative to realize one's own dignity (Λάβε τοῦ ἀξιώματος ἔννοιαν—in the Latin translation: *Accipe dignitatis tuae notionem!*—Accept the notion of dignity! And: Γνώθι σεαυτοῦ τὴν ἀξίαν!—in the Latin translation: *Agnosce dignitatem tuam*—*Know your dignity!* Also: Σύνεες σεαυτοῦ τῆς τιμῆς—in the Latin translation: *Intellige tuam praesentiam!*—Realize your dignity!)
2. The idea of the highest price, called “the blood of Christ” (πολυτίμητον αἷμα—in the Latin translation: *pretiosissimus sanguis*—the most precious blood) that was paid for the reacquisition of human dignity.
3. A strong appeal to refrain from entering again into the captivity of sin (μὴ γίγνου δοῦλος τῆς ἀμαρτίας—in the Latin translation: *peccati ne fias servus!*—do not become a servant of sin!).

Let us now pair these three elements with what we can find in Leo's sermon.

1. Firstly, we can identify the cognitive imperative in Leo's speech: *Agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam!* (“Realize, o Christian, your dignity!”)
2. Secondly, an appeal is addressed by Leo to the human being not to enter into the captivity of sin again: *noli tantum habitatorem pravis de te actibus effugare et diaboli te iterum subicere servituti* (“do not deter such an inhabitant from you by crooked actions and subject yourself again to the devil's servitude”).
3. Thirdly, we observe that for Leo the idea of a high price paid for being the human being serves as a justification and a reminder of what is at stake: *pretium tuum sanguis est Christi* (“your price is Christ's blood”), formulated at the end of the passage.

The content of Basil's and Leo's appeals, insofar as these three elements are considered, runs in parallel. The elements are not quite in the same sequence, since the idea of the price is placed at the end of Leo's appeal and as the second element of Basil's call. Nonetheless, the reoccurrence of the three identical conceptual pieces is hard to explain if the passages are assumed to be unrelated. Finally, the contexts in which the two passages were formulated are similar: both authors used a rhetorical, urging tone to appeal to their listeners, both men and women, during a homily. Basil, however, commented on Psalm 48 and placed his call alongside an explanation of the logic of redemption. He also justified human value by the infinite price paid for the captive. Leo, on the other hand, placed his appeal in his first Christmas sermon delivered as a pope, praising the mystery of incarnation and justifying human dignity based on a number of elements, including the idea of the price, but also referring to the human being as belonging to the mystical body of Christ, and to the sacramental mark of baptism.

How can one, however, explain the baffling presence of the same three elements in both passages, the similar homiletic character of the texts, comparable urging tones, and their parallel terminological choices, albeit expressed in different languages? One hypothesis is that Leo simply had access to Basil's translated commentary to Psalm 48, or its parts. We know little of the Pope's life before his election to the Throne of Saint Peter (Augustine of Hippo recalls an acolyte called Leo who delivered a letter to him, but that could have been a different Leo),<sup>116</sup> but he was certainly an educated man and discussed Greek theological ideas during various dogmatic debates. One of his Christmas sermons (describing the paradoxes of God's incarnation) resembles that of Gregory of Nazianzus, which shows that he was familiar with the Greek ideas of the Cappadocian school peregrinating into the Latin world.

We also know, however, that when Leo addressed a theological problem originating among the Greek Eastern theologians, in his famous *Tomus ad Flavianum*, he did it in Latin. Moreover, we know that in 430, as an archdeacon, Leo appointed John Cassian to mediate between the Pope and the eastern bishops (Cyril of Alexandria in particular), precisely because of Cassian's proficiency in Greek.<sup>117</sup> We therefore have good grounds to assume that Leo could not have read the appeal in Greek, for he did not know the language. We can nevertheless speculate that he could have known of Basil's call indirectly; that is, through a translation. One possible translator is, in fact, Ambrose of Milan.

Due to one preserved letter sent by Basil to Ambrose, we know that the two thinkers exchanged correspondence,<sup>118</sup> and since Ambrose was fluent in Greek, he could have read Basil's commentary to the psalms, including the one formulating an axiological cognitive imperative, and translated it or relayed the passage to the Latin audience. No evidence of this is available, although it might one day resurface. Interestingly, as noted, Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* is heavily reliant on Basil's commentary on the six days of creation, in which Basil commented on the ancient maxim, γνῶθι σεαυτόν.

Is the hypothesis of Leo's call being a translation of Basil's passage feasible, however? When the calls are read alongside one another, and specifically the Latin translation of Basil's call read alongside Leo's call, they reinforce the hypothesis that the latter is inspired by the former, rather than a translation of it. Basil's passage is more concise, has a slightly different sequence of ideas, and lacks the opening imperative characteristic of Leo's passage, starting instead

116 Starowieyski, 2022, 647.

117 Starowieyski, 2022, 647.

118 Basil. Caes., ep. 197 (PG 32, 709–713).

with a mention of human beings' "first origin" and placing an appeal at the end of the first sentence.

We are left, therefore, with some arguments suggesting Leo's dependence on Basil: the imperative form of the two appeals, a similarity of notions, content entailing the same three ideas interlinked in a similar sequence, and the parallel homiletic context. Although historically obscured, a link between Basil's and Leo's calls thus seems likely, even if mediated by another Latin commentator, such as Ambrose. Regardless of this influence, Basil's call is undoubtedly earlier. The origins of the appeal to know one's dignity take us back, therefore, at least to fourth-century Cappadocia in the Greek East, not fifth-century Rome, where Leo resided, and where the appeal became immensely popularized.

#### 4.4.3 *Other Ancient Imperatives to Recognize Human Axiological Status*

One of Basil of Caesarea's keen readers and his personal acquaintance, Ambrose of Milan, also formulated a call to recognize human value, and so did Jerome of Stridon.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, in the context of Ambrose's appeal, we investigated the tradition of calls to know oneself present in the classical Greek and Roman culture, and typically exemplified by the address, γνῶθι σεαυτόν, written in the forecourt of the temple of Apollo in Delphi.<sup>120</sup> For a well-educated Roman, such as Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon, or Leo the Great, these Greek appeals, known to Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic philosophy, were an obvious point of reference. The appeal to recognize one's axiological status, relevant to the history of human dignity, comprises, one could argue, a subdivision of the ancient appeals to know oneself, for axiology is an aspect of oneself. As we remember from Chapter Three, the form of the cognitive imperative to recognize one's axiology appeared in the fourth century Christian Latin exegetic and homiletic traditions. The preserved hexaemeral tradition contains examples of the tendency to formulate cognitive imperatives.<sup>121</sup> Let us recall a specific, axiological type of such Latin calls, whether expressed by *dignitas*-related language or any other terminology, and whether it is expressive of human greatness or insignificance.

The Latin appeal closest in both grammatical structure and meaning to Leo's is that proposed by Ambrose of Milan in his commentary to the sixth day of creation. For the purpose of comparison, let us repeat this part:

119 There is one letter preserved from the correspondence between Ambrose and Basil: Basil the Great, ep. 197 (PG 32, 709–713).

120 Green, 2018, 1–17; E. Osek, "Poznaj samego siebie" w interpretacji Bazylego Wielkiego, in: *Vox Patrum* 58 (2008), 761.

121 F.E. Robbin, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries to Genesis*, Chicago 1912, 1–41.



*Cognosce, ergo te, decora anima; quia imago Dei es. Cognosce te, homo, quia gloria es Dei. [...] Cognosce, ergo te, o homo, quantus sis, et adtende tibi; ne quando laqueis implicatus diaboli fias praeda venantis; ne forte in fauces tetri illius leonis incurras, qui rugit et circuit quaerens quem devoret.*<sup>122</sup>

Recognize, therefore, o beautiful soul, yourself, because you are the image of God. Recognize, o human being, yourself, for you are the glory of God. [...] Recognize, therefore, o human being, yourself, how great you are, and guard yourself, lest you someday, whilst entrapped in the snares by sinning, become prey to the hunting Devil; may you not fall, by accident, into the jaws of that hideous lion, who roars and circles, seeking who to devour.<sup>123</sup>

Ambrose's passage urges the listeners to know the value of themselves and warns against giving in to evil, which are two crucial elements of Leo's call. There is an implied conceptual link between one's value and the need to guard oneself in both calls, and also a similarity in the grammatical form of a second-person singular imperative in the present tense. Needless to say, the fourth-century call is formulated in Leo's language, Latin. It also opens with a cognitive imperative, as does Leo's sentence. Ambrose justified human greatness with the mention of human iconicity, which Leo did in one of his lesser-known appeals (*Agnoscat homo sui generis dignitatem, factumque se ad imaginem et similitudinem sui Creatoris intellegat*).<sup>124</sup> Both the form and the meaning of Ambrose's appeal are very close to those of Leo's most famous appeal, although, significantly, the noun that was about to make history as an anthropological-axiological category, *dignitas*, is missing from the former, and present in the latter. Nonetheless, the formulation present in Ambrose's *Hexaameron*, which is heavily reliant on Basil's *Hexaameron*, could have been

122 Ambr., hex. 6.8,50 (CSEL 32/1, 241, lineae 14–20).

123 As explained in Part II, Ambrose justifies human value by iconicity; thus, it is clear that he addresses all human creatures, similarly to Basil. Where he uses the phrase "glory of God", he references Paul's address to men solely, for Paul calls a woman "a glory of a man" (cf. 1 Cor 11:7). Four arguments suggest the inclusive reading of Ambrose's "glory" as applicable to men and women: 1) when narrowing his message to one sex only, Ambrose makes it clear that he is doing so; 2) the expression "a glory of a man" is preceded by a vocative of *homo*, that is "the human being"; 3) soon before this passage, Ambrose openly addressed women; 4) his listeners were men and women in the Church, this constituting a hermeneutic context of any interpretation. I therefore take these fragments to be addressed to all his listeners.

124 Leo. M., trac. 94.2 (CCL 138A, 579, lineae 39–46): *Agnoscat homo sui generis dignitatem, factumque se ad imaginem et similitudinem sui Creatoris intellegat, nec ita de miseris quas per peccatum illud maximum et commune incidit expavescat, ut non se ad misericordiam sui Reparatoris adtollat. Ipse enim dicit: Sancti estote, quia sanctus sum, hoc est me elegite, et his quae mihi displicent abstinete. Facite quod amo, amate quod facio.*

an important part of Leo's inspiration. Unlike Basil's texts, those of Ambrose would have been easily accessible to the Pope.

As we remember, Augustine of Hippo also thematized human axiology. The Bishop of Hippo, a student of Ambrose, accentuated human glory in opposition to God's glory, for example in a sermon *ad pauperum: gloria Christi, non gloria hominis, ut agnoscat homo humilitatem suam, impertiat Deus divinitatem suam*.<sup>125</sup> ("the glory of Christ, and not the glory of a human being—God shares His divinity, so that the human being recognizes their own humility.") Leo, however, perceived human glory as participation in God's glory, while Augustine placed them in opposition to one another. Augustine could therefore have been a polemic source for Leo, yet not a positive one.

We might add here that the medieval reception of some parts of a fifth-century homily compilation known as *Eusebius Gallicanus* led to Augustine's medieval reception as an author of an appeal: *Agnoscat homo quantum valeat, quantum debeat et, dum pretium suum cogitat, servilis et venalis esse desinat*.<sup>126</sup> ("May a human being know how much they are worth and how much they owe, and as long as they consider their price, may they stop being slavish and for sale.") This exact phrasing is not present in Augustine's preserved writings, which is why we will return to it as an example of Leo's influence, rather than origin. The phrasing *quantum valeat* also bears a likeness to Ambrose's *quantus sis*, rather than any of Augustine's preserved passages.

Finally, also Jerome of Stridon authored two laconic axiological appeals to observe human dignity: *Vide hominis dignitatem*<sup>127</sup> and *Videte quanta sit dignitas: et dii vocamur, et filii*.<sup>128</sup> Two points indicate, however, that beyond inspiring the phrasing *dignitas hominis*, the monk of Bethlehem was not a direct inspiration for Leo. First, Jerome's appeals, which introduce the category of human dignity, have a much simpler form than the appeals by Basil and Ambrose. Second, they are placed in a context of the Greek conception of human deification, which Leo never referenced during his Christmas sermon.

As Basil's, Ambrose's, and Jerome's examples testify, the grammatical form of an imperative not only to know oneself but also to know one's value was present in the exegetic and homiletic Christian traditions existing before Leo, and almost certainly known to him as a genre. The form of the appeal serves the purpose of a homiletic speech very well by offering moral advice in a simple, yet rhetorically compelling manner, as well as an easily memorable form.

125 August., serm. ad pop. 380.6, in: REAug 61 (2015), 265.

126 Stephanus de Borbone, tract. 1.8,9 (CCCM 124, 337, linea 734).

127 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.1 (HO 9/1, 230).

128 Hier., trac. in ps. 81.6 (HO 9/1, 234).

A likely inspiration for such appeals stems from the archaic Greek tradition of calls demanding self-knowledge (which were, interestingly, interpreted by Ambrose as having biblical roots in the book of Deuteronomy).<sup>129</sup> Christian intellectuals applied these types of rhetoric forms to the axiological status of the human being in the fourth century, formulating a new kind of cognitive demand. Why is it that they adapted the ancient call in such a way? This brings us to the question not of form, but of the content with which they filled the ancient form.

#### 4.4.4 *Biblical Inspirations for the Axiological Imperatives: A Construction Built on Rock*

The content of the most similar appeals, Leo's and Basil's, can be broken down into points, which can in turn be partially identified in various passages of the Scriptures. Even though some of these pieces are present in the biblical text, they do not all appear alongside one another, nor do they ever take the form of an imperative to know one's dignity. When carefully listed and analyzed, they can reveal, however, yet another, heretofore concealed and yet identifiable source of the call that was about to make history.

The pieces that together shape the common denominator of both Basil's and Leo's calls include the listed three: (1) the imperative to grasp one's dignity, (2) the idea of the highest price paid for a human creature identified as the blood of Christ, and (3) a strong appeal to refrain from entering again into the captivity of sin. Moreover, Leo's call in its full form encompasses other building blocks: the notion of a mystical body of Christ and of a temple of the Holy Spirit, the mention of a sacrament of baptism, an idea of judgment in truth, and a metaphor of light and darkness. Ambrose's call, referenced here as a possible source for Leo, additionally contains the metaphor of a lion. What are the biblical sources of these ideas?

The idea of a highest price originates from the early passages of the First Letter of St. Peter (1 Pet 1:19), and the imperative "to guard oneself" occurs at the very end of this letter (1 Pet 5:8). A similar appeal is formulated in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 4:9), the fifth book of the Torah and an early book of the Old Testament, describing Moses' speech to the Jews in which he appeals for fidelity to the covenant with God and His commandments. It is this passage that Ambrose referenced as the source of the Greek appeal, γνῶθι σεαυτόν, and on which Basil the Great commented in his homily, *Attende tibi ipsi*.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Ambr., psal. 118.2,13 (CSEL 62, 27, linea 20).

<sup>130</sup> Ambr., psal. 118.2,13 (CSEL 62, 27, linea 20); Basil the Great, Homilia in illud: attende tibi ipsi (PG 31, 197–217), critical edition in: S.Y. Rudberg (ed.), *L'homélie de Basile de Césarée*

Leo's phrase, *divinae consors naturae*, stems from the Second Letter of Saint Peter (2 Pet 1:4). Furthermore, it is Ambrose's call, and not Basil's or Leo's, that is supplemented with the image of a lion roaring and searching for someone to devour, also originating from the last lines of the First Letter of Saint Peter (1 Pet 5:8).

Let us summarize. Two building blocks of both Leo's and Basil's appeals (the idea of the most precious blood and the call to guard oneself against faltering), and a third element which occurs only in Leo's call, point towards Peter the Apostle. Ambrose's metaphor of a lion also indicates Peter's writings. It seems that, to put it poetically, the foundational rock upon which the content of the call rests—and had already persisted throughout over one and half millennia—is none other than Peter the Apostle.

Leo's most famous call, however, contains elements other than the three listed that crossover with Basil's call. He mentions the notion of the mystical body of Christ referred to in the Letter to Ephesians (Eph 5:23) (let us observe here in passing that "the man as God's glory," referenced by Ambrose, originates from this letter as well); additionally, Leo's phrase, *erutus de potestate tenebrarum, translatus es in Dei lumen et regnum*, is a passage from the First Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians (1 Col 1:13). The idea of a temple of the Holy Spirit is derived from the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 6:19), while notion of "judgment in truth" originates from Psalm 96 (verse 13).

Finally, we could add that, apart from the appeal to guard oneself present in the First Letter of St. Peter and in Deuteronomy, there is a passage in the Gospel of St. John that takes the form not of a direct cognitive imperative, but of a similar hypothetical construction that expresses the value of knowledge and indicates favorable consequences of the proper recognition of a particular fact. The passage uttered by Jesus reads: "If you knew the gift of God." (John 4:10). Apart from encompassing the idea that knowledge is of value, this passage does not seem to be relevant to either Leo, nor Ambrose and Basil.

By way of conclusion, we could assert that the form of a cognitive imperative, originating from the ancient Greek, Roman and—on a smaller scale—biblical traditions, was applied to human axiology by influential fourth- and fifth-century Christian bishops, who used various biblical elements, the majority contained in the New Testament, and with a significant overrepresentation of Saint Peter's writings, to adapt the call, and to appeal to their listeners to "recognize their dignity". The biblical elements they put together to complete the ancient Greek maxim "know thyself" did not include the concept of human

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sur le mot 'Observe-toi toi-même: Édition critique du texte grec et étude sur la tradition manuscrite, Stockholm 1962.

dignity, however. This category was their own patristic invention, although not in equal measure. Before we show why and how, let us consider the observations made thus far.

To reinforce the thesis that it is an ancient Greek form filled with biblical ideas that shaped the call, we could indicate Basil's, Ambrose's, Jerome's, and Leo's intellectual background. Characteristically, the Latin authors who formulated the call (Ambrose, Jerome and Leo) were both well-born and classically educated Romans. Ambrose, as the son of no less than a prefect of Gaul, was offered a classical education, as demonstrated by his proficient knowledge of Greek, and no doubt entailing elements of rhetoric. Jerome's early education in rhetoric resulted in his unrivaled and yet personally tragic knowledge of classical Latin literature. Leo was most likely the son of a distinguished family of Rome, and must have received a classical Roman education. As exegetes, Ambrose, Jerome and Leo dealt with the New Testament daily. In the case of Ambrose and Leo this was in the form of separate writings from available *Vetus Latina* scrolls (such as the letters of St. Peter); in the case of Jerome, the original texts. Basil, the one Greek to make the appeal, was a man learned in the classical tradition, educated in rhetoric, and knowledgeable regarding the Scriptures. As such, all four were undoubtedly acquainted with the classical form of an imperative of self-knowledge that had been popular since the archaic Greek period, as well as its rhetorical force. They specified it with content derived from the Gospels, as well as with an entirely new category of human axiological status. Leo's attempt is, however, unrivalled by the other three as regards its reception.

Why was it that among these imperatives, Leo's proved dominant? My hypothesis is that it is due to the conciseness and the generality of the new category, *dignitas*, as well as Leo's position in the Church. In order to refer to human axiological status, Basil used three different words that were synonymous to some extent: ἀξία, ἀξίωμα, and τιμή. Ambrose did not find a single noun to pinpoint the idea of human axiological status, succumbing instead to expressions such as *decora anima* and *gloria Dei es, quantus sis* addressed to his listeners, and hence a circumlocution. It was Jerome's genius that employed a single Latin noun descriptive of human axiological status, and with this one word expressed the idea that others had described with longer expressions. Leo and Prosper of Aquitaine followed in these clever footsteps. The rhetorical force and simplicity of the form Leo used, as well as its general reference to *homo* as such, meant that his wording would make history as a convenient, concise name for humans' positive axiological status. Why was it not Jerome's call, however—one even shorter—that made history? When spoken by a person holding a public office such as the head of the Church for an exceptionally

long time, whilst gaining much appreciation as the defender of Rome against Attila and Genseric, and regularly addressing all groups of the ancient society, the category of *dignitas* was likely not only to be recognized, but also to resonate in Roman society and hence prevail as a leading anthropological concept.

#### 4.5 The Late Ancient and Medieval Reception of Leo's Call

And so it did, which is why we now turn to the rich late ancient and medieval reception of Leo's call. This investigation of Leo's reception (from the fifth-century Master of Verona to fourteenth-century Catherine of Siena) documents a history of a dozen of appeals to know one's dignity formulated by the leading Christian authorities following Leo. This history can be reconstructed based on the preserved body of Latin texts which quote the call, or paraphrase it in various ways, often while preserving only the first, famous part of Leo's sentence, with the noun *Christianus* typically replaced by the noun *homo* (*Agnosce, o homo, dignitatem tuam*), and at times using synonymous expressions for parts of Leo's formulation. Such expressions, although not exact quotations and often deprived of any reference to Leo's person, stand as evidence of his lasting impact as well, insofar as they demonstrate how his style inspired other authors to compose similar lines. None of these lines ever became as well-known as that of Leo, not even, perhaps sadly, that of Basil or Jerome. When can we witness examples of the first influence of Leo's clarion call?

##### 4.5.1 *The Late Ancient Reception*

In late antiquity, an appeal resembling (or even possibly fashioned after) Leo's call appeared in a treatise on baptism written by an anonymous north Italian author working between the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) and the pontificate of John I (523–526). John I was, arguably, influenced by this anonymous Master of Verona (who, notably, differentiates the Chalcedonian definition from the Constantinopolitan Creed, thus evidently working after Chalcedon).<sup>131</sup> The work, the third in a series of small treatises on baptism, was long ascribed to Maxim of Turin, and thus assumed to be written during the last decades of the fourth century, in which case Leo would be influenced by, rather than having influenced, the anonymous author. An early twentieth century study convincingly showed that the attribution to Maxim and the dating of the fourth

<sup>131</sup> G. Sobrero, *Catechesi mistagogiche, trinitarie e cristologiche: Inviti alla penitenza*, in: Anonimo Veronese, *Omelle mistagogiche e catechetiche. Edizione critica e studio* (G. Sobrero trans.), Rome 1992, 182–183, 187–195.

century were inaccurate.<sup>132</sup> The hypotheses proposed in the early 1930s of the twentieth century suggested, furthermore, that John I influenced the Master of Verona, but a more recent critical edition and research has reversed that order, arguing for Pope John I's reliance on the Master of Verona. The treatise on baptism can thus be dated to between 460 and 500, directly after Leo's reign—the Pope died on 10 November 461.<sup>133</sup>

It is significant that an appeal to know one's dignity was formulated on the Italian peninsula a generation or two after Leo's sermon containing the most famous version of the call was spoken on Christmas day in 440. The passage bearing some resemblance to Leo's call reads as follows:

*Considerate ergo honorem quem in illo estis mysterio consecuti, et cavete ne forte qui post peccata per baptismum filii regni facti estis, rursum peccando, quod absit, velitis effici filii gehennae.*<sup>134</sup>

Consider, therefore, the honor in which you partook through this mystery, and take care that you, who, following the sin, were made royal sons through baptism, are not, heaven forbid, accidentally willing to be the sons of evil again, by sinning.

The Italian passage contains the two elements of Basil's and Leo's calls: a cognitive imperative (*considerate ergo honorem!*), and an urge not to return to the old ways through sinning (*cavete ne [...] rursum peccando*). Thirdly, it refers to the dignity of the redeemed, calling them *fili regni*, "the royal sons." These three ideas are related to *dignitas Christiana*, as in Leo's sermon, but in the context of a specific sacrament that is merely mentioned by Leo—that of baptism. The passage reads, therefore, as a phrase inspired by Leo's call but adapted to a context which was not relevant for Leo, who spoke on Christmas day. The similarity to Leo's call can also be seen through the imperative and an appeal not to return to the old ways, which appear in the same sequence as in Leo's text.

Given the impossible hypothesis that the treatise was in fact written by Maxim of Turin, the text would fill the gap between Basil and Leo, giving rise to speculation about the possible transmission of the idea from the Greek Father to the Latin Pope. It is, however, commonly accepted after the study of 1933

132 B. Capelle, *Les "Tractatus de Baptismo" attribués à Saint Maxime de Turin*, in: RBen 45 (1933), 108–118. Sobrero questions Capelle's conclusion that the anonymous author was influenced by John the Deacon. The editor of CCL 23 (Turnhout 1962), Almut Mutzenbecher, does not attribute the treatise to Maxim, but to an anonymous writer from Verona.

133 Welsh, 2015, 166 (Welsh names the daily date of death); Wyrwa, 2006, 2768.

134 (Ps.)Max. Taur., bapt. 1, in: Anonimo Veronese, 1992, 127, lineae 32–39.

and the critical editions in 1962 and 1992 that Maxim cannot be the author, and that the texts are dated after Chalcedon.

Three more similar examples of a homiletic appeal were uttered before the fifth century ended, this time in the region of Gaul. A late ancient—for it is dated to the mid or late fifth century—collection of sermons called *Eusebius Gallicanus* includes three sermons formulating an appeal to recognize one's value.<sup>135</sup> One of them justifies dignity primarily by the redemptive act of the exchange of God's Son for the human creature, but secondarily by iconic creation; the second resembles Ambrose's appeal to know one's greatness, and the third appeals for recognition of the dignity of the human mind.

The first of these appeals occurs in the final paragraph of a sermon tackling moral themes, first among which is the need to abandon sin. The sermon comprising both encouragement and reproof addressed to the people (*exhortatio et castigatio ad plebem*) is concluded by the following imperative:

*Quae cum ita sint: agnosce te, homo, caeleste esse figmentum Dei etiam similitudine praeditum. Ac sic, gemino privilegio: qui iam dudum divinae imaginis participatione videbaris honoratus, efficeris etiam commercii dignitate pretiosus.*<sup>136</sup>

As things are, recognize, o human being, that you are a celestial image (*figmentum*) of God, also endowed with similitude. And so, you are gifted with a double privilege: you, who have seemed to be honored long ago with participation in divine image, are also made precious with the dignity of exchange.

These final words of the speech echo Basil's and Leo's appeals insofar as, firstly, they conclude a long list of moral precepts to abandon actions categorized as sinful, and secondly, they recognize the two justifications of human dignity, creation and redemption, while at the same time confirming the greater significance of the latter justification. The idea of "the dignity of the exchange" bears a resemblance to Basil's mercantile description of the ransom paid for the human prisoner.

The second passage present in *Eusebius Gallicanus* formulates an appeal most similar to a passage by Ambrose, for it lacks the name *dignitas* in an axiological deliberation of human value:

*Quae cum ita sint, carissimi: agnoscat homo quantum valeat, et quantum illum Deo obnoxium faciat vel natura vel gratia; agnoscat homo quantum ab illo exspectet Deus, et quem tanta dignatione habuit carum, quam velit [scil. eum] esse in*

135 L.K. Bailey, *Christianity's Quiet Success: The Eusebius Gallicanus Sermon Collection and the Power of the Church in Late Antique Gaul*, Notre Dame 2010, 34–35.

136 Eus. Gall., hom. 53.14 (CCL 101A, 623, lineae 172–176).



*conversazione pretiosum; agnoscat homo quantum valeat, et quantum debeat, et, dum pretium suum cogitat, vilis esse sibi desinat, et potius vicem muneris salvatori, ex ipso bono suo id est de conservata salute, restituat.*<sup>137</sup>

As things are, dearly beloved, may a human being recognize how much they are worth, and how much they are obliged to God, either by nature or by grace. May a human being recognize how much God expects of them, and may they recognize that God loved them tenderly (*aliquem habere carum*) in their full dignity, how He wants them to be precious in conduct. May a human being know how much they are worth and how much they owe, and so long as they consider their price, they stop seeming worthless to themselves, and instead reward the return of the sacrifice to the Savior out of their own good, that is, out of preserved salvation.

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is clear evidence of an axiologically-orientated speech that lacks *dignitas*-related terminology. In this, it resembles Ambrose's eloquent attempts to express the idea of human value with periphrastic expressions. It is thus possible that the passage is influenced by Ambrose, or—as I explain below—Augustine of Hippo.

Second, the passage develops Basil's mercantile explanation of redemption further, by urging a subject of salvation, the highly valued human being, to pay back to God what the human being received, by preserving the effects of salvation. This problematic is fully parallel to the sermon mentioned above, *exhortatio et castigatio ad plebem*.

Third, it bears similarity to Leo's powerful imperatives, since, as we remember, in *Tractatus 94* Leo formulated a version of his call using the same conjunctive form of *agnoscere*: *Agnoscat homo sui generis dignitatem*, followed by a mention of human iconicity.<sup>138</sup>

Fourthly, a passage closely resembling that just quoted from *Eusebius Gallicanus* was attributed in the Middle Ages to Augustine of Hippo, not Leo. Stephen of Bourbon, a late twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologian, quotes Augustine as supposedly stating: *Augustinus: Agnoscat homo quantum valeat, quantum debeat et, dum pretium suum cogitat, servilis et venalis esse desinat.*<sup>139</sup> ("May a human being know how much they are worth and how much they owe, and so long as they consider their price, they stop being slavish and for sale."). Both the passage from *Eusebius Gallicanus* and the line attributed later to Augustine stand as evidence that imperatives to recognize one's value

137 Eus. Gall., hom. 24.7 (CCL 101, 286, lineae 144–149). I added "eum" where I believe it was omitted by the author or a scribe.

138 Leo. M., trac. 94.2 (CCL 138A, 579, lineae 39–46).

139 Stephanus de Borbone, tract. 1.8,9 (CCCM 124, 734, linea 734).

became popular in late ancient Latin Europe, as did the idea of human axiology. Whether it was the call of Ambrose or Leo that influenced the passage present in *Eusebius Gallicanus* remains a matter of speculation. The vocabulary of the quoted passages, however, distinctively shows that this idea of human axiological status was still in need of one category in order to designate it in a concise and precise manner.

The third appeal to recognize human dignity present in *Eusebius Gallicanus* pleads for recognition of the dignity of the human mind, not of human nature, though it also carries a universal message about the value of the human mind as such. The focus on the human mind, not nature, is dictated by the celebration of a group of young martyrs, whose bodies—as the author of the sermon argues—were vulnerable but whose minds remained resilient to evil: “because the body, that is our exterior, was exposed to the dangers, though it did not want it, the interior, that is the spirit, cannot be exposed to danger against its will.” (*ut, cum caro id est exterior noster etiamsi nollet periculis esset expositus, interior id est spiritus periclitari non possit invitus.*)<sup>140</sup> This is why the author of the sermon argues:

*Hinc intellegamus quanta sit animi dignitas, in quo, si prodicionem non operetur voluntas, locum invenire non valet impietas sicut etiam nunc ex hoc triumphalium puerorum certamine intellegi datur.*<sup>141</sup>

From this let us understand how great is the dignity of the mind, in which—provided the will does not commit treason—impiety cannot find its place, just as now we can understand it from this battle of the triumphant young boys.

This observation is, in principle, applicable to all human beings, whose proper power resides in the mind. The sermon emphasizes that “a spiritual war is led with spiritual powers, not corporal ones.” (*spiritalis bellum non corporis sed animi viribus geritur.*)<sup>142</sup> The philosophical point contained in the sermon makes it clear that human spirit enjoys greater freedom than the body, which can in principle be exposed to harm against its will, whereas the mind cannot, unless it agrees to be corrupted. All these observations pertain to universal human nature, even though the appeal is dictated by the martyrs’ situation. The passage exemplifies, therefore, the universalism of some descriptions of *dignitas Christiana*.

140 Eus. Gall., hom. 32 (CCL 101, 365, lineae 18–20).

141 Eus. Gall., hom. 32.2 (CCL 101, 365–366, lineae 25–28).

142 Eus. Gall., hom. 32 (CCL 101, 365, lineae 11–12).

We will discuss other anthropological-axiological fragments of *Eusebius Gallicanus* in the next Chapter; here, however, it is worth listing all appeals to pay attention to one's dignity and value, for they were being repeatedly formulated in late antiquity.

Finally, an appeal to know the dignity of human creation comprises the concluding paragraph of a small treatise dated from the late fifth to the sixth century: *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*.<sup>143</sup> The entire small work, incorrectly attributed in the Carolingian Renaissance and the Middle Ages to Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, or Alcuin of York, is fully dedicated to the dignity of human creation (*dignitas creationis humanae*), analyzed within the Augustinian model of Trinitarian iconicity. The notion of *dignitas conditionis* corresponds with Leo's term, *dignitas originis*, referring to the very same phenomenon. The idea of human iconicity is supplemented in the treatise with the theory of human actions as developing human similitude or dissimilitude to the divine archetype, and thus the final part of the *Dicta Albini* formulates an appeal to the readers:

*Quapropter, quisque diligentius attendat primae conditionis suae excellentiam, et venerandam sanctae Trinitatis in seipso imaginem agnoscat.*<sup>144</sup>

Therefore, may everyone pay all the more diligent attention to the excellence of their first creation and recognize in themselves the venerated image of the Holy Trinity.

Since at least the year 800, *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei* became a part of a small independent text dedicated entirely to human dignity, *De dignitate conditionis humanae*, whose title and main subject demonstrate the increasing popularity of the anthropological use of *dignitas*.<sup>145</sup> We will discuss this treatise in detail in Chapter Five; here, we concentrate on the reception of the Leonian call and ideas.

143 *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*, in: J. Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre*, London 1981, 158–161. Before the critical edition was prepared by Marenbon, *Dicta* were available as: Pseudo-Ambrose, *De dignitate conditionis humanae libellus* (PL 17, 1015–1018).

144 *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*, in: Marenbon, 1981, 161; (Ps.)Ambr., *De dignitate conditionis humanae libellus* 3 (PL 17, 1018).

145 M. Lebech / J. McEvoy / J. Flood, “*De dignitate conditionis humanae*”: Translation, Commentary, and Reception History of the “*Dicta Albini*” and the “*Dicta Candidi*”, in: *Viator* 40 (2009), 1–34.

#### 4.5.2 *Carolingian Renaissance*

During the Carolingian Renaissance, lengthy quotations from Leo's sermons, addressing the topic of dignity, were offered by Hincmar, the Bishop of Reims, an advisor to Charles the Bald and a prime intellectual among the Carolingian Renaissance scholars.<sup>146</sup> In his appeal against Gottschalk of Orbais, the author of a predestinarian doctrine,<sup>147</sup> Hincmar referred explicitly to Leo's *Tomus ad Flavianum*, his letters as well as sermons, altogether referencing Leo's name sixty two times and offering many at least sentence-length quotations of the Pope *verbatim*.<sup>148</sup> Hincmar's tactic was to improve the value of his argument by recalling respected authorities, and that he chose Leo to rely on speaks by itself of the esteem in which the Pope was held. *De praedestinatione* proved successful insofar as Gottschalk was criticized and condemned at the Councils of Mainz in 848 and in Quierzy in 849. He refused to alter his views, was imprisoned, badly beaten, and died in captivity.<sup>149</sup>

Among many references to Leo the Great, Hincmar quotes a passage pertaining specifically to human dignity,<sup>150</sup> one line directly after which a version of an appeal to recognize one's dignity is formulated in Leo's *Tractatus 22*.<sup>151</sup> In discussing the logic of salvation and God's humility in taking on the form of a human baby, Hincmar relies heavily on Leo, finalizing his description of the redeemed human nature with the following passage from the Pope's sermon: *Redit in honorem suum ab antiquis contagiis purgata natura, mors morte destruitur, nativitas nativitate reparatur, quoniam simul et redemptio aufert servitutem, et regeneratio mutat originem, et fides iustificat peccatorem*<sup>152</sup> ("Cleansed of the ancient contagion, nature returns to its dignity, death is destroyed by death, birth repairs birth, since at the same time redemption takes away slavery, regeneration changes the origins, and faith justifies the sinner").

Hincmar's reference shows that the Carolingian theologian followed the Pope in understanding *dignitas* as a category involving high human axiological status once given and once reclaimed—after redemption. It thus testifies to the reception of Leo's conception of dignity twice received, once during

146 S.F. Brown / J.C. Flores, *Historical Dictionary of Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, Lanham 2018, 328.

147 A.P. Stefańczyk, *Doctrinal Controversies of the Carolingian Renaissance: Gottschald Orbais' Teaching on Predestination*, in: *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 65 (2017), 53–70.

148 Hincm. Rem., praed. 1; 2–3; 9–10; 12–13; 16; 19; 24–25; 28–29; 32–38.

149 M. Michałowska, *Spór o predestynację w renesansie karolińskim: De praedestinatione Jana Szkota Eriugeny*, in: *Etyka* 37 (2004), 51.

150 Hincm. Rem., praed. 33 (PL 125, 340–341).

151 Leo. M., trac. 22.4 (CCL 138, 97, lineae 175–178).

152 Leo. M., trac. 22.4 (CCL 138, 97, lineae 175–178).

creation, and the second time after redemption. In Leo's *Tractatus* 22, the passage quoted by Hincmar is followed directly by an appeal to recognize one's glory: *Quisque igitur christiano nomine pie et fideliter gloriaris, reconciliationis huius gratiam iusto perpende iudicio.*<sup>153</sup> ("Whoever of you, therefore, piously and faithfully boasts with the name of a Christian, examine the grace of this reconciliation with a fair judgment"). Hincmar, however, omits this call in his treatise, and moves on to discussing the parts of Leo's sermons pertaining to the miracle of human recreation after redemption, leading, as we remember, to human greater glory than that of creation. These references in Hincmar's *De praedestinatione* do not, therefore, include an exact quotation of the call, but the treatise as such makes extensive use of the key points of the Pope's conception of dignity.

The work's interest in the notion of dignity goes beyond this reference, which is why we will briefly mention its main points. It worth noting here that Hincmar discusses, for example, human dignity's superiority over the angelic honor, a belief articulated by the Greek Fathers and Leo himself. Criticizing the belief that Christ suffered for the sake of demons, the Carolingian references John Chrysostom's and states:

*Non enim angelis tanta dignitas donata est, ut in una persona Dei Filius eorum naturae conjungeretur: sed hunc honorem et hanc dignitatem humanae naturae Deus Dei Filius concessit, ut Deus et homo una esset persona.*<sup>154</sup>

Such great dignity, that the Son of God is united with their nature in one person, was not given to angels, yet this honor and this dignity was granted by God the Son to human nature, so that God and humans could be one person.

An earlier passage of *De praedestinatione* testifies to Hincmar's stance regarding *dignitas Romana*, which he, quite typically, negates in his own version of "neither Jew, nor Greek". The Carolingian intellectual appeals: *Nec dubitet quis: nulla hic exceptio est, nec ingenuitas, nec dignitas, nec conditionis, nec positionis, nec formae, nec aetatis.*<sup>155</sup> ("Let no one doubt: there is no exception, no noble birth, no rank in regards to status, position, form, age.") He further adds:

*Licet dignitate magnifici, licet nobiles, licet senes, licet juvenes, pauperes, divites, boni, mali que, domini atque servi, indifferenter aequaliter introite in haereditatem. Etsi debilis captus es, et corpore deformis, etsi macula turpis, et capite defectus, etsi oculis viduatus, universis libere licet discumbere in convivio, et epulari*

153 Leo. M., trac. 22.5 (CCL 138, 97, lineae 179–180). The edition states *quisque*, not *quisquis*.

154 Hincm. Rem., praed. 27 (PL 125, 276).

155 Hincm. Rem., praed. 25 (PL 125, 227).

*nuptias Sponsi. Neminem pudeat, nec aetatis, nec humilitatis, nec valetudinis, nec conditionis.*<sup>156</sup>

Notwithstanding dignity of greatness, nobility, old age, youth, the poor, the rich, the good, and the bad, lords and servants, enter indifferently, in like manner into [scil. His] inheritance. Even if you are captured weak and of a deformed body, ugly, blemished and defective in the head, although of failing eyes—everyone can freely sit at the feast, to celebrate the wedding of the Bridegroom. Let no one be ashamed, not of age, not of humiliation, not of well-being, not of position.

Thus eloquently negating the role of various kinds of *dignitas Romana*, Hincmar rephrases the biblical teaching, repeated altogether five times in the New Testament: “God shows no favoritism for persons”.<sup>157</sup> By verbalizing this evangelical principle, he strengthens the role of *dignitas hominis* insofar as questioning the rationale of rank, position, and, in general, feature-related axiological presumptions leads to the egalitarian affirmation of a specifically natural value present in all human creatures, regardless of the specific circumstances and characteristics that pertain to them. This passage serves to illustrate a conception of dignity strongly inspired by Leo’s sermons. We have, moreover, evidence of *dignitas* in its meaning of *dignitas hominis* functioning as a standard name for human nature’s positive axiological status, operating within a specific theory of dignity twice received—something not witnessed to that extent in the writings of late ancient Christian authors prior to Leo.

#### 4.5.3 *Twelfth Century*

Curiously, many exact quotations of Leo’s one-sentence call appear in the writings of prominent twelfth century French philosophers and theologians, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, William of Saint-Thierry, Richard of Saint Victor, Godfrey of Saint Victor, Peter Cantor, and Gerard Iterius. As already suggested, the vocative *Christiane* was replaced by most authors with *homo* (which Leo himself used in a version of the call spoken on a Christmas day in 451, as well as in a sermon dating from around 458), and thereby applicable to the whole of humankind, not merely Christians.

To start with, Bernard of Clairvaux, an author of what may conceivably be the first definition of human dignity formulated in the European tradition,<sup>158</sup> quotes the first four words of Leo’s call exactly (except for the vocative *homo*), supplementing it with his own addition. *Agnosce, o homo, dignitatem tuam,*

<sup>156</sup> Hincm. Rem., praed. 25 (PL 125, 227).

<sup>157</sup> Gal 3:23; Rom 2:1; Jas 2:1, 2:9; Jude 1:16. I summarize the five uses in their original forms in Guerrero van der Meijden, 2019, 5.

<sup>158</sup> Bern. Cl., De dil. D. 2 (SBO 3, 121, lineae 15–17).

*agnosce gloriam conditionis humanae*<sup>159</sup> (“Realize, o human being, your dignity, and realize the glory of human creation”)—Bernard exclaims in a *Sermo in nativitate Domini*, clearly following in Leo’s footsteps. The vocabulary, the idea and the relevance of the topic of human dignity for Christmas celebrations all point to Leo as Bernard’s inspiration. It might seem that Bernard’s line assumes human creation as the primary source of human dignity, rather than incarnation or redemption, but this is because the call appears in the introductory part of the speech dedicated to the topic of creation.

The sermon names three miracles of God’s generosity towards the human race: creation, redemption and future glory, which Bernard calls divine com-mingles or mixtures (*commixtiones*). This evident allusion to the Christmas sermon by Gregory of Nazianzus introduces another ancient context in which the notion of dignity arose. Unsurprisingly, it is the incarnation that constitutes the main topic of a Christmas speech, albeit one that needs to be introduced by creation, for the latter presupposes the former. Leo’s call is situated in the first part, thus introducing the subject of the marvelous “mixture” of the earth and spirit united in a human creature.

The Cistercian did not make an explicit reference to the author of the call, the first part of which he repeated word for word, except for the vocative *homo* (*Agnosce, o homo, dignitatem tuam*), presumably because such a reference to Leo was redundant, especially during the Christmas celebrations. Multiple occurrences of the various versions of the call in twelfth-century French monastic circles give rise to speculation that the call and its origin were common knowledge by then.

Bernard’s personal friend, William of Saint-Thierry, paraphrases rather than quotes Leo’s call in his commentary to the *Song of Songs*, in which he appeals numerous times for self-knowledge—because, according to him, self-knowledge is a necessary condition for moral development. In this context, William discusses the beauty of the human soul, represented by the bride in the *Song of Songs*. When the human being, originally beautiful like the bride, forfeits God’s laws, they follow ways foreign to their nature, thus wandering into the land of dissimilarity to God (*in locum dissimilitudinis*).<sup>160</sup> In doing so, they behave like an image drawn to represent its archetype, yet repainted with the wrong colors. As such, they represent neglected beauty (*pulchritudo*

159 Bern. CL, Serm. in nat. Dom. 2.1 (SBO 4, 252).

160 E. Gilson identified the roots of *regio dissimilitudinis* in Plato’s thought, yet other commentators point to Plotinus. Cf. E. Gilson, *Regio Dissimilitudinis de Platon à Saint Bernard de Clairvaux*, in: *Mediaeval Studies* 9 (1947), 108–130; M. Buraczewski, *Pojęcia regio dissimilitudinis, similitudo i imago w sermo IX Acharda ze św. Wiktora*, in: *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne* 29 (2020), 92.

*neglecta*), which ought to be reproached. This is why the abbot of Saint-Thierry appeals for self-knowledge: because knowing one's iconic nature directs one towards the proper shape and color of an image, derived from following the divine archetype.<sup>161</sup> In this context, William connects Leo's appeal with the notion of an image of God: *O imago Dei, recognosce dignitatem tuam; refulgeat in te auctoris effigies*<sup>162</sup> ("O, image of God, recognize your dignity, may the imitation of the designer reflect in you") and writes also earlier, *cognosce te, quia imago mea es*<sup>163</sup> ("know yourself, for you are my image"). Elaborating on human axiology, he adds: *Tu tibi vilis es, sed pretiosa res es*.<sup>164</sup> ("To yourself you are worthless, but you are a precious thing"). In this context, William develops his own understanding of *imago Dei*, using the mentioned metaphor of a literally understood image and Augustine's language of *regio dissimilitudinis*.

It is important to note that Leo's call is referenced one more time, and William's Leo-inspired use of *dignitas* stands as evidence to it functioning as a leading anthropological category when human axiology is discussed, very much in contrast to authors such as Ambrose of Milan.

The Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris is another monastic center in which Leo's call is written and presumably uttered more than once in the twelfth century. Firstly, a philosopher and theologian, Richard of Saint Victor, references Leo in his *Benjamin maior. De contemplatione*. Richard strengthens Leo's imperative with a plea (*quaeso!*—"I ask" or "I beg of you"), and extends the Pope's appeal:

*Cognosce, queso, homo dignitatem tuam, cogita excellentem illam anime tue naturam, quomodo fecerit eam Deus ad imaginem et similitudinem suam, quomodo sublimaverit eam super omnem corpoream.*<sup>165</sup>

Recognize, I beg of you, o human being, your dignity, know that excellent nature of your soul, how God created it in His image and likeness, how He elevated it above all the corporal [scil. natures].

Richard, therefore, pointed to the soul as the foundation of human excellence and dignity, quite typically for the Christian author, assuming that it is the soul that was formed in God's image and likeness. By repeating Leo's call, however, he named the whole of a human creature (*homo*) as a subject of dignity to be discovered by his addresses. It is a curious consequence of Leo's formulation from 451 that *dignitas* is more often predicated on the human being as such,

161 Guill. de S. Th., exp. Cant. 12.62 (CCCM 87, 51).

162 Guill. de S. Th., exp. Cant. 12.62 (CCCM 87, 51).

163 Guill. de S. Th., exp. Cant. 12.60 (CCCM 87, 51).

164 Guill. de S. Th., exp. Cant. 12.62 (CCCM 87, 51).

165 Rich. de S. V., cont. 3.13 (SRSA 13, 312). Richard typically does not use the diphthongs.



and not only on the spiritual aspect of the human creature such as the soul. It was a general tendency of the Middle Ages to identify only the spiritual as the foundation of iconicity, and thus of the excellent and divine, in a human creature.<sup>166</sup>

It is also significant that the Victorine monk referred to the idea of human elevation that was presented poetically by Leo in his ascension sermon from 444. The ideas differ insofar as Leo's *Tractatus* 73 describes the elevation of human nature above all celestial creation, and Richard's *Beniamin maior* above natural creatures. They do, however, remain conceptually close. Moreover—and interestingly—the appeal to recognize human dignity is uttered by Richard with more rhetorical force than by the Pope, in consequence of Richard's additional plea, *queso*.

A similar tendency to strengthen the style of an appeal is visible in a work written by another representative of the Victorine Abbey, Godfrey of St. Victor. In his *Microcosmus*, Godfrey reinforces Leo's imperative with a rhetorical question addressed to listeners: *Vides ne adhuc, o homo, dignitatem tuam, dum contemplaris in personam Dei sublimatam naturam tuam?*<sup>167</sup> (“Do you see, so far, o human being, your dignity when you contemplate your elevated nature in God's person?”). For Godfrey, the truth in which human dignity manifests itself most fully is clearly the incarnation, which is why he urges his listeners to reflect upon “God's person,” which took on human form. He also expresses human axiology through the language of elevation, as did Leo.

It was the innovation of Peter Cantor, another twelfth-century theologian, that brought the tendency to rhetorically reinforce Leo's appeal to its most daring form, despite some orthographic deficiencies of the author. The effect is not achieved by stylistic efforts, but by introducing a new context. Peter supplements Leo's words with a daring suggestion when he writes: *O homo, agnosce dignitatem tuam in qua conditus es ad ymaginem Dei, sic que disce sanctam superbiam*. (“O human being, recognize your dignity in which you were created in the image of God, and thus learn holy pride”).<sup>168</sup> By endorsing an idea of *sancta superbia* resulting from the acknowledgement of the identity of an image of God, Peter strengthens Leo's already bold appeal. This idea of

166 Consider the theories of iconicity proposed by Augustine of Hippo (*De Trinitate*), Basil the Great (*Homilia in illud: attende tibi ipsi*), Gregory of Nyssa (*De opificio hominis*), John of Damascus (*De fide orthodoxa*, *De duabus voluntatibus Christi*), Anselm of Canterbury (*Monologion*), Albert the Great (*Summa de creaturis*, part *De homine*), Thomas Aquinas (*Sth I*, q. 93), and Bonaventure and (Ps.)Bonaventure (*De imagine Dei*, *Sermones de tempore*, *Sermo VI in XXII dominicam post Pentecosten*).

167 *God. de S. V.*, micr. 3,237 (SRSA 16, 492).

168 *Petrus Cantor*, summ. 11 (CCCM 196A, 100, linea 114).

holy self-regard, resulting from the identity and dignity of an icon, might seem unusual for a Christian. As we remember, the Greek Fathers warned against lofty feelings resulting from the contemplation of only one aspect of human nature: the soul understood as a source of human dignity. The Cappadocian's argued that forgetting the demeaning aspect of the human condition, the earthly or the corporal, might lead to false pride. Cantor, however, developed Leo's appeal in a different, rather daring manner, although one fully in line with Leo's description of human nature as sharing in God's glory and dignity.

An utterly opposing tendency is visible in a work by another twelfth century French author, Gerard Iterius, a prior at the Order of Grandmont, which was established towards the end of the eleventh century. Gerard quotes Leo, but places the appeal to know one's dignity in a contrasting context when he writes:

*O homo miser et miserabilis, intellege dignitatem tuam, honorem tuum, celsitudinem tuam, praemium tuum. Conserva, observa, retine, cave ne perdas tantum beneficium tibi caelitus collatum.*<sup>169</sup>

O, pitiable and miserable human being, understand your dignity, your honor, your height, your price. Preserve, watch, retain, and beware that you do not ruin such favor brought to you from heaven.

By integrating the call to recognize one's dignity within a demeaning context (*miser et miserabilis homo*) and warning against losing one's elevated status, Gerard spells out the Greek patristic tendency, formulated by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, to perceive human dignity in conjunction with the recognition of human insignificance. Gerard's appeal is closest to that of Basil insofar as it interprets human dignity through the price paid for the human being, introducing the mercantile understanding of redemption as a kind of exchange. The verb *cavere*, in its characteristic combination with *ne* (*cave ne*) was earlier incorporated in the call by the anonymous Master of Verona.

Finally, it is worth stating that, apart from the call itself, other parts of Leo's sermons discussing human dignity are also quoted or appear in full length in twelfth-century compilations of sermons on various occasions, or in theological debates on diverse subjects. *Exempli gratia*, Hermannus of Runa recapitulates a part of Leo's ascension sermon from the year 444, *Tractatus* 73, describing the elevation of human nature, in *Sermones festivales*.<sup>170</sup> William of

169 Scriptores ordinis Grandimontis, expl. (CCCM 8, 452, linea 1018). Notably, Gerard used *cave ne* followed by a subjunctive structure, which appears in Anonymous Veronese.

170 Herm. Run., serm. 64.

Newburgh, to recall an English example of a historian and a theologian, quotes Leo's authority in an explanation of Epiphany.<sup>171</sup>

The rich twelfth century reception of Leo's call testifies not only to the phrase being popular, but also to key elements of Leo's conception of dignity circulating in the intellectual milieu of various, specifically—although not only—French monastic circles. As for an explanation of why the twelfth century quoted Leo so copiously, my hypothesis is that it is due to the concept of dignity being popularized through what was known as *Sacramentarium Leonianum*. The role of this sacramentary in the history of the concept of dignity, and in the history of Leo's reception, will become fully understandable after I discuss its character and usage. As we will see, the twelfth century was on the cusp of a groundbreaking moment in history.

#### 4.5.4 *Thirteenth Century*

In the thirteenth century, the age of Golden Scholasticism and the age of new preaching methods introduced by the mendicant orders, well-known authorities such Thomas Aquinas quoted Leo explicitly, without rephrasing and with specific reference to the author. This marks a more typically academic form of quotation, one often used in *summae* of the classical medieval period.

To start with, and quite typically for his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas refers to Leo's authority in order to justify his position on the necessity of the incarnation for the restoration of humankind. Thomas argues for a kind of necessity of incarnation; not one which suggests that God had no other means of restoring human nature, but rather, one which suggests that God chose the best of many means by which He could restore human nature. In arguing for his position, Aquinas puts forward a number of reasons why incarnation was the best means, and among these reasons is the idea of human dignity. Aquinas argues that incarnation was, *inter alia*, most useful for eradicating evil from the world. He claims that, among other things, the recognition of how great human dignity is (*quanta sit dignitas naturae humanae*) prevents human beings from carrying out actions that dishonor their great axiological status.<sup>172</sup> Unsurprisingly, in this context Aquinas points to Leo's person and his appeal: *Et Leo Papa dicit, in sermone de nativitate, agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam, et divinae consors factus naturae, noli in veterem vilitatem degeneri conversatione redire.*<sup>173</sup> ("And Pope Leo says in the sermon on nativity, recognize o Christian your dignity and created a participant in the divine nature

171 Guillelmus Neubrigensis, expl. 8.8,7 (Spicilegium Friburgense 6, 346).

172 Thomas de Aquino, Sth 3, q. 1, a. 2, corp.

173 Thomas de Aquino, Sth 3, q. 1, a. 2, corp.

do not return to your old vileness by degenerate behavior.”) Unlike the above discussed twelfth-century authors, Thomas did not paraphrase Leo, nor offer a new context or rhetorical style, but simply repeated the full sentence, naming not only the author but also the text in which it originally appeared. A textbook example of a quotation, one could say.

Aquinas’s views as presented in this article of *Summa* relate well to his view regarding human dignity’s alienability presented in the earlier part of the same work. In his discussion of the death penalty, Aquinas formulates an argument in defense of capital punishment, which relates to the idea of human dignity. Unlike Augustine, who stressed numerous times that even the most deformed icon can return to its original beauty, Thomas argues that when the human being commits atrocious evil, they depart from their human dignity and, therefore, it is justifiable to kill them, similarly to how it is justifiable to kill an animal.<sup>174</sup> Such a radical conclusion, assuming dignity’s alienability, should, however, be interpreted within the context of Aquinas’s theories of human iconicity and human personhood. His theory of the image of God distinguishes between the three levels of iconicity: the level of natural iconicity (*imago naturae*) present in all human beings and visible in the fact that they are capable of knowing and loving God; the level of an image of grace (*imago gratiae*) present in the just human beings inasmuch as they habitually and imperfectly know and love God; and the level of the image of glory (*imago gloriae*) present in the saints who permanently and perfectly know and love God.<sup>175</sup> Aquinas’s views on human personhood also stress that human natural design, being a person, is a basis for humanity’s great dignity,<sup>176</sup> and this design is not alienable even in the most morally depraved human subjects. The remarks on capital punishment should, therefore, be interpreted within those contexts, i.e., as indicating the loss of a moral dimension of human dignity. They were also not inspired by Leo’s thought. It is Aquinas’s discussion of incarnation, which we recapitulated, that demonstrates his acquaintance with Leo’s theory of human dignity.

Similarly to Thomas Aquinas, the anonymous author of *De humanitate Christi*, a work erroneously attributed to him, quotes Leo literally and in full length when he writes: *Leo Papa: agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam; et divinae consors factus naturae noli in veterem vilitatem degeneri conversatione redire.*<sup>177</sup> These two almost exact thirteenth-century references demonstrate

174 Thomas de Aquino, Sth 2–2, q. 64, a. 2. ad 3.

175 Thomas de Aquino, Sth 1, q. 93, a. 4.

176 Thomas de Aquino, Sth 1, q. 29, a. 3, ad 2; id., Sth 1, q. 23, a. 3, ad 4, id., Sth 2–2, q. 32, a. 5, corp.

177 Anonymous (Ps.)Thomas de Aquino, hum., a. 2, col. 2 (Parma 1864, 190).

that, despite the creativity of the twelfth century intellectuals, Leo's call did not start to function as a fragmented form that merely began a sentence composed of two appeals (*agnosce, o homo, dignitatem tuam*) and was supplemented with whatever a later author's invention dictated. The full sentence was repeated and was also attributed to Leo.

Again, as in the earlier centuries, parts of Leo's sermons discussing human dignity are quoted by various authors, among which the widely-read *Summa Fratris Alexandri*, in which Leo's *Tractatus 73*<sup>178</sup> is quoted, is of significance due to its strong influence on scholastic thinkers. When it comes to the effect on the wider public, we ought to mention Jacob de Voragine's famous, widely read and in fact celebrated *Legenda aurea*, which quotes passages from Leo's *Tractatus 73*.<sup>179</sup>

#### 4.5.5 Fourteenth Century

In the fourteenth century, an echo of Leo's appeal is detectable in Catherine of Siena's famous and broadly-read *Il dialogo della divina provvidenza*, and fully present in a commentary to Peter Lombard's *Sentences* written by Denis the Carthusian.<sup>180</sup>

Catherine of Siena's *Il dialogo* discusses human dignity multiple times, most often in moralistic contexts, yet at times also in descriptive ones. The moralistic contexts frequently appeal for self-knowledge, thus continuing the tradition started by Basil the Great.<sup>181</sup> The descriptive ones, on the other hand, offer some insight into Catherine's ontology of human dignity, which she justifies one the basis of human iconic nature, God's incarnation, redemption, and—at times—human rationality.<sup>182</sup> Consequently, Catherine stresses human superiority over the angels, whose nature was not assumed by God.<sup>183</sup> The fact that human beings have such unity with God, and such great dignity resulting from it, leads Catherine to stress human beings' responsibility for maintaining their ontological honor. In doing so, she demonstrates her familiarity with the tradition of the appeals to know one's dignity. The female mystic of Siena, using a fourteenth century Tuscan dialect, exclaims in her *Dialogo: O ciechità umana, che non guardi la tua dignità!*<sup>184</sup> ("Oh, the human blindness, which does not

178 Alex. Hal., Sth 3.1, inq. 1, trac. 7, q. 1, cap. 7, a. 2, prob. 2, num. 206 (Florence 1948, 292).

179 Iac. Vor., leg. aur. 72 (Leipzig 1850, 326).

180 Dion. Cart., comm. 3.1, q. 1, col. 2, (DCOO 23, 36).

181 Cath. Se., dial. 1; 13.

182 Cath. Se., dial. 1; 13; 51; 98.

183 Cath. Se., dial. 42; 75.

184 Cath. Se., dial. 35, linea 196. Orthography is original, cf. G. Cavallini (ed.), *Cath. Sen., Il Dialogo della Divina Provvidenza ovvero Libro della Divina Dottrina*, Siena 1995, 91.

observe its own dignity!"). Catherine thus omits the appeal itself, but indirectly spells out the need for human creatures to know their dignity. The assumption of angelic inferiority in comparison to human nature, the description of original sin as a departure from the dignity of creation, as well Catherine's observation that human beings have dignity resulting from the incarnation, all demonstrate the patristic influences on her thought.

Denis the Cartusian, who collaborated with Nicolas of Cusa, also appealed to Leo's authority explicitly and accurately, just like Aquinas, the author of *De humanitate Christi* (or, earlier, Hincmar). Denis quoted Leo's passages word for word, altering only one verb (*redire*). The passage introducing the quotation illustrates the axiological topic Denis took up:

*Secundo, per idem docetur [scil. homo] attendere quanta sit dignitas naturae humanae, quam assumere Deus dignatus est, ne eam inquinat per peccata. Unde in sermone de Nativitate loquitur Leo Papa: Agnosce dignitatem tuam, o Christiane; et divinae consors factus naturae, noli in veterem vilitatem degeneri conversatione recidere.*<sup>185</sup>

Secondly, through this the human being learns to pay attention to how great human nature's dignity is, which God stooped to take on, so that it would not be stained by sins. In a sermon on the birth of Christ pope Leo thus says: Recognize, o human being, your dignity, and once made a partaker in the divine nature do not return to your old vileness by degenerate behavior.

Leo's appeal employs the verb *redire*, which was changed to *recidere* in Denis' commentary, possibly resulting from a minor mistake in the manuscript Denis was reading or a wrongly deciphered abbreviation. Leo's call is nonetheless quoted accurately, and in the original context of the incarnation, which is celebrated typically during Christmas. The incarnation is, moreover, adhered to in exactly the right context, one corresponding to the Pope's idea: dignity is to be known because of the price paid for it during god's attempt to save human nature from the blemish of sin.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Bernardino of Siena, a late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century reformer of the Franciscan order, and an exceptionally popular preacher (forced to teach in the fields and markets due to the size of the crowds who gathered to listen to him), quoted passages concerning the glorification of human dignity at the throne of God from Leo's *Tractatus 73* in his sermons.<sup>186</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Dion. Cart., comm. 3.1, q. 1, col. 2 (DCOO 23, 36).

<sup>186</sup> Bernardinus Senensis, serm. art. 3, cap. 2, vol. 7 (SBSO 7, 132, lineae 24–25).

These fourteenth-century references, formulated more than nine hundred years after Leo's sermon was spoken in Rome during Christmas celebrations of 440, do not exhaust the long list of quotations of Leo's most famous phrase in European tradition. To name only one highly influential modern author, Cornelius Janssen recalled Leo's authority in his *Augustinus*.<sup>187</sup> The call is also still customarily spoken during Christmas celebrations in Christian churches today, and not infrequently by popes or cardinals, which only serves to illustrate its lasting impact.

This briefly summarized history of the call's reception in late antiquity and medieval times leads, moreover, to the conclusion that by the time antiquity changed into the Middle Ages, the anthropological meaning of *dignitas* (*dignitas hominis*) had become a standard term for positive human axiological status. The centrality of Leo's person in all the listed axiological deliberations indicates the role he played in conceptualizing, and most of all in popularizing, this crucial concept in European culture.

Leo's wording made also a great difference in the practice of applying the positive axiological term to the whole of the human being, and not just to an aspect of a human person—as dictated by the prevalent interpretation of the doctrine of iconicity, specifically spelled out in the terminology of religious connotations, such as a soul. Since it is *homo* (and *Christianus*) that Leo chose to call out to when formulating his imperative, *dignitas* became much more often predicated on the whole of the human being, not just on one aspect of human nature. The power of this appeal lies partially in the simplicity of the language employed, since common words such as *homo* are much more likely to be picked up than the specialized theological language of *imago Dei* or *capax Dei*. This is one reason why his short appeal is relevant and understandable even today. In the preserved ancient and medieval Latin material, we do not find anyone whose words would help frame *dignitas* as a standard name for human axiological status like Leo's did.

All these references testify to Leo's widespread recognition and to the identification of later generations with his call to recognize human dignity as both a key quotation on dignity, and a key concept of the Pope. We will shortly reveal a hypothesis explaining why the concept received so much attention in the twelfth century. From the point of view of the intellectual history of human dignity, it is crucial that Leo was typically recalled in the debates pertaining to human nature and human axiology. This demonstrates both that

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187 Jansenius (Cornelius Jansen), *Augustinus* (tomus secundus) de statu naturae lapsae 4.7, 579B.

*dignitas* served during anthropological debates as a crucial positive axiological category, and that Leo's figure remained at the heart of this historical process.

#### 4.6 Liturgical Prayer about Dignity Created and Restored

In addition to sermons and letters, there are prayers attributed to Leo, who as a pope must have been involved in editing and writing prayers spoken during mass rituals in Rome.<sup>188</sup> In particular, the three oldest sacramentaries, *Sacramentarium Leonianum*, *Sacramentarium Gelasianum* and *Sacramentarium Gregorianum*, list one prayer attributed to Pope Leo,<sup>189</sup> which introduces not only the concept but also Leo's conception of human dignity right into Christmas celebrations.<sup>190</sup> The earlier sources do not indicate the presence of this prayer in liturgy.<sup>191</sup> Interestingly, a missal from the late thirteenth century lists this prayer as an additional text (*alia oratio*) to be recited during the mass ritual of pouring water into the chalice; that is, the offertory.<sup>192</sup>

*Sacramentarium Leonianum*, today referred to more appropriately as *Sacramentarium Veronense*, is a liturgical book that consists of prayers collected from various fifth- to sixth-century *libelli missarum* (booklets of prayers) kept in Italian churches, including Roman ones. It was composed between 561–574 as a compilation of texts gathered from various temples, and its first manuscript dates to around 600–625. In the nineteenth century, Leo was wrongly identified as the author of what was therefore called *Sacramentarium Leonianum* (which he could not have been given the way that the manuscript was arranged: as a compilation of prayers from various sources). However impossible the attribution of the authorship of the whole volume to the Pope, some liturgical prayers contained in the volume were gathered from

188 J. McEvoy / M. Lebech / J. Flood, *Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem: A Latin Liturgical Source Contributing to the Conceptualization History of Human Dignity*, in: Maynooth Philosophical Papers 10 (2020), 120–121.

189 McEvoy / Lebech / Flood, 2020, 120–121.

190 L. Eizenhöfer (ed.), *Sacramentarium Veronense*, Rome 1995, no. 1239 (p. 157); id. (ed.), *Liber sacramentorum Romanae Ecclesiae Ordinis Anni Circuli: Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, Rome 1981, no. 27 (p. 10) [orthography in “*Aecclesiae*” is original]; *Le Sacramentaire Grégorien*, Fribourg 1979, no. 59 (p. 106).

191 L. Ligier / J.A. Jungmann / A. Raes / L. Eizenhöfer / I. Pahl / J. Pinell (eds.), *Prex eucharistica: Textus e variis liturgiis antiquioribus selecti*, Fribourg 1968.

192 C. Folsom, *A Rubricated Sacramentary of Thirteenth-Century Rome*, Rome 2018, 163 (linea 692).



the fifth-century Roman Churches in which he celebrated the mass.<sup>193</sup> Some prayers can, therefore, be correctly attributed to him, provided there are compelling reasons to do so.

One of these prayers introduces the concept of dignity to Christmas celebrations (as demonstrated by Verona, Gelasian and Gregorian Sacramentary), and later—following the creation of missals in the thirteenth century, which slowly replaced sacramentaries—also into the very heart of the Roman missal, in particular the offertory. Since at least the late thirteenth century, the prayer functioned as an additional text to be spoken, if the priest wished, before the most important part of the sacrament, the transubstantiation, during the pouring of water into the chalice.<sup>194</sup>

The prayer, however short, contains the exact conceptualization of dignity that we have identified in Leo's thought: one that does not exhaust the idea of human dignity with a mention of human creation in the image and likeness of God, but that thematizes the marvelous reacquisition of human dignity through redemption. It takes on a slightly different form in various sacramentaries, and also in diverse manuscript traditions of the same sacramentary, but the oldest from present in the Verona Sacramentary reads:

*Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitatem et mirabiliter condidisti, et mirabiliter reformasti: da, quaesumus, nobis Iesu Christi filii tui eius divinitatis esse consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps: per [scil. eundem dominum nostrum].*<sup>195</sup>

God, who both wondrously created and even more wondrously restored the dignity of human nature; grant us, we ask, that we may be partakers of the divinity of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who deigned to share in our humanity, through [scil. our Lord].

The editor of the critical edition of the sacramentary clearly followed the *lectio difficilior potior* rule when he chose to present a more obscure version of the first line (*Deus, qui in humanae substantiae dignitate*). The available critical apparatus of the edition references the manuscript version presented above, one which is consistent with the versions of the prayer present in Gelasian and Gregorian sacramentaries, as well as in medieval missals.<sup>196</sup> This is why I chose to follow the manuscript tradition presented above, and to merely indicate the

193 A.J. Chupungco (ed.), *Scientia Liturgica: Manuale di Liturgia 1: Introduzione alla liturgia*, Rome 1998, 264–266; W. Świerzawski (ed.), *Historia liturgii*, Sandomierz 2012, 36–37.

194 McEvoy / Lebech / Flood, 2020, 117–133.

195 Sac. Ver. no. 1239 (p. 157).

196 Sac. Ver. no. 1239 (p. 157), footnote 24.

existence of an alternative formulation, one employing *in* and an ablative of *dignitas* instead of accusative.

The Gelasian Sacramentary, composed between 628–715, quotes the prayer dedicated to the feast of Nativity in the following form:

*Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitate et mirabiliter condidisti et mirabilius reformasti: da, quaesumus, ut eius efficiamur in divina consortes, qui nostrae humanitatis fieri dignatus est particeps, Christus filius tuus: per eundem dominum nostrum.*<sup>197</sup>

God, who both wondrously created and even more wondrously restored the dignity of human nature; grant, we ask, that we may become partakers of the divinity of the one who deigned to share in our humanity, Christ, Your Son. Through our Lord.

The Gregorian Sacramentary, composed during the pontificate of Honorius I (625–638), the first manuscript of which dates from between 811–812, lists another version of the prayer as one of the “other prayers on the Lord’s birth” (*aliae orationes de Natale Domini*):

*Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitatem et mirabiliter condidisti, et mirabilius reformasti, da nobis quaesumus eius divinitatis esse consortes qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps. Per dominum.*<sup>198</sup>

God, who both wondrously created and even more wondrously restored the dignity of human nature, grant us, we ask, that we may be partakers of the divinity of the one who deigned to share in our humanity. Through Lord.

The version of the call that was introduced in the thirteenth century, as an additional text (*alia oratio*) to the standard prayer recited during offertory, adapts the earlier versions to the new context by introducing the mention of water and wine:

*Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitatem et mirabiliter condidisti et mirabilius reformasti, da nobis per huius aquae et vini mysterium eius divinitatis esse consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps, Jesus Christus, Filius tuus, Qui [scil. tecum vivit et regnat in unitate Spiritus Sancti Deus; per omnia saecula saeculorum].*<sup>199</sup>

197 Sacr. Gel. no. 27 (p. 10).

198 Sacr. Greg. no. 59 (p. 106).

199 Folsom, 2018, 163 (linea 692).

God, who both wondrously created and even more wondrously restored the dignity of human nature; grant us, through the mystery of this water and this wine, that we may be partakers in His divinity, the one who deigned to share in our humanity, Jesus Christ, Your Son, [scil. God, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.]

All the key elements of the Leonine understanding of dignity can be identified in the prayer: dignity's source in God's act of creation; dignity's loss and the greater miracle of dignity's reacquisition; as well as dignity's conditional character, visible in the plea addressed to God for the preservation of human participation in God. Moreover, the prayer is listed in the earliest sacramentaries as intended for the celebration of Christmas, during which Leo spoke his appeals for the recognition and preservation of dignity. This once again introduces a connection between the notion of dignity and the incarnation.

The prayer was spoken for centuries during mass rituals, and only after the Second Vatican Council's reforms was its presence from the offertory ritual removed. It remains part of Roman Catholic liturgy, recited out loud once a year in an abbreviated form during offertory on the first day of Christmas. Given the sheer number of times the concept of dignity was spoken and described through this prayer on various altars throughout the ages, it is likely to be the most widespread exposition of the concept of human dignity to the wider public in European history.<sup>200</sup>

I have already argued that Leo is a watershed figure in the history of the idea of human dignity due to the rhetorical force, as well as simplicity, of the appeal he formulated. Additionally, his general ascription of dignity to *homo* as such, his role as the Bishop of Rome held for an exceptionally long time (and thus his exposure to various ancient Roman crowds), and his popularity among the people of Rome (grateful to him for successful negotiations with Attila and Genseric) all contributed to the popularity of the idea of human dignity which he uttered. Now we can add one final explanation to the phenomena of Leo's influence: his contribution to the Christmas celebrations. Leo not only made appeals to recognize human dignity during these celebrations, but also wrote a prayer expounding and illuminating dignity that entered into the liturgy of a central Christian holiday. Given the growing popularity of Christmas in the ancient Church, the idea of human dignity could not have found a better means of broadcast than both the sermon and liturgy of the feast of nativity.

We have identified some factors explaining why Leo stands out in the ancient Latin West as the one who popularized the concept of dignity, among

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<sup>200</sup> Lebech, 2009, 70; McEvoy / Lebech / Flood, 2020, 133.

not only the educated elite, but also the wider public listening to his sermons in Rome, mostly at the Lateran, St. Clement's, and St. Peter's.<sup>201</sup> In addition to devising a conception of dignity, he delivered a number of catchy, easy to remember lines popularizing the concept during crucial public celebrations, employing both maximum rhetorical force and simplicity of language. That he was already respected during his time further strengthened the reception of his words, and the composition of the prayer corresponding to the call, as well as introducing the notion of dignity to crucial public liturgical holidays, the feast of nativity, were likely to determine the success of his idea.

Finally, reconstructing the history of the Leonian prayer allows a hypothesis to be formulated concerning the overrepresentation of paraphrases of Leo's call in the twelfth century. In the Franco-Germanic world, there remained an insistence on performing the Roman rite, following reforms instigated by the Carolingian rulers, who wished to make the liturgy uniform and who famously directed a request to Pope Hadrian to send to them an exemplary Roman sacramentary, hence known as *Hadrianum*.<sup>202</sup> Since *Hadrianum* was a papal document, it needed to be adapted for regular clergy. Benedict of Aniane thus wrote what is called a *Supplementum*, adding the necessary prayers which he extracted mostly from the Gelasian Sacramentary. In Gaul, the new prayers and gestures were added specifically to the introductory rite as well as the offertory, and soon, in the ninth century, a tradition of *Ordo Missae* was initiated.

We could therefore ask whether the twelfth-century French phenomenon is not a result of the prayer already being popular in that region, following the ninth-century reforms and insistence on using the Roman sources for liturgy. It is only after the tradition of missals appears in the thirteenth century, however, that we can identify with proper exactitude the regular presence of the prayer in the ceremony of offertory.

#### 4.7 Conclusions and Summary

We have documented the lasting and widespread influence of Leo's concept, and, to some extent, also of his conception of dignity. It is time to summarize the core principles of his conception. How can we synthesize, situate and diagnose the standpoint just discussed?

First and foremost, *dignitas* stands out in Leo's approach as a significant, highly positive anthropological category, one used systematically, with care

<sup>201</sup> Pratesi, 1991, 9–23.

<sup>202</sup> Świerzawski (ed.), 2012, 41–43.

and deliberation during important public speeches. *Dignitas*, when applied as an anthropological concept, is primarily referred to as a feature of universal human nature, and thus it literally is *dignitas hominis*. Leo expounded the positive character of this category by calling it *speciosissima* (splendid), and his secretary, Prosper, used another adjective in relation to human dignity—*magna* (great). Uses in reference to a particular group or a position are also present, although the link between dignity and human nature remains the most dominant, and is present in major speeches and during key celebrations. Significantly, when applied to non-personalist contexts, the use of *dignitas* has a personalist connotation to it, which can be seen in the fact that the term applies to a date or position celebrating or representing someone of dignity, typically God, and thus it is in fact the dignity of the sacred. Such uses are typically limited to the realm of the sacred, and never to worldly honors and civic or social nobilities (*dignitas Romana*).

When it comes to the philosophical assumptions of this approach, the Pope stands out as an advocate of human dignity justified primarily by the incarnation and redemption. This establishes a link between dignity and Christmas celebrations, a crucial factor in determining the later reception of the idea of human dignity. Leo identified human creation in God's image, and likeness as a historical moment constitutive of human dignity; one, however, that is overshadowed by the fact of the incarnation leading to redemption. To justify dignity primarily through the incarnation remains specific to Christianity, and we identified this approach earlier, in the Greek Christian East. Leo's standpoint emphasizes the fact that human nature has been shared by the second person of the Trinity, and sees this as the most dignifying aspect of human history. This makes his standpoint prone to some criticism, specifically in contrast with a standpoint that justifies human dignity merely by way of creation, which I will consider at the end of the book.

What are the characteristic features of Leo's approach to dignity? We have seen that Leo's conception favors a dynamic, fluctuating understanding of dignity, not a static one. Leo understood human dignity as having a history of loss and reacquisition; and so the alterability of dignity remains an assumption of his standpoint. The urging tone of his appeals to preserve dignity and to live a life compatible with it further indicates that he saw dignity as possibly being at risk. The factor that alters the dignity of the human being is called, in his terms, sin. Human choices of evil, breaking God's laws, alter the human God-given nobility of iconicity, which in consequence needs to be restored. Having said that, it is worth stressing that the restoration of dignity did occur and remains an unchanging factor in humankind's history. In the current

condition, however, even when restored, dignity remains in need of protection and preservation, achieved by a life consistent with the dignity of God's icon.

As such, dignity is clearly not only a descriptive but also a normative concept, one that obliges the dignity-bearer to act in a way corresponding to it. The actions that dignity demands are primarily the dignity-bearers' obligations toward themselves, yet Leo's sermons on the poor make it clear that the Pope was a firm advocate of recognizing and respecting dignity in others, and especially in those in need. Dignity therefore obliges both the dignity-bearers to conduct themselves in a way proper to their dignity, and those who face dignity-bearers to act towards a dignified subject with proper respect.

The connection between dignity and iconicity calls for a relational understanding of the concept of dignity, one pointing to something outside the subject of dignity as its source and archetype. Human dignity is twice received from God, who is the ultimate example of what dignity is. Leo, furthermore, explicitly stated that humans—understood as icons of God—have nothing in themselves to match the dignity of their divine archetype.

The reacquisition of dignity accomplished by God's incarnation and the sacrifice of the Cross discloses ultimate human value. God sees each human being as worthy of "the most precious price," His Son's sacrifice. Since God has infinite value, humans worthy of the infinite person's sacrifice also possess infinite value. This established dignity as a value beyond measure, and not one of any finite worth.

We have also seen that even though dignity has a universal scope of reference among all people, it can be specifically applied to some narrower human groups, such as the poor, the priests, or the disciples of Christ. There are no kinds of dignity or different categories of dignity in Leo's approach to speak of, however. Instead, one fundamental dignity of human nature common to all can be supplemented with additional nobilities; the dignity resulting from a particular calling, for example, such as being the Bishop of Rome.

Finally, we ought to indicate Leo's role in the history of human dignity. The Pope's role and position—his being recognized and valued to the point of designating him the first "great" pope in history—situate him among the most influential authorities in ancient Christianity. Not only was he an intellectual whose writings were copied, spread, and read by the educated, but he was also a speaker addressing the wider Christian crowds daily, including the uneducated groups of ancient Roman society. His use of the term *dignitas* had, therefore, a uniquely large and varied audience. The later popularity of his call to realize one's dignity is an example of his heritage being passed on through generations, as far as the late Middle Ages, and beyond. Leo's contribution to

Christmas celebrations, a prayer, and an understanding of this holiday, similarly, entered into the mainstream of the liturgy, showing how the Pope altered the character of this holiday (and in fact liturgy) for good. The link between the Christmas liturgy and dignity meant that the concept was promoted among many and became a public concept right from the beginning. It never was merely a technical theological or philosophical term known to just a few and discussed only in specialized texts. Additionally, Leo was a genius at concise, uncomplicated, rhetorically strong, and easy to remember lines. This all goes a long way towards explaining why the concept of dignity in its anthropological meaning (*dignitas hominis*) ultimately came to be privileged and selected in the following ages, unlike previously. Leo promoted Christmas as a feast praising, among other things, the elevation of human nature to a special glory and dignity. In the first centuries after Christ, there was hardly anyone in the Latin West to emphasize and broadcast the concept of dignity as widely and compellingly as he did. Undoubtedly, due to his exceptional role, his terminological choices expressive of profound ideas, and their lasting influence, Leo the Great belongs at the very forefront of the European landscape of the history of human dignity.

## The End of an Era. *Continuitas*

This chapter considers the end of the patristic era, troubled by *Völkerwanderung*, the instability of intellectual institutions, and the consequent decline of intellectual life. The analysis of the use of *dignitas hominis* in a number of sources—a late fifth-century collection of sermons called *Eusebius Gallicanus*, the anonymous *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*, the writings of the Boethius, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great, Ildefonsus of Toledo, and Julian of Toledo—illustrates the spread of Leo’s influence to varying degrees. Some late patristic axiological descriptions approach the category in a systematic manner and, characteristically, they remain linked to Leo the Great, either institutionally or geographically. These texts demonstrate the reception of the idea of human dignity that developed in the Golden Age, and indicate that the late patristic body of texts was sufficient to transmit the ancient idea into the Middle Ages.



In the previous chapters, we identified the making and spreading of the idea of human dignity in Christian antiquity. We observed the minting of the category of human dignity in the Latin West as a result of a number of coinciding factors, as well as the relatively unsystematic anthropological use of *dignitas* until Leo the Great’s reign. The Pope not only used the category on many occasions; he also developed a comprehensive theory of human dignity. Following his long pontificate, many repeated and reformulated his famous appeal to know one’s dignity, and the history of its reception documents the immense change that the pope caused. Our attempt at describing it was, nevertheless, limited to the mention of the imperative, thus excluding all the uses of the category of human dignity outside the short formula of the appeal. This chapter traces, therefore, the presence of the idea of human dignity in the late patristic era through a number of texts: the writings of Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Gregory the Great, the collection of sermons called *Eusebius Gallicanus*, the anonymous treatise *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei* (a part of *De dignitate conditionis humanae*), as well as texts by Ildefonsus of Toledo and Julian of Toledo.

This selection of texts serves to illustrate the spreading of the influences of the previously developed conceptions of universal human dignity to varying degrees. Some late patristic axiological descriptions approach the category in



a systematic manner, demonstrating that the anthropological use of *dignitas* was apparent to them and, characteristically, that they remained linked to Leo the Great, either through their connection to the papacy or through geographic location. The relatively new, anthropological meaning of *dignitas* plays a role in their writings alongside the classical, socially relevant use of the concept, *dignitas Romana*, yet the former is clearly differentiated from the latter. Some of these late patristic writers picked up if not the theory, then at least the category of human dignity from Leo. The collection of sermons named *Eusebius Gallicanus* demonstrates this point very well, and Gregory the Great's remarks show the adoption of both the linguistic category and Leo's conception of human dignity. Some continue the appropriation to the Christian context of the social meaning of dignity as a rank. However, other late ancient intellectuals (such as Boethius and Cassiodorus, working at Theodoric the Great's court in the Ostrogothic kingdom, for example) were scarcely influenced by Jerome's and Augustine's phraseology of "human dignity" or by Leo's conceptualization of it. Nonetheless, the influences that did occur, specifically in Italy, are sufficient to constitute a lasting linguistic *usus*, culminating in the Middle Ages, when *dignitas* was adopted as a primary anthropological concept and attempts were made to define it.

### 5.1 Eusebius Gallicanus

Let us start this consideration of the idea of human dignity with texts that were written in the Italian peninsula in the second half of the fifth century, just after Leo's reign.<sup>1</sup> The sermons presented in *Eusebius Gallicanus* contain texts which make use of the notion of human dignity in conjunction with that of the price paid for the human creature by Christ.

One moral sermon that concludes with an appeal for the recognition of the beauty of the celestial image (*caeleste figmentum Dei*) copies Basil of Caesarea's idea of dignity being linked to Christ's sacrifice. The text, which we discussed in Chapter Four, argues that humans should recognize that they have been made precious with "the dignity of the exchange" (*commercii dignitate pretiosus*).<sup>2</sup> The author of this consideration continues, therefore, the Greek approach to

1 L.K. Bailey, *Christianity's Quiet Success. The Eusebius Gallicanus Sermon Collection and the Power of the Church in Late Antique Gaul*, Notre Dame 2010, 34: "almost all scholars date the Eusebius Gallicanus sermons in their original form to the mid- to late fifth century and locate them in south-eastern Gaul."

2 Eus. Gall., hom. 53.14 (CCL 101A, 623, lineae 172–176).

human dignity derived primarily from the act of redemption, i.e., the approach that was incorporated into Leo's speeches.

Another sermon which relates the notion of dignity to Christ's sacrifice discusses "the dignity of the price" paid for the sake of humankind:

*Hodie Dominus noster in statera crucis pretium nostrae salutis appendit, et una morte universum mundum, sicut omnium conditor, ita omnium reparator, absolvit—indubitanter enim credamus, quod totum mundum sic et redimeret; qui plus dedit quam totus mundus valeret: meritum enim redemptae mercis, dignitas insignis pretii supergressa est.*<sup>3</sup>

Today our Lord weighs the price of our redemption on the scales of the Cross and with one death he freed the whole world as a creator of everything and a restorer of everything. Let us believe undoubtedly that this is how He redeemed the world, for which He gave more than the whole world was worth: the dignity of the established price superseded the merit of the redeemed good.

The sermon goes on to appeal: *Agnosce, homo: quantum valeas*, an idea we discussed in Chapter Four. Both the sermons, drawing on the mercantile connotations familiar from Basil's commentary on Psalm 48, provide the grounds for proposing a hypothesis that their authors knew Basil's ideas. Possibly, the text thus represents examples of the Greek Father's influences that are detectable in the late fifth century in the Latin West.

Yet another sermon in the collection describes the dynamic aspect of dignity that can be received through redemption. The general idea of the speech suggests that if sinners accept redemption and offer their deeds to God, He "will transform [scil. them] into the dignity of angels" (*transformabit in angeli dignitatem*).<sup>4</sup> This broad principle takes on a number of specific forms, such as that if you offer your body's chastity to God, He shall offer you immaculacy; if you offer your justice, He will offer you a crown of glory, and if you offer your goodness, He will transform you into "the dignity of an angel." The sermon then goes on to confirm that virtue itself is a price for noble behavior. As such, the consideration offers examples of practically orientated, moralistic conclusions derived from the idea of human dignity as resulting from redemption.

Additionally, *Eusebius Gallicanus* discussed the dignity of Jesus's conception (*conciipientis dignitas*) and the honor of the mother (*honor matris*),<sup>5</sup> the dignity

3 Eus. Gall., hom. 5 (CCL 101B, 853, lineae 5–11).

4 Eus. Gall., hom. 62.5 (CCL 101A, 711, lineae 96–101). An early ninth-century codex from Brussels attributes the sermon to Augustine, while another late ninth-century manuscript from Montpellier mentions Faustinus as an author.

5 Eus. Gall., hom. 76 (fragmenta A–B; CCL 101A, 812, linea 61–65).

of the human mind (*dignitas animi*)<sup>6</sup> which cannot be coerced to sin unless the will of the person turns to evil voluntarily, and “the dignity of divine work” (*divini opificii dignitas*), which exceeds the limitations of the human mind.<sup>7</sup> All these remarks, marginally relevant to universal human dignity, nonetheless demonstrate the widening of the meaning of *dignitas*, which was employed with increasing diversity outside the context of social ranks.

## 5.2 Boethius and Cassiodorus

Typically, an introduction to the notion of human dignity includes a reference to Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, the so-called “Socrates of late antiquity.”<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, however, Boethius’ uses of *dignitas* utilize only *dignitas Romana*, and thus he could be excluded from this investigation. Given that the category of human dignity had already existed in the Latin culture for over a century when he was writing the work that serves as an example of his contribution to the history of human dignity, his example is not significant enough to be included here. It is, nonetheless, valuable to briefly consider his use of the concept, in order to highlight the advantages of our methodology, which clearly distinguishes between the texts that employ the category of human dignity and those that describe human axiology by other means—and, significantly, which draws a line between *dignitas hominis*, *dignitas Romana*, and *dignitas Christiana*.

Boethius was one of the leading intellectuals of the late patristic era, and his *Consolatio philosophiae*, most likely written while he was awaiting the death penalty, comprises one of the most frequently copied texts in European history. Its copies were present in almost every academic center in the Middle Ages; to name one example, Wawel Royal Cathedral in Cracow (Kingdom of Poland), whose library catalogue from 1110 documents a manuscript of *Consolatio*.<sup>9</sup> Generations of Europeans were educated on the classical text, and there was hardly an intellectual who did not know about Boethius’ final work. The author also made history in yet another way, by producing the first definition of a person, which he formulated as part of the Christological treatise, *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*. Interestingly, the definition is most often quoted

6 Eus. Gall., hom. 32 (CCL 101, 366, linea 25).

7 Eus. Gall., hom. 9 (CCL 101A, 101, lineae 95–99).

8 Loughlin (ed.), *Human Dignity in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition. Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Perspective*, London 2019, 104.140–142; M. Lebech, *European Sources of Human Dignity*, Oxford 2019, 70–72.

9 A. Nowak, *Dzieje Polski* 1, Warsaw 2014, 84.

inaccurately, for it in fact reads *individua substantia rationabilis naturae*, not *rationalis naturae*, even if this is of little consequence.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Boethius, who was fluent in Greek, planned to translate Plato's and Aristotle's works into Latin, an idea which, had it been completed, would have altered the history of the subsequent centuries, and particularly the Middle Ages, as we know it. Nonetheless, his death under Theodoric in 524 or 525 in Pavia, one of the most widely recognized events of late antiquity, put an end to the idea. This all explains why Boethius is considered one of the most important philosophers of his time, although not necessarily why he occupies a central role in the history of human dignity. Part of the answer to this second question is, I believe, that the investigations led by academic philosophers tend to follow the lives of notable figures in the history of philosophy.

Thus, some commentators draw our attention to Book Three of Boethius' *Consolatio*, in which he criticizes false notions of happiness, specifically the one pertaining to prestige. Boethius shows the limits of holding a position of honor, and argues that a tyrant who occupies a position of dignity does not become worthy of it, but rather, when placed in such a position, exposes his unworthiness.<sup>11</sup> This entire passage uses only the meaning we called *dignitas Romana*, not *dignitas hominis*, and comprises a very clear example of it. It is confusing—I believe—to list it as a constitution of human dignity, for it is in fact the opposite: the persistence of the social meaning of the concept, which is neither universal nor egalitarian.

Additionally, in the same passage, Boethius mentions the dignity specific to virtue (*dignitas propria virtuti*). This idea does not pertain to all people equally, for it specifically concerns the morally accomplished. It does extend the scope of reference for dignity beyond the meaning of a rank or social standing, although not broadly enough. It only names a specific positive status of a morally accomplished person.

Finally, one of the poems intertwining the prose of *Consolatio* calls human-kind "happy": *O felix hominum genus! / Si vestros animos amor / Quo caelum*

10 Boet., Eut. 3.4 (LCL 74, 84) and 3.5 (LCL 74, 92). J.P. Migne's edition is incorrect, as are most medieval quotations of Boethius by Richard of St. Victor or Thomas Aquinas, who skip two letters in the adjective "rationabilis", thus making it into "rationalis." I have consulted some medieval manuscripts of Boethius's *Opuscula sacra* kept in the Bodleian Library and observed that even those from the second half of the twelfth century; e.g., an English parchment manuscript written *plenis litteris* uses the term "rationabilis" in all instances, as does the Benedictine parchment manuscript from Admont Abbey, Austria, also written *plenis litteris* in the second half of the twelfth century.

11 Boet., cons. 2. prosa 6.18.

*regitur regat.* (“O happy race of men / If the love that rules the stars / May also rule your hearts!”)<sup>12</sup> Again, I fail to observe how this constitutes a significant thread in the history of the category of human dignity. Boethius does indeed observe a universal (and presumably equal) state of happiness pertaining to humankind. Yet, given that the category *dignitas hominis* had been in use for approximately 130 years (since Augustine and Jerome), and Boethius talks not of human axiology but of the state of happiness, this illustrates that the Ostrogothic politician was not familiar with the category *dignitas hominis*. Additionally, given that *dignitas hominis* was most often justified theologically, Boethius would not be interested in using it in a purely philosophical work such as *Consolatio*.

The second most significant intellectual at the court of Theodoric the Great, Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus, is known first of all for his systematization of the liberal arts; second, for the establishment of an intellectually-orientated monastery, the Vivarium (which aimed at preserving the classical heritage); and, third, for his involvement in the conspiracy against Boethius.<sup>13</sup> Cassiodorus was both a politician and a thinker, just like Boethius, but most of all, he was certainly erudite. His orientation towards classical influences is also apparent in his use of *dignitas*, often employed in its social meaning of rank or social standing. Numerous writings from different stages of Cassiodorus’ ninety-eight-year-long life stand as evidence, however, that he was more open to implementing other meanings of *dignitas* than Boethius was.

In a commentary on Psalm 4, Cassiodorus mentions, for example, the dignity of the mind (*dignitas animi*),<sup>14</sup> and in a commentary on Psalm 37, he refers to the *dignitas* of the penitent (*dignitas paenitentium*)<sup>15</sup> and the dignity of the Church (*dignitas ecclesiae*),<sup>16</sup> which consists in the fact that the faithful can talk directly to God. Another commentary names human dignity as something to be admired (*dignitas admiranda*), which results from the fact that humans will judge the earth.<sup>17</sup> This last remark is a discussion of specifically human dignity, yet applied to the eschatological perspective and made specific to the saints. Insofar as all are called to sanctity, the remark is universal in scope. All of these examples demonstrate Cassiodorus’ erudition, although not an exposure to Leonian *dignitas hominis*, which was apparently foreign to the court of

12 Boet., cons. 2. metrum 8 (LCL 74, 226–227).

13 M. Starowieyski, *Kasjodor*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 594–589.

14 Cass., psal. 4 (CCL 97, 62, linea 266).

15 Cass., psal. 37 (CCL 97, 353, linea 429).

16 Cass., psal. 44 (CCL 97, 411, lineae 376–377).

17 Cass., psal. 121 (CCL 98, 1152, linea 136).

Theodoric. As we shall see, writers connected to the papacy remained much more influenced by Leo's language.

### 5.3 Gregory the Great

Gregory the Great, a monk, a founder of monasteries, and a pope, is perhaps the best example of Leo's heritage living on in the late patristic era (and yet he is not a protagonist in any history of human dignity, not even the ones that mention Boethius). Gregory's life resembled that of Leo in many ways: he also came from Roman aristocracy, and hence received a classical education; he was likewise selected to fulfill the role of the bishop of Rome; and, as pope, he too earned the title of "the Great". He also had to defend the eternal city against invaders—this time the Lombards—with whom he negotiated, and, again similarly to his predecessor, he left rich sources about his life in numerous preserved letters.<sup>18</sup> The parallel between the two popes extends to their use of the concept of human dignity, which is analogous.

The text exemplifying Gregory's use of this concept was written before his election to the Throne of Peter. Early in his youth, Gregory abandoned the riches of his family's lifestyle in order to become a monk. He went as far as transforming his home at Monte Celio, as well as other family properties, into monasteries. Given that he came from a devout Christian family connected to the Church and papacy, this was accepted. Our history of human dignity has already taken us to the church built from Gregory's *villa suburbana* at Monte Celio—for it was there that the mosaic of a skeleton pointing at a sign that reads γῶθι σεαυτόν was discovered. Young Gregory might have observed this mosaic, for it is dated to the third century BC and was possibly uncovered during his time. Nonetheless, he never did transform the maxim into a dignitarian one—perhaps the gruesome visual representation formed too strong an association for such a reinterpretation. It was when Gregory was living at the Caelian Hill as a monk in his community that he was asked to provide a commentary for one of the more perplexing Old Testament texts, the Book of Job. This led him to write the most sizable work of the times, some thirty-five books of an exegesis entitled *Moralia in Iob*.<sup>19</sup> The work, requested by his brothers

18 C. Ricci, *Gregorio Magno*, in: Di Berardino (ed.), 2007, 2439–2453; M. Starowieyski, *Grzegorz Wielki*, in: Starowieyski / Szymusiak (eds.), 2022, 397–403; B. Colgrave, *Introduction*, in: Anonymous Monk of Whitby, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (B. Colgrave trans.), Lawrence 1968, 1–31; J. Moorhead, *Introduction*, in: id., *Gregory the Great*, London 2005, 1–48.

19 Moorhead, 2005, 1.

and written much to Gregory's dismay, returns to the anthropological themes a number of times, and these create an opportunity for the commentator to display his understanding of human axiological status. The notion of human dignity is later utilized by Gregory in his *Homiliae in Hiezechielem prophetam*, written shortly after, possibly around the year 593, and in his homilies of the Gospels.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike the texts written up as far as the fifth century, Gregory the Great employs *dignitas* as a standard category designating human axiological status. The passages and their context suggest that the word has a clear and well-established anthropological meaning for Gregory, who uses it, as it were, in passing. The understanding of the concept evokes the memory of Leo the Great's speeches, for Gregory described the history of dignity's loss and reacquisition. Dignity, an abstract noun describing human axiological status, is viewed by the pope as dynamic: after having been given, it is lost, and then finally restored.

It is because of the dynamic history of human dignity that Gregory urges people of faith to desire the dignity of their restoration (*renovationis suae dignitatem desideret*).<sup>21</sup> When Gregory reaches the point descriptive of this restoration, the glory of the children of God (*gloria filiorum Dei*), he depicts it as "being freed from the servitude of corruption and accepting the dignity of freedom" (*servitute corruptionis exuta et dignitate libertatis accepta*).<sup>22</sup> This freedom is achieved when the creature "is proclaimed to surpass and overcome its creation," literally—"to overcome that, which the creature is" (*hoc ipsum quod creatura est, transisse ac subegisse declaratur*).<sup>23</sup> This remark echoes Leo's idea of human dignity that is twice received: once in creation and the second time through redemption.

Developing an elaborate metaphor of an eagle, Gregory first depicts the bird flying high above the earth, thus symbolizing human nature floating "in in the heights of reason" (*in rationis celsitudine*). In their first ancestor, nonetheless, humankind fell down from this height to that which is lowest (*humanum genus in parente primo ad ima de sublimibus corruit*),<sup>24</sup> similarly to an eagle plunging down to catch prey and satisfy his hunger. Interestingly, phraseology descriptive of this fall describes humankind falling from "the dignity of creation" (*dignitas conditionis*)—this being a rewording of Leo's *dignitas originis*—to the

20 Moorhead, 2005, 13.

21 Greg. M., mor. 7.11 (CCL 143, 343, lineae 13–14).

22 Greg. M., mor. 8.8 (CCL 143, 391, lineae 27–29).

23 Greg. M., mor. 8.8 (CCL 143, 391, lineae 27–29).

24 Greg. M., mor. 9.33 (CCL 143, 492, lineae 58–64).

lowliness of the earth.<sup>25</sup> Having reached this lowliness, human nature feeds of the bodily desires (*voluptates corporeae*) because it has destroyed the free spirits of contemplation (*libera contemplationis inspiracula perdidit*). So, the eagle that was meant to fly high in the skies instead descends to crawl the earth, fulfilling its bodily urges.<sup>26</sup>

Commenting on Job's display of humility as he sits on the pile of dung (Job 2:7), Gregory describes—by way of contrast—the Devil's sin of pride. "Having accepted the dignity of his creation he was not content, saying: I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of heaven" (*qui accepta conditionis dignitate contentus non fuit dicens: in caelum conscendam, super astra caeli exaltabo solium meum*).<sup>27</sup> This is yet another instance of the abstract noun *dignitas* referring to the original greatness of personal creatures (angels, in this case) whose history mirrors human insofar as it is also one of dignity's loss. At this point, the histories differ, as we know; for it is only the human being that can receive redemption and the restoration of their dignity.

The human being can receive forgiveness because of their corporal nature: one bound to something that is beneath themselves. Gregory follows Nemesius when he argues that humans can be excused from their trespass because their corporal constitution can at times blur reason, unlike angels, who remain equally rational at all times. Thus, human remorse deserves to be honored, and Gregory once again reaches for the Leonian concept of the dignity of creation (*dignitas originis*,<sup>28</sup> transformed by Gregory into *dignitas conditionis*), which the remorseful human being presents to the Creator, pleading for forgiveness.<sup>29</sup>

Human dignity is evidently linked by Gregory to the spiritual aspect of the human creature. As he writes, *nostra dignitas fulget per imaginem et longe distat a beatitudinis perfectione per carnem*<sup>30</sup> ("our dignity shines through the image, but due to the body it is very distant from the perfection of the blessing") in the pilgrims' state. This is why Gregory at times accentuates angelic superiority over human nature in the pilgrim's state.<sup>31</sup> While being bound to the unworthy body, human icons might falter, and yet also be redeemed, due to their weakness (*infirmitas*).<sup>32</sup> Hence, the eagle that crawled the earth might fly up into the sky once again.

25 Greg. M., mor. 9.33 (CCL 143, 492, lineae 58–64).

26 Greg. M., mor. 9.33 (CCL 143, 492, lineae 58–64).

27 Greg. M., mor. 3.31 (CCL 143, 152, lineae 17–18). Translation of Isa 14:13 from NRSV-CE.

28 Leo. M., trac. 72.2 (CCL 138A, 442, lineae 30–31).

29 Greg. M., mor. 9.49 (CCL 143, 509, lineae 16–17).

30 Greg. M., mor. 9.49 (CCL 143, 509, lineae 39–41).

31 Greg. M., mor. 2.3.

32 Greg. M., mor. 9.50 (CCL 143, 509, lineae 2–5).



Gregory displays more evidence of Greek inspirations: he extends Gregory of Nyssa's exegetic argument regarding the divine council by adding that the divine council took place before the creation of the human being, so that rational deliberation announced the creation of the rational creature. All this points out that the human being is preferred (*praefertur*) by God,<sup>33</sup> the very fact that is recalled in Job's dramatic complaint to God: *cur tanta vilitate despicias quem cum tanta dignitate condidisti?*<sup>34</sup> ("Why do you despise with such great disdain the one whom you created with such great dignity?") The phraseology of this complaint stands as additional evidence that *dignitas*, specifically *dignitas conditionis*, is Gregory's common name for human axiology.

The case regarding Gregory's homilies on the Gospel, which employ Basil's and Jerome's concept of the dignity of friends of God (*dignitas amicorum Dei*), is similar. Repeating the grammatical structure of Ambrose's *Hexaemeron*, Gregory exclaims: *Quanta est dignitas hominum esse amicos Dei! Sed audistis gloriam dignitatis, audite et laborem certaminis*<sup>35</sup> ("How great is the dignity of the human beings that they are friends of God! But if you heard about the glory of dignity, pay attention also to the labor of the struggle"). The latter part of the quotation follows Basil, Ambrose and Leo insofar as the mention of dignity evokes the moral obligation of its preservation.

The homilies on the book of Ezekiel also demonstrate Gregory's familiarity with the anthropological-axiological meaning of *dignitas*, which he uses to describe the reality of angels and their eschatological perspective.<sup>36</sup> Despite Gregory's familiarity with Pseudo-Dionysius's angelology and some of his descriptions of human postlapsarian nature as less perfect than angelic, this work affirms the Greek view that angels cannot rival humans in their dignity. Despite the fact they are also icons of God and possess a more powerful nature, the moment God became incarnated, He immediately surpassed angels in power (*mox Deus homo potestate super angelos fuit*),<sup>37</sup> and He was one of humankind. The commentary thus describes the paradox: human nature was made lesser than angelic, but after the incarnation, redemption and ascension, it surpasses the angelic in its dignity. Therefore, "through taking human nature Christ was both born beneath the angels and elevated above them" (*per humanae assumptionem naturae et ipse est sub angelis natus, et ipse super angelos*

33 Greg. M., mor. 9.49 (CCL 143, 509, linea 21).

34 Greg. M., mor. 9.49 (CCL 143, 509, lineae 37–38).

35 Greg. M., hom. ev. 2.27,4 (CCL 141, 231, linea 62).

36 Greg. M., hom. Ez. 1.3 (CCL 142, 41, lineae 271–274); 1.8 (CCL 142, 111–112, lineae 399–401); 1.8, (CCL 142, 112, lineae 411–414); 2.4 (CCL 142, 263, lineae 203–205).

37 Greg. M., hom. Ez. 1.8 (CCL 142, 114–115, lineae 484–503). The quotation is in line 503.

*exaltatus*).<sup>38</sup> Humans are first subordinate to angels (as some Old Testament stories exemplify), and later supersede them (as can be seen with the angels serving the human family in Bethlehem).

This changing hierarchy results from the paradox of the humility and dignity of the Son of God: “ascending above the angels the Redeemer of humankind exalted humanity, which He took on by descending below the angels” (*humani generis redemptor humanitatem, quam descendendo sub angelis assumpsit, ascendendo super angelos exaltavit*).<sup>39</sup> This idea rests on the view developed by Basil the Great, and later by Leo the Great: the dignity of redemption supersedes the dignity of creation. Gregory’s remarks, relating human dignity to the angelic, illustrate this point very well. The interplay of humility and dignity of the Son of God echoes, on the other hand, Athanasius of Alexandria’s and Hilary of Poitiers’ dignitarian formulas, discussed in the previous chapters: God’s humiliation led to human dignity.

This dynamic view of human dignity (the dignity of creation, *dignitas conditionis*, and the dignity of restoration, *dignitas renovationis*) suggests that Gregory was exposed to Leo’s sermons even before becoming the bishop of Rome. This is not at all implausible. Gregory was a great-great-grandson of Pope Felix III, as odd as that might sound—Felix was a widower when he became a deacon, and his daughter from an earlier marriage, Paula, was most likely Gregory’s grandmother.<sup>40</sup> Gregory was also related to Pope Agapetus I, and his family retained strong ties with the Church: his father was an employee at the Church of the Saints John and Paul, and two of Gregory’s aunts became nuns (one, however, would scandalize her nephew by abandoning her vocation and getting married).<sup>41</sup> Given such a background, Gregory was naturally exposed to the heritage of previous popes, and this is perhaps why his axiological vocabulary is so different to that of Boethius.

#### 5.4 *Dicta Albini de Imagine Dei*

In the year 800, a manuscript was created at the court of Charlemagne whose incipit utilized the category of the dignity of human creation (*dignitas conditionis*) and proclaimed it to be great (*tanta*)—wording that echoes the

38 Greg. M., hom. Ez. 1.8 (CCL 142, 114, lineae 488–490). Cf. idem, hom. Ev. 1.8.2, where Gregory suggests that in the kingdom of God humans and angels are equal.

39 Greg. M., hom. Ez. 1.8 (CCL 142, 114, lineae 496–498).

40 M. Welsh and J. Kelly, *Felix III*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, Oxford 2015, 176–179.

41 Moorhead, 2005, 1–2.

above-discussed complaint of Job, even though it was possibly written much earlier than Gregory's *Moralia*.<sup>42</sup> The treatise, entitled *De dignitate conditionis humanae*, was composed of *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*, complemented and intersected by a second consideration, *Dicta Candidi presbiteri de imagine Dei*, and slightly extended into what is now called a pseudepigraph.<sup>43</sup>

The analyses of Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob* presented above demonstrated that it was he—among the identifiable authors—who pioneered the exact phase *dignitas conditionis*, describing it as “great,” although Leo the Great's prayer (which we discussed in the previous chapter) comes close to it as well and Leo utilized the category *dignitas originis*. As we remember, both Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose of Milan had earlier used the expression *dignitas conditionis*, but in entirely different meanings, limited either to a selected group of people whose nobility they wished to accentuate or to one man, whose conditions are being depicted. Gregory is thus the first author known to us by name to call the universal dignity humans have in consequence of their creation *dignitas conditionis*, yet the anonymous author of *Dicta Albini* utilized this category in the first sentence of his work, possibly much earlier. *Dicta Albini*, as a separate consideration, can be dated as early as late fifth century.<sup>44</sup> The common title of both *Dicta Albini* and *Dicta Candidi* intersected and slightly extended in the ninth century, *De dignitate conditionis humanae*, is derived from the incipit of *Dicta Albini* while omitting the biblical quotation from Genesis that opens the entire analysis: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.”<sup>45</sup> This quotation is commented on in the first remark of the author, with the words: “It is known that the dignity of human creation is so great,” (*Tanta dignitas humanae conditionis esse cognoscitur*)—from which the collective name of the whole was later derived. *Dicta Albini* presents an interpretation of this verse within the framework of a distinctly Augustinian understanding of human iconicity, and *Dicta Candidi*

42 Dicta Albini de imagine Dei, Dicta Candidi presbiteri de imagine Dei, in: J. Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre*, London 1981, 158–163; (Ps.)Ambr., *De dignitate conditionis humanae libellus* (PL 17, 1015–1018). I abstract here from the discussion about the dating of *Dicta Albini*, assuming Bullough's hypothesis that they originate in the late fifth or early sixth century.

43 D.A. Bullough, *Alcuin and the Kingdom of Heaven*, in: id., *Carolingian Renewal: Sources and Heritage*, Manchester 1991, 178–181; M. Lebech / J. McEvoy / J. Flood, ‘*De dignitate conditionis humanae*’: Translation, Commentary, and Reception History of the ‘*Dicta Albini*’ and the ‘*Dicta Candidi*’, in: *Viator* 40 (2009), 8–9; J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Traktat ‘De dignitate conditionis humanae’: jego patrystyczne źródła i wkład w rozwój pojęcia godności człowieka*, in: *Vox Patrum* 89 (2024), 131–148.

44 Bullough, 1991, 181.

45 Gen 1:26, NRSV-CE trans.

continues the analysis within a Trinitarian model of the soul. The category of human dignity, specifically the dignity of human creation (*dignitas conditionis humanae*), serves as the main theme of the entire concise work, the first part of which ends with an appeal to know the dignity of human creation. This distinguishes the treatise as an independent reflection dedicated entirely to the topic of human axiology.

The analysis of human axiology in *Dicta Albini* is divided into a discussion of iconicity and a discussion of human dynamic similitude. *Dicta Albini* is a reflection on the creation of man in the image and likeness of God, developing a novel distinction between the image of God's unity (*imago unitatis Dei*) and the image of the Trinity (*imago sanctae Trinitatis*). The first words of the treatise emphasize two factors that distinguish the human being from all of creation: the first is the divine deliberation over this creation prior to it, and the second is human iconic nature. Despite the fact that these arguments account for the thematic continuity of the work with respect to the Church Fathers, *De dignitate* is innovative in its distinction between *imago unitatis Dei* and *imago sanctae Trinitatis*.

The image of God's unity (*imago unitatis Dei*) manifests itself in the unity of the human soul, which, though one, is entirely present in every part of the human body. As the author of *Dicta Albini* argues, the same soul is present in each part of the human body, even the smallest one, just as God is omnipresent in every place and time, even the most insignificant.<sup>46</sup> The image of the Holy Trinity (*imago sanctae Trinitatis*), on the other hand, is not structural but functional: just as God is, lives, and knows, so the human soul is, lives, and knows.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the author identifies "another trinity" (*trinitas alia*) consisting in the tripartite division of the soul's faculties, described according to the Augustinian triad: intellect—will—memory (*intellectus—voluntas—memoria*). These faculties, idiosyncratically called *dignitates* (this practice did not catch on, although the plural form might be an inspiration derived from Augustine's *De libero arbitrio*, in which various natures are described as having their own respective rank of dignity—*gradus dignitatis*),<sup>48</sup> reflect the action of the three divine persons, for as God the Father begets the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, thus the will emerges from the intellect, and memory proceeds from them both.<sup>49</sup> These three types of iconicity—the iconicity of unity, the iconicity of the Trinity, and the

46 *Dicta Albini*, in: Marenbon, 1981, 159.

47 *Dicta Albini*, in: Marenbon, 1981, 159.

48 August., lib. 3,5,15–16; 3,20,56; 3,22,65.

49 *Dicta Albini*, in: Marenbon, 1981, 159.

iconicity of the “other trinity”—together with the argument from the divine council, provide evidence that the human being is endowed with *privilegium dignitatis*—an honor of dignity inscribed in human nature.

Human action, to which the thematically distinct second part of *Dicta Albini* is devoted, is analyzed in the light of this privilege of dignity. The theory of human action assumes a binary scheme of each action either developing one’s resemblance to the human archetype inscribed in one’s nature, or deforming this resemblance and making the human being resemble an animal. Human morals (*mores*) are thus divided into two basic categories: virtues serve as examples of the former, while vices and transgressions serve as examples of the latter. The practice of virtues leading to godlikeness leads, in turn, to happiness, while the development of vices breeds dishonor and misfortune. The final part of the *Dicta Albini* thus formulates a call to know the excellence of human creation:

*Quapropter, quisque diligentius attendat primae conditionis suae excellentiam, et venerandam sanctae Trinitatis in seipso imaginem agnoscat.*<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, may everyone pay all the more diligent attention to the excellence of their first creation and recognize in themselves the venerated image of the Holy Trinity.

This passage closes the small treatise by naming its leading theme, human dignity, mentions of which thus both open and close *Dicta Albini*. As such, the work is a rare example of a stand-alone treatise entirely devoted to human axiology. It is analyzed in relation to both human nature and human action—themes that are continued in *Dicta Candidi*. Even though this work is of later (and arguably Carolingian) origin, due to it being strongly linked to the patristic *Dicta Albini*, we shall say a few words about it.

*Dicta Candidi* begins with an original interpretation of the dogma of the Trinity, operating with the following names of divine persons (*nomina personarum*): “the one from whom,” “the one who is from him,” and “the one through whom” (*ex quo—qui ex eo—quo*). Its author, apparently familiar with the Greek Trinitarian commentaries, argues for the unity of the divine nature and the distinction between the three persons. The consideration initially refers to the idea of *imago unitatis Dei*, and in the second part develops the idea of human likeness, concluding with an appeal for morally beautiful actions. In its structure, therefore, *Dicta Candidi* mirrors *Dicta Albini*.

<sup>50</sup> (Ps.) Ambr., *De dignitate conditionis humanae libellus* 3 (PL 17, 1018).

Following the theme of humanity's functional similarity to God, the treatise discusses the triad of mind—knowledge—love (*mens—scientia—amor*) in God and in the human soul that imitates the divine archetype. The relationships between the mind, knowledge, and love in human action resemble the Trinitarian relations: just as the Father begets the Son, so does the human mind beget knowledge, and just as the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, so does love proceed from the interaction of mind and knowledge, for the mind “loves to know whatever it knows” (*amat scire quod scit*).<sup>51</sup> In this aspect, *Dicta Candidi* proposes a peculiar distinction between the facts “that the human being is” (*quod est*) and “that the human being is such as it is” (*quod talis est*),<sup>52</sup> which might be understood as a distinction between the existential and qualitative aspects of the human being. Both existentially and qualitatively, however, human beings originate from God, not from themselves, which means that both human existence and nature are determined by a factor that is heteronomous to the human being and transcendental. This characteristic makes the human being similar to the two divine persons, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who, as the treatise emphasizes, do not come from themselves (*a se*), but from the Father (*ex ipso*).

To finalize, let us observe that the compositions of *Dicta Albini*, as well as the entire *De dignitate conditionis humanae*, comprise a milestone for the theory of human dignity, for in these texts, human dignity has become an autonomous theme of reflection and writing. Although remarks on the value, beauty, or price of the human being can be found in almost all ancient philosophical schools, the distinguishing of the axiology of the human being, let alone the one which centers around *dignitas*, as an independent subject of reflection, is a novel development. It was not until the anonymous author of *Dicta Albini* that this approach was applied, setting the thematic framework for a new subject: the theory of human dignity. It is this aspect of the widely-read treatise *De dignitate conditionis humanae*, as well as its earliest part, *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*, that appears to be their most important contribution to the history of the concept of human dignity.

## 5.5 *Dignitas Christiana*: Ildefonsus of Toledo, Julian of Toledo

Apart from the reception of the anthropological-axiological category of human dignity, the late patristic authors also passed on the appropriation of *dignitas*

51 Dicta Candidi, in: Marenbon, 1981, 162.

52 Ibid., 163.

*Romana* to the specifically Christian context, thus forming a new category, *dignitas Christiana*. As I have argued, this notion does not describe an ecclesiastical office, but rather an honor of those who excelled in the love of Christ. In the late patristic era, this idea was repeated by Caesarius of Arles, who rephrased Jerome's principle (*non facit ecclesiastica dignitas Christianum*—"ecclesiastical office does not make a Christian") into a phrase pertaining to the name of Christians. He wrote that *christiani nominis non facit sola dignitas Christianum*<sup>53</sup> ("The dignity of the name of a Christian alone does not make a Christian").

Another strand of influences of *dignitas Christiana* is to be found among the Spanish bishops. Perhaps the influences of the popes Leo the Great and—at this stage in time—Gregory the Great reached them first through correspondence. Julian of Toledo mentions the dignity of martyrs by asking how great is their dignity (*quanta est dignitas*), a phrasing we are already very familiar with.<sup>54</sup> He also quotes Augustine of Hippo and recalls the authority of "illustrious teachers" who acknowledge that in the kingdom of God "there will be no deformity in the martyrs, but only their dignity" (*Non enim deformitas in eis, sed dignitas erit*).<sup>55</sup> In the preserved writings of Ildefonsus of Toledo, an earlier archbishop of Toledo and most likely a student of Isidore of Seville, we find a mention of angelic dignity (*angelica dignitas*).<sup>56</sup> This exemplifies some reception of *dignitas* in its role as an anthropological-axiological category in seventh-century Spain.

## 5.6 Conclusion

The end of the patristic era, troubled by *Völkerwanderung*, the instability of the intellectual institutions, and the consequent decline of intellectual life, was naturally disadvantaged in comparison with the earlier Golden Age of intellectual fruition. Before the monasteries and courts became filled with scriptoria in the Carolingian Renaissance, Europe suffered through the short period of the "Dark Ages," during which the lack of institutional continuity had an impact on the development and preservation of texts. The sources that did survive demonstrate the reception of the idea of human dignity that had been

53 Caes. Arel., serm. 157.6 (CCL 104, 644, lineae 1–2).

54 Iul. Tol., progn. 2.36 (CCL 115, 74, linea 5).

55 Iul. Tol., progn. 3.22 (CCL 115, 96, lineae 9–12): *Non enim, ut idem doctor egregius ait, deformitas in eisdem corporibus, sed dignitas erit, et quaedam, quamvis in corpore, non corporis sed virtutis pulchritudo fulgebit.*

56 Ildef. Tol., virg. (CCL 114A, 236, linea 1425).

developed in the Golden Age of patristic literature. These influences often assumed a connection to the papacy, either institutional or geographic, as is exemplified in Gregory the Great's theory of human dignity. Despite the fact that the preserved material is modest, the original body of texts sufficed to transmit the ancient idea to the Middle Ages. Beyond the fall of the Roman heritage and the reorientation of states, "human dignity" lived on.





## The Patristic Idea of Human Dignity

This chapter proposes a broad synthesis of the material researched and a critical discussion of existing ideas about the role of the Patristic Period in the history of human dignity. I offer a synthetic description of the intellectual historical process through which *dignitas* emerged as an anthropological category in European culture and defend the thesis that it was the patristic era that coined the axiological-anthropological category of human dignity named *dignitas*. The book ends with a defense of the thesis presented earlier, in which I claim that the multifaceted, rich, and multilingual late ancient approaches to human dignity rest on a number of divergent ideas that all, nevertheless, reveal an enduring deeper core. In this core, the notion of *imago Dei* plays the role of an element in a more complex structure—a structure in which Christian doctrines of incarnation and redemption stand at the forefront as the main figures in the previously lightly-sketched landscape of the late ancient history of human dignity.



*Dignitatem in homine liberum arbitrium dico* (“Dignity in a human being I call free will.”)—this is how, in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux began his definition of human dignity.<sup>1</sup> His opinion is, of course, one of many possible philosophical descriptions of the concept, but what is significant is that the very prospect of defining *dignitas* in the sense of a universal anthropological category was apparently conceivable for a twelfth-century writer, one of the first to pioneer such a philosophical attempt. Among the many necessary preconditions of his utterance, one seems to be the most fundamental: *dignitas* must have been perceived as an anthropological category before anyone could even start to debate its philosophical essence.

Why and how a word that meant a rank or an office acquired a meaning expressive of universal human dignity is the history we have tried to sketch in the previous chapters. Having given an overview of the patristic approaches to human axiology and the terminology that the Greek and Latin Fathers used to express it, we can now offer a broad synthesis of the material researched,

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<sup>1</sup> Bern. Clar., De dil. D. 2 (SBO 3, 121, lineae 16–17).

as well as a discussion of the role the patristic period played in the European history of human dignity.

First, let us delineate the process of *dignitas hominis* emerging as an axiological-anthropological category, thus synthesizing our findings and answering a puzzling question about the role of ancient Christianity in the making of the idea of human dignity. Subsequently, we shall discuss existing assessments of the patristic period in the history of human dignity, and offer a brief discussion of the overall patristic theory of human value as well as its relevance to the contemporarily prevalent features of human dignity.

## 6.1 When Did European Culture Start to Talk about “Human Dignity”?

The idea that the human being is dignified can be expressed in many ways; for example, by calling them precious or valuable, a spark of divinity or a plant rooted in heaven, as well as discussing their excellence, honor, righteousness, preeminence, ability, glory, or nobility (*excellencia, honor, honestas, praestantia, valetudo, gloria, nobilitas*). Up until the late fourth century, axiological ideas in the Roman world lacked one systematically applied name for the positive axiological status of a human being. For example, when, towards the end of his life, Cicero was describing human distinction in comparison to the rest of nature (but not gods), he talked about the preeminence of the virtuous human beings (*praestantia hominis*) and excellence and dignity in nature (*excellencia et dignitas in natura*).<sup>2</sup> In the second century, the author of the work called *Asclepius* tried to give a name to human distinction or esteem (*dignatio*) by calling a human being a great miracle (*magnum miraculum*) and an animal to be admired and honored (*animal adorandum et honorandum*).<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, he also did not consider all humans equal to one another, and limited his remarks to the selected few.

### 6.1.1 Egalitarianism

Christian writers, working in parallel to the ancient Roman philosophical schools, spelled out the idea derived from the Book of Genesis: that all human beings are universally and equally dignified in creation. Egalitarianism, the idea that all human beings are equal and share one nature, was discussed in ancient cultures, at times in reaction to the view of natural slavery: in Judaism (Pentateuch, Book of Psalms, Philo of Alexandria), and among Epicureans and

<sup>2</sup> Cic., off. 1.106 (LCL 30, 108).

<sup>3</sup> (Ps.)Apul., Asc. 6 (CCCM 143, 179, linea 101).

Stoics (e.g. Epicurus, Chrysippus, Seneca, Epictetus).<sup>4</sup> The egalitarian attitude to humanity that was assumed in Christianity drew from all of these influences: the Old and New Testament texts, Judaism, and the Hellenistic schools. The Gospel proclaimed all people to be the addressees of God's redemption and God's children and introduced equality between the peoples, lords and their servants as well as genders: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female"<sup>5</sup> and the Old Testament confirmed, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, treating people differently according to their social standing—favoritism of persons—was strongly discouraged in the New Testament, for "God shows no favoritism for persons." Therefore, whatever positive axiological observations Christians made, on the whole, they applied them universally to all human beings. Differences and moral hierarchies between the virtuous and non-virtuous were still observed, yet the fundamental value of each human being was secured on the level of their unearned ontological perfection. The verbalization of the equality of human beings thus contributed to the universal application of axiological ideas, specifically the ones operating with the category of human dignity. Despite the continued social practice of slavery, this process led to two effects: first, it contributed to stressing the value of the disadvantaged, poor, sick, and all other outcasts of Roman society, as well as the promotion of humanitarian actions for their sake; and second, it facilitated the challenging of existent hierarchies based on circumstantial factors such as birth, office, and wealth.

### 6.1.2 *Dignitas Christiana*

This second phenomenon, the challenging of the Roman social order, was brought about by proclaiming hierarchies based on criteria of merit, i.e., resulting from free choices, such as one's moral development, not through political activism against the established social order, in which slavery was prevalent. Hence, the old category of social rank, *dignitas Romana*, was appropriated in speech and writing and altered by some leading authorities to express a new

4 J.A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought*, Oxford 2008; T. Rasmus / T. Engberg-Pedersen / I. Dunderberg (eds.), *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, Peabody 2010, Kindle location 3232–3952. Significantly, I do not discuss here just any egalitarianism, e.g., political or economic ideas of equal treatment of citizens or goods (discussed extensively in: H.P. Brown, *Egalitarianism and the Generation of Inequality*, Oxford 1988), but specifically an anthropological egalitarianism expressive of the idea that all human beings are equal. Political egalitarianism was present in Athens, but not an anthropological one.

5 Gal 3:28 (NRSV-CE trans.); cf. Mark 8:36.

6 Ps 82:6–7 (NRSV-CE trans.). Cf. Or., in ps. 81.1 (GCS 19, 511, linea 7).

idea, *dignitas Christiana*, a Christian honor equally available to the poor and the rich, to free people and slaves, and to men, women, and children. *Habet et Christianus dignitatem suam, qui tanto imperatori militat* (“a Christian who fights for so great a ruler also has their own dignity”), argued Ambrose of Milan, appropriating military language to the realm of spiritual warfare. “They are more capable before God who are commended by piety of faith in God and the sanctity of life, not by family nobility or a generation’s dignity,” proclaimed Chromatius, redefining the logic of worldly honors in the light of evangelical principles. Jerome, too, argued: *non quaeritur dignitas apud Deum, sed opera*—actions, not the dignity of rank, are sought by God. Quite early on, *dignitas Christiana* became a title linked to martyrs—including child martyrs—and saints. Part of the process leading up to the coining and popularization of the category of human dignity led through a shift from the social meaning of *dignitas* (specific to Roman legal, administrative, and military ranks) to the application of the term in the context of virtue exemplified, according to the spiritual leaders, most often by the martyrs and, more broadly, saints.

### 6.1.3 *The Raising of the Poor*

The first effect mentioned, the appreciation of the poor, took the form of repeated humanitarian attempts: charitable work, as well as preaching about the obligation to respect the poor and the disadvantaged. In contrast with the Roman *forma mentis*, at times also criticized by the Stoics, Christian intellectuals highlighted the value of the poor—reportedly called “the treasures of the Church” (*thesauri Ecclesiae*) by Laurentius of Rome, much to the later Church’s delight—and the normative consequences of mistreating them. Basil the Great established a center of hospices, and numerous Christian sermons were dedicated to promoting charitable acts. *Respice in sepulcra hominum* [...], *dic mihi, quis ibi dives, quis pauper sis?* (“Look in the graves of men [...] and tell me, who is rich and poor?”), queried Ambrose of Milan, an ancient Roman aristocrat, thus leveling out the social order. Leo the Great identified Christ in all of the poor and claimed that nothing belongs to a Christian so much as that which they spend on the poor. *Non sit vilis homini homo* (“No human being should be worthless to another”), he argued, stressing the egalitarian principle: *Una est divitum pauperumque natura* (“The nature of poor and rich is one”).

Nonetheless, up until the late fourth century, considerable inconsistency appeared among Christian writers when referring to the human axiological status. In the Latin West, Hilary of Poitiers praised human *nobilitas* and *honor*, and Ambrose of Milan made use of expressions such as “precious soul” (*pretiosa anima*) and “beautiful soul” (*decora anima*), as well as periphrastic

expressions addressed to his listeners: “how great you are” (*quantus sis*), “you are the glory of God” (*gloria Dei es*). All this, however, does not yet explain why someone like Bernard of Clairvaux would sit down in the twelfth century specifically to define *dignitas*, out of all the terms mentioned.

#### 6.1.4 Lumen Orientale

Meanwhile, in the Greek East, the idea of a universal special axiological status for human beings was long established, but, significantly, it was expressed without a consistent terminology. The adoption of the idea of human deification, derived from the Old Testament Psalms, was popularized early on in the Greek Christian tradition. This idea posited human superiority over other created beings; a notion often facilitated by anthropocentric finalism, which claimed a privileged position for humans during the creation of the world. Not only were human beings made in the image and likeness of God, but beyond that, the rest of the world existed only for the sake of humans, so that humankind could be its guest, explorer, and ruler. Additionally, the Greek Fathers held a view that only human creation was preceded by a divine council about the new nature. They repeated the classical Greek view that human beings exceed all other entities with the unique faculty of reason, although, significantly, they assumed that the property of intelligence pertains to all humans, including slaves. They also often drew from other ancient classical Greek and Hellenistic ideas, such a notion of love of humanity or deification, which they adapted to their argumentation.

Both Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa criticized—in varying degree—the practice of selling people into slavery, arguing that their worth is unmatched by anything one could pay. Basil the Great explicated the feature of infiniteness and the principle of incommensurability of the value of a human being—that is, the impossibility of finding an adequate price for a human being. This conclusion led him and his brother to consider the practice of selling people utterly absurd. Gregory provided an exegetic-egalitarian argument, stating that those who were made self-determined and sent to rule the world could not be deprived of either of their prerogatives. According to Gregory, people who claim power over other human beings, dispossessing them of their God-given role in the world, place themselves in God’s position, and thus have fallen into the grave sin of pride. Gregory’s argument, strongly accentuating Christian egalitarianism, marks an outspoken ancient criticism of slavery. It is also a rare example of someone observing the direct implication of human dignity for the condemnation of slavery as early as the fourth century.

Greek Christian reflection on human value provided terminology—such as “great” (μέγας), “precious” or “worthy” (τίμιος), “of great nature”

(μεγαλοφυΐας)—for discussing humankind. At times, abstract nouns were employed to refer to human worth or dignity (ἀξίωμα), price or honor (τιμή), value or dignity (ἀξία), greatness (μέγεθος), honorable origin or dignity (εὐγένεια), and majesty or comeliness (εὐπρέπεια). Additionally, the Greek East worked out a unique type of praise (encomium) for human beings, a genre unlike any other in the early centuries of the new era. The Greek Fathers also associated the idea of infinite human value with the incarnation, which constituted a dignifying unity between God and humans in one nature. According to Athanasius of Alexandria, God was particularly keen on human nature, and His love and kindness towards human beings (φιλανθρωπία) led Him to pay the ultimate price for human creatures. He stooped to partake in human nature and thereby redeemed it. In the Middle Ages, Bernard of Clairvaux called this privileged unity of divine and human nature in one person *unitas dignativa*.<sup>7</sup> Yet, to explain why the medieval master chose the adjective etymologically linked with *dignitas*, we have to return to the Latin West.

### 6.1.5 *The Delphic Maxim*

At the end of the fourth century, a number of prominent Christian intellectuals, both Greek and Latin (Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon), initiated the practice of not only describing human axiology but also appealing to the wider public to recognize human dignity or value. In these appeals, the expression *dignitas hominis* was used by Jerome of Stridon around the year 397 and henceforth served as an anthropological category that was soon used by Rufinus of Aquileia in his translation of Origen and by Augustine of Hippo, who employed it in numerous anthropological contexts, especially in his enduring works *De Trinitate* and *De civitate Dei*. Earlier, Augustine used the concept *dignitas* in *De libero arbitrio* in reference to all kinds of natures, some possessing finite value. Soon after, *dignitas* became popularized, systematically applied, introduced to the public celebration of Christmas, and thus broadcast among all levels of ancient society by Pope Leo the Great. At the same time, the Pope's secretary, Prosper of Aquitaine, used *dignitas hominis* in his commentaries to the Psalms. Both of these fifth-century writers linked dignity with adjectives such as splendid (*speciosissima*) and great (*magna*), thus discussing *magna dignitas hominis* (great human dignity) and *speciosissima dignitas hominis* (splendid human dignity).

“Human dignity,” used as a specialized philosophical and theological-anthropological category, thus emerged in the fourth- and fifth-century tradition of formulating appeals urging humankind to know their dignity. The

<sup>7</sup> Bern. Clar., De cons. 5.18 (SBO 3, 483, linea 3).

reinterpretation of the culturally prevalent ancient maxim of self-knowledge (“know thyself”) in an axiological context (“know thy dignity”) contributed to the popularization of the notion contained in them: *dignitas*. Henceforth, Christians followed in the footsteps of Basil the Great, the first to appeal: Λάβε τοῦ ἀξιώματος ἔννοιαν—“Accept the notion of your value!” And: Γνώθι σεαυτοῦ τὴν ἀξίαν!—“Know your dignity!” In the West, Ambrose of Milan argued: *Cognosce te, homo, quia gloria es Dei* (“Recognize yourself, human, for you are the glory of God!”) and *Cognosce ergo te, o homo, quantus sis* (“Recognize, o human being, how great you are!”). Around 397, Jerome of Stridon cried out in Bethlehem, *Vide hominis dignitatem* (“Observe human dignity!”), and Leo the Great continued in the fifth century: *Expergiscere, o homo, et dignitatem tuae agnosce naturae* (“Wake up, o human being, and realize the dignity of your nature!”) and *Agnoscat homo sui generis dignitatem* (“May a human being acknowledge the dignity of their own kind!”). Soon after, an anonymous Master of Verona carried on the tradition by pleading, *Considerate ergo honorem*, and so did the authors of the sermons contained in *Eusebius Gallicanus*, insisting, *Agnosce te, homo, caeleste esse figmentum Dei*—“Recognize, o human being, that you are a celestial image,” and *Agnoscat homo quantum valeat*—“May a human being recognize how much they are worth.” An anonymous treatise, *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei*, echoes these by appealing: *Quisque attendat primae conditionis suae excellentiam*—“May everyone pay all the more diligent attention to the excellence of their first creation.” This transformation of the ancient Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν, which during the Roman period received a strong negative connection with death, comprises an original patristic contribution to the history of the ancient saying and to the history of human dignity.

This observation helps us to properly understand later approaches to human dignity. For example, only having identified the patristic tradition of appeals to know one’s dignity can we understand the Renaissance *locus communis* of orations on human dignity: observing the need to know one’s worth. Pico della Mirandola referenced the Delphic maxim in his *Oratio de hominis dignitate*<sup>8</sup> and—to offer some lesser known examples—the two sixteenth-century treatises about human dignity that were published in Cracow during the Polish Renaissance: *De natura ac dignitate hominis* by Jan of Trzciana, also called Ioannes Arundinensis, and *Oratio de praestantia et excellentia humanae naturae* by Mikołaj Dłuski did so as well.<sup>9</sup> The fundamental principle of Jan of

8 G. Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de hominis dignitate* 21.

9 Mikołaj Dłuski, *Oratio de praestantia et excellentia humanae naturae*, Cracow 1564, critical edition in: L. Szczucki, *Per la storia della fortuna del pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Nicola Dłuski e la sua “Oratio”*, in: *Rinascimento* 14 (1974), 268–276; Jan of Trzciana (Ioannes



Trzciana's *De natura et dignitate hominis*, structuring the whole investigation around human dignity, hinges on the Delphic maxim of self-knowledge and demands that the actions of human beings be worthy of their great dignity.<sup>10</sup> Had the maxims of self-knowledge carried their ancient Greek and their later Roman negative connotations only, we could not understand Trzciana's text at all. Mikołaj Dłuski's treatise, too, proclaims the moral downfall of his times, caused by nothing more than humans forgetting about their dignity, and it appeals at the same time for its much-needed recognition. Such texts represent evident examples of continuity with the tradition instigated by Basil the Great, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon, and Leo the Great. Let us return to these origins of the category of human dignity.

### 6.1.6 *Establishing Christmas Liturgy*

This elevation of the category of human dignity, present in Jerome's and Leo's version of the call, was closely linked to the establishment and popularization of Christmas celebrations. In the early fourth century, Helena of Constantinople, mother of Constantine the Great, travelled to Jerusalem to initiate the construction of the temple honoring Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus—a cave already surrounded with Christian attention. Soon, the tradition of celebrating the birth of Christ with a separate liturgy spread in the East, and the sources indicate a similar development in Rome at the same time. The new holiday became one of the biggest Christian celebrations of the year. The sermons that Leo the Great delivered during this holiday and the prayer he introduced into the very heart of the liturgy of Christmas—present in it even today—propagated the idea of human dignity. In Leo's writings, as earlier in those of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, dignity was taken to be twice received by the human being. Although human creatures were created with dignity in the image and likeness of God—called *dignitas originis* or *dignitas conditionis* (the dignity of creation)—the act of incarnation introduced people to a greater dignity still, one later called *dignitas renovationis* (dignity of restoration). The incarnation, celebrated during the Christmas liturgy, led Leo not only to praise God's act of joining humankind but also humankind's elevation by virtue of being the only kind shared by God Himself. This resulted

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Arundinensis), *De natura ac dignitate hominis*, Cracow 1554, critical edition in: J. Czerkowski (ed.), *Textus et studia historiam theologiae in Polonia excultae spectantia* 2/2, Warsaw 1974, 123–317. Additionally, a discussion of the subject makes up a large part of the commentaries written by Hannibal Rosseli, an Italian Benedictine monk working at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow: Hannibal Rosseli, *Corpus hermeticum*, Cracow 1584–1586; id., *Asclepius Mercurii Trismegisti cum commento*, Cracow 1590.

10 Jan of Trzciana (Ioannes Arundinensis), *De natura ac dignitate hominis* 2.

in the descriptions of the distinction of human nature above not only all non-rational creation, such as the world and animals in it, but also other rational beings—angels for instance—who do not share in the privilege of incarnation.

Because the celebration of Christmas not only remained in Christian culture but also grew in popularity in subsequent ages, the idea of human elevation through God's incarnation endured among both the educated elites and the lower social classes attending the celebrations. The Pope's reflections on the mystery of incarnation, employing the notion *dignitas*, and his incorporation of this notion into the Christmas liturgy, can explain why someone like Bernard of Clairvaux defined *dignitas* among all of the positive axiological terms descriptive of human status, and why he called human unity with God *dignativa*. Due to its connection with Christian celebrations, dignity became a public concept right from the beginning, rather than remaining a technical theological or philosophical term known to few and discussed only in specialized texts. It was present in the homilies spoken to numerous listeners, and was accentuated through its presence in the rhetorically compelling form of an imperative: "Know, o human being, your dignity!"

#### 6.1.7 *Christian Reading of the Psalms*

An observant student of the history of patristic writings on human dignity cannot help but notice that the development of the reflection on human axiology was largely dependent on the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament Book of Psalms. Origen of Alexandria and his reading of Psalm 81, Basil the Great and his homily on Psalm 48, Ambrose and his commentary to Psalm 118, Jerome of Stridon and his interpretation of Psalm 81, Prosper of Aquitaine and his still common reading of Psalm 143, even Cassiodorus's homilies on the Psalms (specifically Psalm 121)—these texts comprise milestones in the making of the category of human dignity. There is no doubt that the poetry of the Hebrew bible on existential themes, such as the Psalms, inspired the discussion of human nature. The ancient Christian homiletic and exegetic tradition of commenting on the Psalms was aimed at a public reception and was therefore written and spoken in accessible style that preferred rhetorical forms such as pleas. Two verses of Psalm 81 led Origen to discuss human transformation into a divine creature, and upon rereading this commentary in Bethlehem, Jerome exclaimed "Observe human dignity!" Two verses of Psalm 48 led Basil to depict the situation of the Devil's prisoner awaiting a ransom, and the divine bargain over the human soul. One line of Psalm 134 led Prosper of Aquitaine to propose a still common interpretation of its third line as being expressive of human dignity; Prosper justified human dignity by the redemptive act of Christ, as did Basil commenting on Psalm 48. The founding of their reflection

on a Scriptural basis strengthened these thinkers' argumentation and secured a lasting impact for their speeches—for exegesis was to remain a permanent form of reflection and of a preacher's duty.

Once formulated, the category of human dignity played a role in all other kinds of writings and exegesis, but particularly in speeches delivered on Christmas Day, as was done by Leo the Great. By the time of Gregory the Great, the category of human dignity—referring to humanity's positive axiological status—was long established. Gregory the Great is a superb example of Leo's heritage living on far beyond the fifth century. In the sixth and seventh century, the fact that dignity was twice received is an obvious reference to Gregory the Great, as were the categories of the dignity of creation (*dignitas conditionis*) and the dignity of restoration (*dignitas renovationis*). The most evident trend exemplifying Leo's influence is, however, a long history of pleas to know one's dignity, which were repeated by generations of preachers and writers, often during Christmas sermons. The prayer that the Pope introduced into Christmas liturgy, and that during the Middle Ages was placed in the Roman missal (as an accompanying text spoken during offertory), also constituted a lasting reiteration of the notion of human dignity to the public. All of these factors make Leo the Great's impact on the history of human dignity unrivalled.

Nonetheless, that "human dignity" became an anthropological-axiological category, is—as we saw—a result of the coincidence of various factors: egalitarianism, challenging worldly hierarchies by the moral category of *dignitas Christiana*, accentuating the value of the poor, adopting the eastern Greek heritage of axiological reflection (e.g., ideas of God's love and kindness towards a human creature—φιλανθρωπία—and deification), the innovative appropriation of the ancient maxim to know oneself, establishing a holiday to celebrate God's unity with human nature, and drawing anthropological conclusions from the Book of Genesis and the Psalms. A brief answer to the question of how long the category of human dignity has been used in European culture is thus: since the Golden Age of the Patristic Period.

### 6.1.8 *Features of Human Dignity as an Indication of Homonymy Replacing Polysemy*

At the dawn of the Golden Age, *dignitas* was prevalent in its meaning of rank or office, and up until *dignitas Christiana* was proposed in Christian writings, largely as a critical reaction to valuing offices and ranks, its legal, administrative, and military function was complemented by a set of aesthetic meanings. The coining of *dignitas Christiana* and later *dignitas hominis* exemplifies the linguistic phenomenon of a concept's developing polysemy, with a common etymological root and overlapping meanings associated to it. Since the Golden

Age, however, polysemy slowly grew into what amounts to a case of homonymy between the meaning of rank and that of universal human worth in contemporary culture. The two words, looking and sounding alike to the late ancient and medieval mind, started to refer to two different phenomena, the features of which hardly overlapped: one being incommensurable, inalienable, unearned, common and transcendental in origin; the other, limited in value, alienable, earned, elitist and of worldly origin. Since the Golden Age of the patristic period, nonetheless, both are present in European culture and constitute its legacy.

## 6.2 Existing Assessments of the Role of the Patristic Period

Current assessments of the role of the patristic period in the history of human dignity contain a number of views, which we can now address in light of the source material and analyses provided in this volume. Some of these assessments propose an overall evaluation of the period in history; some address specific issues, such as the ancient approach to Christian dignity; and some suggest potential Christian sources. Let us start with the more general accounts.

### 6.2.1 *Did Human Dignity Develop from an Idea of a Rank?*

In his discussion of post-Enlightenment definitions of human dignity, Jeremy Waldron offered a short paragraph about the Greco-Roman and Christian approaches to *dignitas* and to “an old connection between dignity and rank.”<sup>11</sup> Some commentators thus took this remark to describe the ancient world, and the paragraph itself does not exclude such an interpretation.<sup>12</sup> Waldron argued that the Judeo-Christian notion of the dignity of humanity “transvaluated

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11 J. Waldron, *Dignity, Rank and Rights*, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values. Delivered at University of California, Berkeley, Oxford 2009, 32. I here quote the entire paragraph: “It might be thought that the old connection between dignity and rank was superseded by a Judeo-Christian notion of the dignity of humanity as such, and that this Judeo-Christian notion is really quite different in character. I am not convinced. I don’t want to underestimate the breach between Roman-Greek and Judeo-Christian ideas, but I believe that as far as dignity is concerned the connotation of ranking status remained, and that what happened was that it was transvalued rather than superseded.”

12 M. Soniewicka / J. Holocher, *Human Dignity in Poland*, in: Becchi / Mathis (eds.), 2019, 700–702. Soniewicka and Holocher adopted Waldron’s terminology in the title of the paragraph about the history of human dignity, “Universalization of Dignity in the Stoic Tradition and Its Transvaluation in Christianity,” thus assuming that Waldron proposed a historical observation. According to these authors, the “Stoic” who universalized human dignity is Cicero. I address this view below.

rather than superseded” the old Greco-Romanic idea of dignity as a matter of ranking status and referenced a book on this topic in a historical perspective.<sup>13</sup> He was not convinced, as he admitted, that the Christian idea was fundamentally different from the Greco-Roman idea of a ranking status, and went on to discuss whether the idea of rank could be compatible with the notion of human dignity. This discussion is clearly conceptual rather than historical, yet it was received as a historical observation.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the idea was proposed that “Christianity transformed the external socially dependent worth of the person into inner worth.”<sup>15</sup> This view offers us the opportunity to raise a number of philosophical points in favor of highlighting the categorical difference between *dignitas* in the sense of rank and *dignitas* in the sense of human dignity.

First, the alteration of an elitist concept into an egalitarian one is much more than a matter of adapting it by extending the number of its designates. The universalism of the message of human dignity relies on social and anthropological egalitarianism, which upheld an idea of human brotherhood and solidarity that can be seen in both the Christian approach and Stoic cosmopolitanism. The Greco-Roman political idea of rank could not withstand being flattened out to fit this social model, for the idea of a rank contains—as its essential feature—the power of the one with dignity to extend this dignity over those below him (and hardly ever “her,” which in itself illustrates the transformation that the notion of the rank would have to undergo to become egalitarian). An essentially hierarchal notion cannot simply be extended over a larger number of designates for it to become egalitarian. *Dignitas hominis* is a concept uniting all human beings by distinguishing them from all other creatures, whereas *dignitas Romana* is a concept uniting one social group by differentiating them from other people.<sup>16</sup> The former contributes to the unity of humankind and the latter undermines it.

Second, the dignity of a rank is a feature heavily reliant on external factors, such as wealth or family ties, and is not part of the intrinsic, inalienable nature of the subject of dignity. In contrast, as John Chrysostom argued, human dignity is intrinsic to nature, and rank is not. Arguably, this distinction also comprises a categorical difference rather than a simple extension of the feature of rank upon new subjects. Third, in conjunction with this, the dignity of rank

13 Waldron, 2009, 32.

14 Soniewicka and Holoher, 2019, 702, interpret it this way: “As Waldron argues, a Judeo-Christian notion of the dignity of humanity [...] made the idea of noble rank ‘compatible with an egalitarian conception of dignity’”.

15 Soniewicka / Holoher, 2019, 702.

16 A similar distinction can be found in: Jan Czerkawski, *Renesansowe koncepcje godności człowieka*, in: *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 35 (1987), 251–281.

was taken to be alienable by third parties, as exemplified by Greek ἀτιμία, deprivation of civic rights. Nothing of that sort concerns the idea of human dignity, ingrained in nature once created. Christians did stress human dignity's decline as a consequence of original sin, and its resurgence in a greater form through redemption, yet this theoretical context did not translate into practical (let alone political) consequences for the living, as it pertains to a largely ahistorical description of human nature and its salvation. Additionally, Christians described that ancient distortion of dignity as a result of free choice, and not the external power of the third parties violating one's status.

Finally, the ancient idea of the *dignitas Romana* was a finite one, perhaps at times great, but always finite, both in value and in time. One's position was strictly defined as subordinate to other ranks in the hierarchy, according to the *ordo dignitatis*. The power exercised by the one on top—even over those on the highest ranks—was immense, extending to claims over their lives. Gregory of Nyssa argued instead that no one can deprive his brother or sister of their right to autonomy and power over the world. Earlier, Basil provided an argument stressing human value's incommensurability. Cassiodorus spelled out a democratic spiritual idea—all can address God directly. Moreover, the idea of rank did not translate into a normative demand of respect for its subjects, for as ancient history proves, even the most accomplished in rank were at the mercy of someone above them. *Dignitas Romana* thus existed in a power-driven society, in which the accomplishments and fame of the one on top of the social ladder—someone such as Caesar—were measured, among other factors, in terms of the numbers of people he enslaved, murdered, and conquered.<sup>17</sup> The idea, therefore, that Christians made the Roman idea of noble rank compatible with an egalitarian conception of dignity seems to overlook the context of social rank in the Roman Empire. The Greco-Roman idea of a rank requires much more than simply extending authority over more subjects, for it is not even clear how to accomplish such a project given its essentially exclusionary character. This is perhaps why the third-century apologetics criticized the Roman social order (compared to which there is, according to Lactantius, “nothing uglier, nothing more arrogant, nothing further from the course of wisdom”), replacing it with a hierarchy of virtue. This shift, however, pertains to the creation of *dignitas Christiana*, not *dignitas hominis*. The difference between the idea of rank and universal human dignity is categorical, even though the historical process through which this distinction developed contains sharp shifts of meaning from one to another.

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17 Plu., Caesar 25.5. Cf. M.E. Deutsch, *Caesar's Triumphs*, in: *CIW* 19 (1926), 101–106.

In Chapter One, I drew the reader's attention to a number of questions directed at unravelling the theoretical context of the theories studied, and proposed that we should ask if dignity is taken to be finite or priceless, alienable or inalienable, inclusive of all humans or exclusive to some, universal or not. When we estimate the use of *dignitas* in light of such questions, the gaping void between what is correctly translated as rank and universal human dignity can be made evident. The research presented in this volume allows us to witness the process of *dignitas hominis* emerging as an anthropological-axiological category, and even though some steps of this process, such as the appropriation of *dignitas Romana* to *dignitas Christiana*, can be characterized as a mild adaptation achieved through the criticism of the idea of rank, the effect of this process as a whole is not. The meaning expressed in *dignitas hominis* is derived from various listed anthropological ideas, not the reflection upon the Roman social order.

### 6.2.2 *Was the Coining of the Category of Human Dignity a Discontinuous Process in European Culture?*

The idea that the emergence of the category of human dignity cannot be described as a continuous evolution from the Stoic, biblical, and, in particular, Ciceronian anthropologies was expressed in a major attempt at documenting this process.<sup>18</sup> Ulrich Volp, who dedicated a sizable German monograph to the ancient pagan, biblical, and early Christian voices on human dignity (up until Augustine of Hippo), proposed a thesis that the concept of human dignity was systematically used for the first time by the fourth-century Christian writers, both Greek and Latin.<sup>19</sup> Volp identified the Cappadocian Fathers in the East and Augustine of Hippo in the West as the key figures in this process.<sup>20</sup> This identification is fully compatible with the present study insofar as Augustine's conception is the first mature Latin synthesis of the biblical and philosophical reflections on human axiological status. Given our investigation of the Cappadocian sources, we can provide additional evidence of the significance of the Greek Cappadocian School, for as we saw, it was Basil's reflection that initiated the later Latin tradition of the calls to know one's dignity. It is a welcome discovery that the material presented in this study confirms Volp's major discoveries with additional source material.

18 U. Volp, *Die Würde des Menschen: Ein Beitrag zur Anthropologie in der Alten Kirche*, Leiden 2006.

19 Volp, 2006, 353–365.

20 Volp, 2006, 172–181.236–239.

Volp's apt identification of the fourth century as the proper beginning of the category of human dignity is supplemented in his diagnosis by a thesis that the emergence of the concept of human dignity was the result of an unpredictable and discontinuous process, full of sudden changes and unbridgeable tensions.<sup>21</sup> Pointing out the transformation of the tradition of calls to know thyself into a tradition of appeals to know one's dignity, documented in his study, as well as all the other factors listed at the beginning of this chapter, allows us to fill in some of these unexpected gaps. However, it is only possible to observe the continuity of these calls amongst which the notion of *dignitas hominis* was coined and popularized in the Latin West, or to appreciate the role of the Christian celebrations, if the late patristic sources are examined, and these exceed the scope of Volp's great study. These sources, examined here, verify his findings by providing yet another argument for the striking parallel between the early Christian idea and contemporary ideas of human dignity, and for the critical role Christian antiquity played in the making of this idea.

### 6.2.3 *Is Dignitas Christiana an Ecclesiastical Office?*

Another view holds that Christians identified only the dignity of an office belonging to the clergy, thus continuing to use the social meaning of the word, adjusted to the context of the Church. Although the Church did develop this practice, the sources we have provided stand as evidence that *dignitas Christiana* was, first, different from the universal idea of the dignity of all and, second, that it was different from ecclesiastical office. Christian dignity was instead seen as available to all, including children and women, because it referred to the moral accomplishment exemplified most often by martyrs and saints. One of the earliest applications of this notion, by Cyprian of Carthage, applies it to the families of martyrs, and figures such as Agnes of Rome, Pancras of Rome, or Lucy of Syracuse (martyred respectively at ages twelve, fourteen, and twenty-three) demonstrate that ancient Christian culture did not associate *dignitas Christiana* with the office of the clergy, nor did it confine it to adults or to men.

Jerome of Stridon's paraphrase of the Roman saying, *barba non facit philosophum* ("the beard does not make the philosopher"), as *non facit ecclesiastica dignitas Christianum* ("the dignity of the office does not make a Christian") expressed and shaped the Christian attitude of neutrality towards circumstantial factors, including Church offices. The saying was picked up by many writers, because it effectively grasped the respect Christians had for the actual merit of saints and martyrs, recruiting from all social groups: married and

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 353.



celibate, laity and clergy, poor and rich, men and women, girls and boys. The rule was also introduced as a principle of Canon Law, and this illustrates how important the distinction between the external—and thus irrelevant—factors and the internal factor of a free choice of moral perfection was to Christianity.

#### 6.2.4 *Was Leo the Great the First Writer to Use the Concept Dignitas Hominis?*

Another scholarly opinion attributes the first use of the category *dignitas hominis* to Leo the Great.<sup>22</sup> Although the Pope's use of the notion is, without doubt, the one that influenced later generations of Christians most broadly, he is wrongly identified as an inventor of the concept, for both Jerome of Stridon and Augustine of Hippo precede him in this practice—the former by half a century. A similar linguistically oriented view suggested that *dignitas* did not function independently as one noun, but was most often used in conjunction with the nouns *excellentia* or *praestantia*, thus forming phrases such as *dignitas et excellentia hominis* or *dignitas praestantiaque hominis*.<sup>23</sup> This might be surprising for those who have followed the material provided in this volume. This misunderstanding may have grown out of the consideration of Renaissance sources and the translations provided in *Patrologia Graeca* as exemplary,<sup>24</sup> which often follow the typically Renaissance double phraseology, such as Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, Bartolomeo Facio's *De excellentia ac praestantia hominis*, or Mikołaj Dłuski's *Oratio de praestantia et excellentia humanae naturae*. Such phrases, however, did not occur in Christian antiquity, which tended to favor a single noun *dignitas*, at times linked with adjectives such as *magna, speciosissima*, or the like.

#### 6.2.5 *Was Cicero the One to Coin the Concept of Human Dignity?*

Some leading protagonists of the early stages of the described history of human dignity (Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon, Augustine of Hippo, Leo the Great) remained—no doubt—under the influence of Cicero. Before the patristic ideas of human dignity (specifically the Greek ones) were properly researched, some specialists suggested Cicero as the single influence upon these Christian writers in respect to their use of *dignitas hominis*. Is the ancient

22 J. Domański, *Z dawnych rozważań o godności i marności ludzkiej*, Warsaw 1997, 76–77. See also V. Pöschl, *Der Begriff der Würde im antiken Rom und später. Vorgetragen am 10. Mai 1969*, in: SHAW.PH 3 (1989), 7–67. Pöschl identifies the first instance of the modern idea of universal human dignity in Leo's sermons, while maintaining that Cicero hinted at such an understanding.

23 Domański, 1997, 75.

24 Cf. e.g. Gr. Nyss., de op. hom. 16 (PG 44, 177).

philosopher, statesmen and lawyer, however, indeed a precursor for the use of the category, and can he be called—as some suggest—a pioneer of human rights?<sup>25</sup>

Cicero once employed the expression *praestantia hominis* to name human superiority over the non-rational beasts in his last work, *De officiis*. Significantly, the remark opens with a comparison between those who live like beasts, succumbing to passions and classified as these “of beastly kind” (*ex pecudum genere*),<sup>26</sup> and those excellent human beings who raise themselves above sensual pleasure, using it in moderation. *Praestantia hominis*, therefore, is not applied universally to all human beings, and Cicero openly states, “for there are some people only in name and not in fact” (*sunt enim quidam homines non re, sed nomine*).<sup>27</sup> This remark alone should suffice to discredit Cicero’s passage from the history of attempts to conceptualize human dignity, if human dignity’s prerequisite is its universal application to humankind.<sup>28</sup> Today, we would rather say that in the ancient cultures there were people who were human in fact, but not in name—slaves in particular, but also those who are more emotional. Cicero’s language is conditional: one can be called “human” and “pre-eminent” if one does not succumb to passions. Such a view describes a virtue rather than an intrinsic, unearned and universal property of human nature. It also proposes an elitist view of humankind. Even if the remarks about beasts was taken as merely metaphorical, the single passage employing *dignitas*

25 For the idea that Cicero is a precursor of the concept of human dignity, see: H. Cancik, “Dignity of Man” and “Persona” in *Stoic Anthropology: Some Remarks on Cicero, de Officiis I 105–107*, in: D. Kretzmer / E. Klein (eds.), *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, The Hague 2007, 19–40; Becchi / Mathis (eds.), 2019, 701–702; J. Loughlin, *Introduction*, in: Loughlin (ed.), 2019, 4; J. Lössl, *The Pre-Christian Concept of Human Dignity in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, in: Loughlin (ed.), 2019, 37–56; M. Lebeck, *On the Problem of Human Dignity: A Hermeneutic and Phenomenological Investigation*, Würzburg 2009, 52; Pöschl, 1989, 7–67. For polemics with the idea that Cicero’s usage is relevant to the idea of universal, inalienable human dignity, see, e.g.: M. Griffin, *Dignity in Roman and Stoic Thought*, in: Debes (ed.), 2017, 47–66; K. Harper, *Christianity and the Roots of Human Dignity*, in: T.S. Shah / A.D. Hertzke (eds.), *Christianity and Freedom*, Cambridge 2016, 127–128. For the idea that Cicero is a precursor of human rights, cf. R. Bauman, *Human Rights in the Late Republic: Cicero*, in: id., *Human Rights in Ancient Rome*, London 2000, 36–50. Bauman openly admits Cicero’s lack of recognition of the rights of slaves and limits his investigation to the rights of free persons: “Strictly speaking universalism takes in not only non-Romans as well as Romans, but also slaves as well as free people. But Cicero is not known as a champion of slave’s rights.” (Bauman, 2000, 37).

26 Cic., off. 1.105 (LCL 30, 106).

27 Cic., off. 1.105 (LCL 30, 106).

28 The universal application of Cicero’s remarks in *De officiis* is assumed by many commentators; see: Rosen, 2012, 11–14; M. Palenčár, *Some Remarks on the Concept and Intellectual History of Human Dignity*, in: *Human Affairs* 26 (2016); Soniewicka / Holocher, 2019, 702.

promotes a concept akin to virtue, not unearned value of all. Cicero's view of human preeminence seems therefore both conditional and alienable.<sup>29</sup>

Right after that, Cicero mentions the common capacity of reason and the practice of virtue, on the basis of which he identifies *excellētia* and *dignitas* of nature—presumably human (thus “our”—*nostra*) nature, as was added in the fourteenth century manuscripts, not earlier.<sup>30</sup> It is not absolutely clear, however, if Cicero discussed dignity in nature taken as a general principle—in a Stoic sense referenced shortly before as that which brings us into the world. This nature is discussed more extensively, for example, in *De natura deorum*.<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, Cicero may have meant human nature, and if human, it could be the humans that Cicero identifies with and addresses as the preeminent. The hierarchical nature of Cicero's thinking is well demonstrated; for example, in his differentiation of the levels of kindness (*benignitas*) which should be granted based on the level of *dignitas*, used not in the formal, but the moral sense of rank.<sup>32</sup> Whether the property of reason, proclaimed to be common among “us all” to whom Cicero speaks and with whom he identifies, is in fact universal—or again confined to “humans in fact” and not only “in name” (thus, *ex pecudum genere*)—remains a question that should, I believe, be also posed in relation to Cicero's *De re publica*, to which I return below. His selective approach to *praestantia hominis*, visible in his remark about human beings being human in name and not in fact, strengthens the interpretation that his remark concerns a virtue, not an unearned worth of all.

When, however, we ask if Cicero's words could inspire others to think of universal human dignity, it is worth mentioning that in the very same place, Cicero employed *dignitas* in the sense of the physical property of a well-shaped body, and not once did he relate *dignitas* to *homo*.<sup>33</sup> Just a couple of paragraphs later, he defined *dignitas* (in the sense of an aesthetic property of the body) as an exclusively male property, complemented by “loveliness” (*venustas*) in women.<sup>34</sup> It is, therefore, factually not true that he coined the universal category *dignitas hominis*. The two factors, one linguistic (his primarily aesthetic use of *dignitas* in *De officiis*) and one conceptual (the lack of a universal understanding

29 Griffin, 2017, 55.

30 K. Harper, *Christianity and the Roots of Human Dignity*, in: T.S. Shah / A.D. Hertzke (eds.), *Christianity and Freedom*, Cambridge 2016, 127–128.

31 Cic., off. 1.103 (LCL 30, 104); Cic., n. d. 3.11,27–28 (LCL 268, 310–312).

32 Cic., off. 1.42 (LCL 30, 46). Cf. commentary in Griffin, 2017, 60.

33 Cic., off. 1.107 (LCL 30, 108).

34 Cic., off. 1.130 (LCL 30, 130–132): *Cum autem pulchritudinis duo genera sint, quorum in altero venustas sit, in altero dignitas, venustatem muliebrem ducere debemus, dignitatem virilem.*

of *homo* and in his last, normatively oriented work), could explain why none of Cicero's readers of *De officiis* used *dignitas hominis* or *dignitas naturae* up until the late fourth century, nor suggested he used such a concept. It would be surprising for Cicero's influence to only appear so many centuries later, having been overlooked by all of his earlier readers. This is not so surprising, though, if anthropological egalitarianism as well as humanitarianism had yet to transform the existing (often elitist) ideas about humanity, and eventually to support the formulation of a universal and unearned category: one earlier indicated by some anthropological schools, Hellenistic and Jewish, yet linguistically never taking the form of the Latin *dignitas*.

Among Cicero's Christian Latin readers in the fourth century, only some used *dignitas* in relation to human beings, while others did not. Interestingly, Ambrose's *De officiis ministrorum*, shaped after Cicero's *De officiis*, does not. Given the research presented in the previous chapter, we can provide a compelling reason why some Latin writers came up with the concept of human dignity. The unraveling of the history of the transformation of the Delphic maxim "know thyself" into "know thy dignity" suggests that this novel practice originated in the Greek East, with Basil of Caesarea in particular. Ambrose, who inspired Leo the Great, followed Basil—and Basil, as we do know, did not read any Latin and never referenced a Latin text. It was within this tradition, however, that *dignitas* emerged as an anthropological-axiological category. The making of human dignity was facilitated by Cappadocian humanitarianism, rather than Ciceronian humanism.

Finally, it is accepted that Cicero's view of human nature was not inclusive of slaves.<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that Cicero stated in *De legibus* that his definition of humankind as rational and akin to gods pertains to all human individuals, and that in *De amicitia* he drew a personalist distinction between people and things based on the criterion of love (to be specific, the capacity of being loved and loving back), his theory and practice of slavery is clear.<sup>36</sup> In *De re publica*, the ancient orator upheld the Aristotelian view that some people have a natural predisposition to be lords over slaves, and that this is to the slaves' benefit.<sup>37</sup> Aristotle argued that natural slaves do not have reason, only a capacity to recognize reason in others. Parts of Cicero's *De re publica* that describe slaves are lost, so we cannot know if Cicero upheld this part of Aristotle's ideas. Yet these views influenced some Latin writers, as they are discussed by Augustine in *De civitate Dei*. Confusing information about Cicero's attitudes towards slaves can,

35 Bauman, 2000, 36–50; Griffin, 2017, 47–66; Harper, 2016, 127–128.

36 Cic., leg. 1.30; amic. 14.

37 Arist., pol. 1254b16–21; Cic., rep. 3.36–37.

however, still be found among the theoreticians of human dignity today. We can read, for example, that Cicero kept “a slave.”<sup>38</sup> Let us therefore review the historical facts.

According to some historians’ calculations, Cicero owned around two hundred slaves at his twenty mansions.<sup>39</sup> These “possessions” made up Cicero’s everyday reality: dressing, washing, shaving, feeding, and possibly even satisfying his sexual needs. Interestingly, however, Cicero did not bother to pay much attention to most of them in his copious preserved letters. This *argumentum ex silentio* can be raised as an illustration of the ancient Roman mindset, in which the existence of slaves was obvious, unquestionable and not worthy of mention. Cicero’s opinion that the exercise of power is for the benefit of the slave, and that nature itself selects the better ones to rule “the weak,” is one way to explain his silence about the majority of the human property he owned.<sup>40</sup> If mentioned, the slaves are referenced through their function, not by name, except in three cases, two of which are forced because Cicero is trying to take legal actions against the slaves. Except for his secretary, Tiro, the reference to slaves occurs only when they displease Cicero—as was typical for a Roman slave-owner. A review of these references is available in the scholarly research.<sup>41</sup>

Let us mention them briefly, for they illustrate the views presented in *De re publica*. Cicero’s fond language towards Tiro, his secretary (*es mihi carissimus*), at times stressing the slave’s humanity (*humanitas*), leads us to believe he treated him differently to others whom he owned, and so decided to grant him manumission.<sup>42</sup> This stance, however, does not contradict the view of natural slavery, for, as Aristotle argued and Cicero repeated, not all slaves are necessarily natural slaves.<sup>43</sup> Manumission did not translate into entry into the realm of free citizens, however; Tiro’s continued work for Cicero demonstrates that his manumission meant further ties with the family and a decrease in the degree of personal dependence, not its total abolition. Even after manumission, Tiro was reminded of his subordination to the family, as the letter he exchanged with Cicero’s brother Quintus shows. In that letter, Quintus informed Tiro that he fantasized about giving him a proper beating, merely because Tiro did not arrive when Quintus wanted him to. This does make one wonder—following

38 Loughlin, 2019, 4.

39 M. Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, London 2015, 328–329.

40 Cic., rep. 3.36–37 (OCT 2006, 106–107).

41 Beard, 2015, 238–333.553.

42 Cic., fam. 16.14 (*ad Tironem*).

43 Cic., rep. 3.37 (OCT 2006, 107).

Mary Beard—whether this was just a bad joke, or a firm reminder of the power still exercised over Tiro by the entire family.<sup>44</sup>

Manumission was also reversible, as the case of Chrysippus, Cicero's librarian, shows. Chrysippus is one of the three slaves, apart from Tiro and Dionysius, ever called by name in Cicero's letters. Both Dionysius and Chrysippus were librarians, and both were accused by Cicero of theft, which is why some historians wonder if this was not a sign of some kind of paranoia about his library possessions.<sup>45</sup> Chrysippus was granted manumission, but when ordered to accompany Cicero's son and nephew during a journey, he escaped. Apparently, the prospect of being an illegal outcast was more appealing than being Cicero's manumitted worker. The former owner thus investigated the legal possibility of enslaving Chrysippus again by lying that the manumission never took place, and hence displaying a rather vindictive approach.<sup>46</sup> Another librarian, Dionysius, also attempted to escape, and Cicero again showed the same attitude. He wrote to his friend who lived in an area where the runaway slave had been seen, asking him to spy on the escaped slave. These efforts led to nothing, but the letters gave Cicero an opportunity to describe a fantasy of his, one of torture: he wanted to see Dionysius paraded in shackles as a captive during a triumphal procession through Rome.<sup>47</sup>

Himself eventually a victim of this system in which dignity meant power over another life, Cicero played by the ranks and rules of the Roman world. Although later "baptized" by some Christian thinkers, his mindset was not at odds with the Roman social and economic order built on the principle of the systemic exploitation of people captured, bred and forced to live as slaves of masters. The Ciceronian theoretical approach to slavery is well-researched, but to address the idea that Cicero hinted at human dignity, it is worth illustrating those views with an overview of his less well-known practical attitude towards the people he owned. In doing so, one finds an elitist approach to humankind, one that limits *dignitas* to a virtue of the upper echelons of society.

### 6.2.6 *Is Imago Dei the Main Christian Justification for Human Dignity?*

Ancient Christians justified human exceptional dignity by a number of factors, such as Christ's incarnation, redemption, human iconicity, *capacitas Dei* (meaning a designed nature capable of serving as a vessel of divine life), the

44 Beard, 2015, 333.

45 Beard, 2015, 332.

46 Cic., Att. 7.2 (LCL 8, 19–20).

47 Cic., fam. 5.9 (*Publius Vanitius ad Ciceronem*); 5.10a (*Publius Vanitius ad Ciceronem*); 13.77 (*Cicero ad Sulpicium Rufum*); Beard, 2015, 331.

final positioning of the making of human beings in the act of creation, and participation in God's glory, as well as humanity's microcosmic nature. Among these factors, reflections concerning the incarnation and redemption play a key role and, when compared with the creation of human beings in God's image, they overshadow it, yielding dignity greater than the one bestowed upon human beings during creation.

The doctrine of human iconicity forms a persistent thread in Christian anthropology and a solid foundation for the theory of human dignity. It originated from ancient Judaism, and its elitist versions, applicable to kings and rulers, were present in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures. Greek philosophers also admitted that human beings bear likeness to God by virtue of reason. The Christian approach to the notion of *imago Dei* is transformed, however, by the doctrine of incarnation and redemption. The ancient Christians differentiated "the icon of God" before sin and "the icon of the earth" or "of the snake" after sin. Faltonia Betitia Proba even named a category *imago tristis*, "the sad icon," descriptive of Adam hiding from God in the Garden of Eden. God's incarnation was taken to be an event that would provide the misshapen images of God with an exemplary ideal through which all others were made God-like again. Hence, some Christians, such as Gregory of Nazianzus, described the Last Judgement as the judgement of the likeness to the archetype. Although they understood themselves to be consistent with Judaism, from which they developed, ancient Christians accentuated God's incarnation as their own focal belief, including in their interpretation of the doctrine of iconicity. If iconicity is therefore referenced in Christian writings on human axiology, it is transformed in the light of the doctrine of incarnation and the teaching of redemption.

When analyzing anthropological topics, such as human dignity, Christians typically incorporated the novel notion of incarnation, which is why they discussed two kinds of dignity, one of creation and one of incarnation, that formed a link between God's humiliation and the human attainment of dignity: God was humiliated so we could be dignified. This is also why they engaged in speculation concerning dignity as a price to be paid for the human creature during redemption. The idea of redemption makes up a dominant part of ancient Christian deliberations on human dignity, including the discussions of iconic creation.

Nonetheless, the two main patristic factors in justifying dignity—iconic creation and incarnation leading to redemption—can be compared with one another in terms of their philosophical value. Let us consider one possible criticism. One could argue that the description of human creation in the image and likeness of God is far more abstract, and hence more universally applicable,

than unity with God achieved by His incarnation into one specific example of human nature. It might be argued that the creation of a human being applies to all humans without exception, whereas God uniting with human nature selects and praises one particular sex and nation. Through incarnation, God has, after all, united with a man of Israel, not with humanity as such. It could therefore be argued that human creation in God's image and likeness is a better candidate for the justification of human dignity than the incarnation, because it is more universal.

This line of thought, suggesting that some (e.g., women or non-Semitic ethnicities) are excluded from (or at least less included in) the most dignifying aspect of the human condition, incarnation, will not hold if considered in the theological context to which it belongs. There are philosophical arguments to be considered against it as well. First, let us consider the philosophical background to this criticism, and then move on to the theological one. Incarnation cannot, in principle, be abstract, because it must apply to this or that specific human individual—one with a concrete sex, height, weight, skin color, hair and eye color, and even a particular type of nose, or mode of gesture. If there is to be incarnation at all, it needs to take some specific human form. It is possible to interpret human creation as the creation of an abstract humankind, not of this or that particular man. Indeed, the Biblical creation of Adam has been interpreted in this way—for example, by Gregory of Nyssa. It is therefore possible to interpret the creation of a human being purely abstractly, and so as universally applicable to all human beings, whereas the act of incarnation is situated in a concrete time and place and applies to one particular individual who cannot possess abstract features (e.g., a different embodiment, height, or weight). It would not have been incarnation had it been deprived of the particularity that lies at the heart of being a human being: humans are individual, after all. They are also physical, and it belongs to the nature of a material object that it possesses specific features. All such features are necessarily individualized into having this particular tint and tone of flesh, and this particular shape and size. Incarnation, if it is to be incarnation—going inside the flesh—must take some particular form.

Second—and more importantly—Christian tradition and theology never argued that, due to their phenotypic and genetic closeness to Christ, Mary of Nazareth, or her parents, Jesus's only biological grandparents, Anna and Joachim, have a greater claim on human dignity than all other people. The incarnation did take place in a Jewish family and Jewish flesh, but this very fact has never been interpreted as a reason for understanding God's unity with people as graded and as translating into a greater or lesser degree of dignity based on a greater or lesser degree of genetic or phenotypic similarity to



Christ. Both theology and various Christian traditions make it clear that the core meaning of the incarnation is God's unity with humankind. The Gospel explicitly contradicts this line of thought (Luke 8:19–21): Jesus argues that his real blood relatives are those who listen to the word of God and fulfil it. The first disciples did not even provide the details of Jesus's physical appearance. Therefore, although incarnation cannot but be an act of God taking on human nature in one particular form, this particularity was never the point. In fact, the Gospels describe Christ's physique after resurrection as variable, which is why his disciples did not recognize Him. It is not the particularity of Jesus's form that is crucial, but the humility of God in stooping to unite with a creature by taking on its nature. If similarity to Christ is ever a point in Christianity, it is the similarity of heart and virtue. Additionally, as we saw, Christians distanced themselves from the idea of nobility of birth, for "they are more capable before God who are commended by the sanctity of life, not by family nobility." Finally, theology describes Jesus's body as remaining in the form of a Eucharist that unites with all human beings on equal terms. If anyone, therefore, objects to Jesus's depiction as a Semitic male, they formulate a criticism abstracted from the teachings in which the theory is embedded. To incorporate a circumstantial factor such as family connections into a paradigm of thought that condemns "favoritism of persons" would undermine some of the core teachings of that paradigm.

### 6.2.7 *Were Human Beings Considered Inferior to Angels?*

One scholarly opinion has suggested that patristic writers assumed human beings to be placed below angels in the hierarchy of beings, and not at "the apex of creation."<sup>48</sup> Let us review some of the ideas researched, specifically in light of what has just been said about the incarnation occupying a central place in the patristic axiological anthropology. Anthropocentric finalism was common among the Greek Fathers, who, like Gregory of Nyssa and Nemesius, treated the human being as the final and best of creatures, one introducing harmony to the otherwise incomplete world. An idea that human status is equal to or above that of angels was adopted by Athanasius of Alexandria and Basil the Great. In the West, Leo the Great's first comprehensive theory of human dignity includes a repeated view of human dignity's superiority over the archangelic orders. Still in the late patristic period, Gregory the Great confirmed that human dignity was elevated above or made equal to that of angels through the incarnation. The repeated argument for humanity's overall superiority is that

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48 Kent, *In the Image of God*, in: Debes (ed.), 2017, 75.

of the incarnation: human nature is the only one shared by God, which privilege is not granted to other rational beings.

Augustine, however, holds the view that perfection of nature is only one criterion of a being's place in the hierarchy, and it is often overlooked that he added another criterion, the rule of justice; the latter can outweigh the former, but not the other way around. To overlook the point that an assault on justice can lower a being's place in the hierarchy of natures below a less perfect, yet just creature is to depict only half of Augustine's view.

#### 6.2.8 *Did the Ancient Christians Have Little to Say about Human Dignity?*

I began this book by quoting some histories of human dignity which state that Christian Antiquity (as well as the Christian Middle Ages) have "little to say" about human dignity. In fact, as I have demonstrated, quite the contrary is the case—it is because of Christian antiquity that we say, "human dignity." The quoted utterance, employing the concept of "human dignity," used these words because a number of Christian writers coined the category. To use a colloquialism, Jerome of Stridon, Augustine of Hippo, Prosper of Aquitaine, and Leo the Great put the phrase *dignitas hominis* into our mouths, even when we use their words to deny they had anything to do with them. There is a link—perhaps an unlikely and unknown one, as well as distant, and yet, a link—between the creator of Vulgate scribbling in his eremite's cell in Bethlehem around the year 397 or Leo the Great presenting his Christmas sermons to the public in Rome and a mention of "human dignity" in English and some Roman languages. Naturally, their ideas were dependent on the divergent cultural processes we listed above, and represent only one reason why we speak of human *dignity* today. Nevertheless, Jerome and others remains one reason why we do so.

The early Christian writings comprise an unavoidable chapter in the history of the concept. Naturally, causal links between the facts of intellectual history are not marked by the necessity that is typical of physical processes, and one could put forward the counter-argument that, regardless of e.g. the Christian eremite reading Origen in Bethlehem, it still would have been Pico della Mirandola, Marcilio Ficino, or some other Renaissance thinker, possibly Dłuski or Trzciana, who would have come up with the concept of "human dignity." The evident counterfactuality of this argument is only one of its weaknesses. Another, more substantial one, is that the tradition of formulating axiological appeals to know one's dignity, of which Jerome's speech is a part, forms a repeated practice linking ancient and medieval texts in a continual process, one persistent enough to exclude the likelihood of any of these appeals being detached linguistic and cultural incidents. One cannot regard the early axiological appeals as being of no consequence to later linguistic practices of the

same kind. It is, therefore, not only the fact that Jerome, Augustine, Prosper, and Leo coined the phrase “human dignity” before Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, and all others, but that their practice was then continually picked up through later ages, reaching Pico and Ficino, who used the notion that had already been present in their culture for centuries.

If, however, the occurrence of the exact wording “human dignity” or “great human dignity” in Jerome’s or Leo’s writings is still too “little” an input to the history of human dignity, let us add that the ancient Christians had much—if not the most—to say about dignity, when one looks at the numbers. The greatest exposure to the notion of human dignity was provided to the European people by Leo the Great through the prayer he included in the Christmas liturgy. The number of people partaking in Mass celebrations across the generations, who were thus exposed to the idea of human dignity contained in the prayer, is unrivalled. Pico della Mirandola’s famous *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, for that matter, could not have been read by so many people as those exposed to “human dignity” through the Church’s services throughout the ages. The egalitarian character of the Church, addressing representatives of all social levels, provided further advantages for the concept broadcast at altars. When Leo included the prayer emphasizing the idea of human dignity in the liturgy, he offered this new-born category an exposure to numerous generations of listeners to Mass celebrations. Therefore, ancient Christians had much to say about human dignity, when one considers the statistics.

### 6.3 The Threefold Symbol of Nativity

Finally, let us refer to the scene of Nativity, which could serve as the most concise summary of the investigation heretofore performed: of the investigated facts there were, features of dignity that still are, and an indicator of some studies that yet may be.

First, Bethlehem with its scene of nativity of Jesus’s birth symbolizes a number of formulated historical observations about the crucial moments in the history of the concept of human dignity. Among them is the creation of the Basilica of the Nativity, which has served since about 333 as the longest continuously-working Christian temple; Jerome’s work in Bethlehem, where *dignitas hominis* was used; and Pope Leo’s proclamation of the concept to the wider public through Roman altars as well as the liturgy of Christmas. All these historical observations might be adapted, clarified or specified by further research.

Second, the scene demonstrates a philosophical truth of dignity's justification in incarnation, a prelude to redemption, which comprised the main justification of human worth in Christian Antiquity. A number of philosophical arguments, principles and features pertaining to human value were spelled out through reflection upon the incarnation and redemption: dignity's incommensurability, its inherence, its unearned character and—due to its dual origin—its transcendentality.

Finally, the scene of nativity can serve as a pointer for further studies into the history of the concept of human dignity, which in the Middle Ages was often discussed in relation to Christ's birth and during Christmas speeches. Due to the continued reflection upon the topic of Nativity, dignity comprised a recurring theme, not just in specialized philosophical or theological circles but also in the commonly-available discourse of medieval Christendom.

#### 6.4 An Idea Old and New

The European landscape of human dignity contains areas of rare beauty, which have long remained hidden. Although we live in times that proclaim the idea of human dignity as a global heritage, the roots of this legacy remain neglected. Having followed the ancient imperative to know one's dignity, we wandered into the land of ancient Christianity and unearthed the hidden gems of European culture: Basil the Great's argument for humanity's infinite value; Nemesius's encomium of the human being; and Jerome's wonder at the respect shown to the human beings and his appeal, *vide hominis dignitatem*. Then, in the bright daylight we found that the newborn category was brought from Bethlehem to Rome's most distinguished altars, whence it resonated throughout the vast lands of a developing Christendom and Europe, henceforth proclaiming *magna dignitas hominis* and urging *agnosce, o homo, dignitatem tuam!* The ancient voices of Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Nemesius of Emesa, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon, Augustine of Hippo, Leo the Great, Prosper of Aquitaine, and Gregory the Great can still be heard today, even if few can discern what they speak of: the forgotten treasure of universal human dignity—an idea so old and yet ever new.



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The book examines the late ancient history of one pivotal concept of contemporary culture, that of human dignity, with the view to identifying the moment in history when European culture worked out a systematic category for human axiological status. Whereas some studies concentrate on the notion of dignity in the Renaissance, suggesting that the earlier Christian thought emphasized human insignificance, this analysis reveals that it was the patristic writers who undertook the decisive rethinking of human dignity, primarily in light of the incarnation and the introduction of the feast of Christmas. The volume traces the transformation of the culturally prevalent ancient maxim of self-knowledge (“know thyself”) into an axiological appeal (“know thy dignity”) claiming that it was within that tradition that “*dignitas hominis*” was popularized and entered the European mindset. In order to demonstrate the lasting changes, the volume outlines patristic axiology’s reception in the Middle Ages.

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