ENGLISH SUMMARY

There can be no doubt that there is a link between early Christian statements on human dignity and the corresponding modern concept, as it appears ever more frequently in current bioethical debates, or most recently in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. Indeed, academic dictionaries mention "Cicero" or "stoic thinking" in addition to the biblical concept of "man as created in the image of God", as having determined the "early Christian and medieval position".[1594] 15th century humanists and theorists of modern human rights referred to these concepts. All of this is without doubt correct. However, this study attempts to show that the idea of an "organic" development from Greek philosophy via Cicero on to the Church Fathers, who were familiar with Gen. 1, and eventually to medieval theology, is highly misleading, because the situation is far more complex. The emerging of such a concept of human dignity was, in retrospect, unpredictable and is indeed remarkable.

The study identifies a number of discontinuities and almost unbridgeable gaps: between biblical and platonic anthropology; between a platonic and a stoic perception of humanity; between gnostic and antignostic cosmology; between biblically based criticism of human culture on the one hand and *heilsgeschichtlichem* cultural optimism on the other hand; between Greek and Roman thinking. Thus, it was not until the second half of the fourth century that two quite different, but related, theological concepts came close to forming a synthesis, or at least to finding a balance between all these antagonistic efforts of ancient anthropology: by Cappadocian anthropology in the east, especially that of Gregory of Nyssa, whose thought has influenced eastern theology in this respect up to the present day, and by Augustine in the west, who succeeded in formulating a convincing *Begriff* (term) of human dignity in the light of the aforementioned antagonisms. Augustine managed to relate the core idea of the biblical teaching on creation to philosophical heritage in such a manner that a sustainable concept emerged which still influences ethical thinking today—not least in terminology.

Hence, one should rather ask how this could happen *despite* the enormous anthropological differences of the biblical and philosophical starting points. The answer to this is anything but simple, and certainly

---

[1594]   C.f. only R.P. Horstmann, Art. Menschenwürde: HWP 5 (1980) 1124.

warrants a closer look at the anthropological ideas of the early Christian thinkers.

As a general rule, the Church Fathers based their anthropology on a more or less dichotomous, trichotomous, or even dualistic concept of humanity, and thus followed prevalent philosophical thinking in this regard. Most Christian authors, however, ran into difficulties because of this when dealing with biblical texts. The Hebrew Bible in particular knows little of the body-soul dualism which posed a serious difficulty for Christian teaching on the creation—a difficulty that was appreciated (or at least sensed) as early as the second century. However, New Testament writings also caused problems: the second century witnessed the first anthropological discussion in connection with the question of a bodily resurrection, because the New Testament accounts of faith could not easily be harmonised with Hellenistic thought.

Gravity and urgency was added to the problem due to the success of gnostic thinking within the Christian community. "Gnostic anthropology" meant a massive devaluation of created human soul and body. With it came a denial of any special human dignity within creation, which was deemed to be tainted and worthless. However, the two *tractatus de resurrectione* discussed here stress the importance of the resurrection of created bodies and created souls. It is in this context that the term "dignity of man" (τὸ ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) is first mentioned. Theophilus of Antioch uses it explicitly in an anti-gnostic sense. Indeed, gnostic thought enticed a number of Christian thinkers to reflect on the history of creation as portrayed in Genesis 1-3. Most notably, Irenaeus of Lyon developed his influential theory of *recapitulatio* by drawing on St. Paul and the Septuagint version of Gen. 1:26. The creation of mankind was henceforth seen in the much wider context of *Heilsgeschichte*. Not only did Adam's fall provide for a crucial explanation of the torn state of man who experiences—albeit created in the perfect image of God—his earthly existence as highly deficient. It also raised hopes for a successful *recapitulatio* through Jesus Christ, if only at the end of time. Philon of Alexandria had already thought along similar lines using the distinction of *Eikon* and *Homoiosis* for his anthropological concept. As a result, human body and created soul experienced a substantial theological revaluation—despite the prevalent and strengthening ascetic tendencies in Christianity. A long and fierce literary debate eventually led to a *consensus* on the resurrection of the *whole* human being who would thus have to be equipped with the creator's particular dignity.

Genesis' anthropologically monistic creation account, with its perception of God's image linked to the dominion of man over all

creation, could not be easily reconciled with the popular hellenistic anthropologies of the time—especially in the light of second and early third century apologists (Aristides, Athenagoras, Justin, Minucius Felix, Tertullian) accusing pagans of having too humanlike, anthropomorphic gods. Such progress was made by Alexandrian theology in its discussion of platonic anthropology during the third century that a solution seemed imminent for many. Such thinking was, of course, greatly indebted to the exegetic insights of Philon. In the context of the debate on the resurrection, Justin Martyr had already identified platonic Logos and the Logos-Christ from John 1 and thus paved the way for harmonising the message of the resurrection, Christian paranesis, and philosophy's definition of man as ζῷον λογικόν: humans were selected for resurrection and redemption by the Logos, because they are able to use reason in order to recognise the will of the Logos and to act accordingly. However, the danger of devaluing the body became instantly apparent. Tatian's attempt to blend gnostic teaching on the three natures with faith in creation and salvation by one and the same God lead to a radical encratic ethos—which was designed to bring back the original state of man "by force", as it were. This model, however, did not survive except in some sectarian encratic communities.

Clement of Alexandria presented a much more promising synthesis of biblical, platonic, and stoic ideas. He combined the theory of Homoiosis with Platon's *Gottesschau* (viewing God) to which man is destined due to his *status rectus*, as an upright being. This he can achieve through—stoic!—ἀπάθεια. Not only did Clement thereby rehabilitate the created soul, the created body and their respective capabilities, but this theory also accommodated man's special dignity (δόξα in Clement) and place within the universe. Origen was able to take up this idea. He specified the terminology in a number of instances and based the Alexandrian argument on much firmer biblical ground through his extensive exegetical work. He, too, was aware of the tension between platonic thinking and biblical texts. A solution was sought by relating the "image of God" to man's inner self. The human soul exists prior to creation and is ontologically related to God. Hence, it is able to view and to recognise God, and to strive for similarity with God. Remarkably, this does not lead Origen radically to devalue the human body. Instead he concedes a dignity or rather an honour (τιμή) derived from the soul's divine dignity—which merits a dignified funeral for any human body.

Origen's anthropological concept dominated the debate for a long time. Declared and secret followers (Eusebios, Athanasios, Didymos, Jerome), however, faced at least some opposition. Arnobius denounced Origen's teaching on the soul's divine kinship as hybris. Methodios was more influential still with his fight against Platonism and

Origenism. He was utterly opposed to any idea of a kinship of creator and creation. Instead, he investigated the exact characteristics of God's created human beings. Their members could not, he argued, be pre-existent, but nevertheless their *creatio ex nihilo* merited a certain dignity derived from their creator—even if it was lost through the fall, and had to be regained through baptism and resurrection. Epiphanios of Salamis reproached Origen for his denial of the human image of God by reducing it to the human inner self. By drawing on arguments from the resurrection debate of the second century he demonstrated that central anthropological questions seemed to be unresolved yet again. Indeed, eastern theology was far from any consensus in anthropological matters in the mid fourth century.

Something of a successful synthesis was eventually reached by the Cappadocian fathers who managed to integrate all of the aforementioned questions and problems into a precarious balance which would prevail for a long time in eastern theology. Part of its secret was its foundation on extensive exegetic studies. Gregory of Nyssa especially found a convincing formula which blended the teaching of Homoiosis with that of a twofold nature in order to view together biblical, platonic, and stoic elements in a new way. The idea of a first creation of a divine human nature and a second creation of a sexual and passionate human nature maintained platonic ethics and epistemology without sacrificing the teaching on *creatio ex nihilo* or the special dignity of the whole human being with all his or her (ethical) possibilities and responsibilities within God's creation. Philon's and Origen's ideas were thus successfully transferred into a model which would indeed be able to cope with Christian life in this world as well. Basil's pondering on the ethical duties deriving from such an understanding of man's τιμή and his dominion over creation implied by being created in the image of God, or Gregory Nazianzen's praise of creation, merely completed such a programme.

John Chrysostom not only supplied further insights into practical ethics in this light, but also reflected on illness and death or purity and impurity in this context. Again, this lead to stressing the *one* φύσις which unites all mankind, and merits a dignity which can indeed be violated. Finally, Nemesios' model of a unity of all creation shows how Christian cosmology and anthropology had altogether stopped questioning the teaching of the goodness and beauty of creation and the dignity of (hu)man in the early fifth century (if this traditional dating is correct) without having to refer to the "image of God" at all.

Having thus overcome gnostic cosmology, a consensus finally emerged about a more positive conception of human creation and man's unique position in the universe as witnessed by the biblical accounts.

Given the starting point in the philosophical tradition, this was by no means to be expected and can hardly be explained without the crucial role of the Septuagint version of Gen. 1f. Its distinction between *imago* und *similitudo* was highly attractive, because it seemed to solve *the* main problem of Christian anthropology: the rupture between the "good" creation of man (according to Genesis) and his fundamental sinfulness which warranted the eschatological focus of Christian teaching. After Irenaeus' theory of *recapitulatio* gave some hope of regaining the original divine state of man, later authors turned this idea in a more ethical direction: *similitudo* was understood as a realistic perspective of an ethically sound human life prolonged in an eschatological perspective. Thus, a number of fundamental insights of pagan philosphy and ethics could be interpreted in the light of the creation account. Discrepancies between empirical human beings and "true man" could be seen in the context of *Heilsgeschichte*. This explains the enormous success of the Homoiosis ethos in eastern theology: prevalent ascetic ideals based on a dichotomic anthropology constantly clashed with biblical anthropology, but the teaching of Homoiosis justified both exegetically and helped to harmonise biblical and Greek anthropology.

The idea of human dignity seems almost something of a random by-product of this development, and it was by no means a central theologoumenon. Man's creation in the image of God and his capability for ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ were actually quite alien concepts to a wide range of Greek philosophical thought. Hence, it came as no surprise that the Old Testament teaching of man's unique position within creation (cf. Gen. 1:28 or Ps. 8:6) led to only a hesitant formation of a special "dignity" of man in some eastern theological writings. *Explicit* statements about this dignity are by no means as widespread as those about man as created in the image of God. They result from a question caused by the anthropological clash of hellenistic dichotomy and ascetic thinking referring to the eschatological dimension of the human soul with the Old Testament message that was based on a monistic and collective concept of humanity. Even the consensus reached in the late fourth century failed to bring about an appropriate terminology for its results. The variety of words used in this context such as δόξα or τιμή demonstrate this difficulty—despite attempts to define human dignity with precise terms like μεγαλοφυία.

Nevertheless, the east did form a concept of a special human dignity. The importance of Christian ethical preaching (Chrysostom) for spreading the idea of an ἴση τιμή of all human beings cannot be over-estimated. The semantic pair of Christian humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη) and human dignity experienced an astonishing career. While Clement struggled a great deal when he tried to reconcile New Testament

humility with the Greek philosophical tradition, Origen and later theologians came to the conclusion that the distinct Christian tradition of *humilitas* was man's only appropriate response to his given dignity. Again, the fruitfulness of the tension between the antagonistic biblical and philosophical traditions for the development of the concept of human dignity becomes apparent (cf. Basil's work *De humilitate*). The writings of the Cappadocian Fathers clearly demonstrate how important the glorification of man's creation and his subsequent dignity—derived from God, not from within creation—had become by the end of the fourth century. However, the terminology for all this still remained quite flexible for a very long time, and thus the debate continued into Byzantine times (Origen was not condemned in this context until 553).

Despite much mutual influence, the west witnessed a rather different development of a concept of human dignity. Tertullian already uses the term *dignitas* which was to provide a fruitful semantic model for dealing with the main anthropological problems. His defence of *carnis dignitas* again demonstrates the productive importance of Gnosis for the development of Christian theology. Minucius Felix, Lactantius and Ambrose use the old Roman term *dignitas* in a negative sense in order to express the newness of the Christian universe of values: Christians do not require worldly *dignitas* in order to gain respect from other human beings. Augustine, however, took up these traditions in order to create a comprehensive theory of human dignity using a completely new reinterpretation of the old Roman concept of *dignitas*.

Augustine's teaching on the *dignitas* and *honos* of human nature not only convincingly addressed the anthropological concerns of contemporary Christian theology, but he also reconciled them with the epistemological and ethical implications of Scripture. This was only possible by creatively using a system of positive values and virtues which this study calls *altrömische Wertetextur* ("old Roman texture of values"). It is not a philosophical or ontological system which in a sense prevents a conventional systematic presentation. In Augustine's day, the legitimising foundation of *altrömische Wertetextur* had already been outdated for some time. Rather, it referred to an ideal image of a bygone (republican) epoch with which his contemporaries were still well acquainted and on which Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Lactantius and Ambrose had already based some of their rhetoric. However, these Fathers did not simply "apply" *altrömische Wertetextur*, but instead employed it using a wide range of references, contradictions, antitheses, revaluations, reformulations and semantic recreations. In order to make this process transparent, the study includes an excursion into the Christian teaching on *bellum iustum* as just one example—it might just

as well have been into other values from *altrömische Wertetextur* such as *libertas* or *tolerantia*.

However, it is the old Roman term *dignitas* which Augustine chose to employ in order to achieve a remarkable synthesis and reformulation of the Christian anthropological concept of human dignity. By doing this he not only successfully incorporates the concept of a special, responsible position of man in Kosmos (analogous to that of a *patronus* in an ideal Roman society), but also the goals of eastern Homoiosis ethics. *Dignitas* is connected to both rank and dominion derived from God's and Christ's dignity and a corresponding ethical Telos. The manifold aesthetic implications of *dignitas* within *altrömische Wertetextur* subtly addressed the differences between biblical and philosophical anthropology, because then the whole human being with his or her creator's *dignitas* irreversibly came into focus: the aesthetic angle includes bodily presence which forbids any anthropological reduction to the inner self. Augustine thus did not reactivate the republican *altrömische Wertetextur*, but rather interpreted it— based on scripture—in a totally new way.

The insignificance of *altrömische Wertetextur* in the east (which Cicero had already stressed) explains the difference in approaches. However, western and eastern theology together took the probably decisive step towards the subsequent development of European thought when they firmly connected anthropology and all its controversial questions of soul-body-dichotomy, bodily resurrection, origin of the soul, etc. to ethics. A comparison to, say, Plotin's neoplatonic anthropology makes the difference quite clear, and also explains the great impact and success of Christian anthropology. Of course, Clement, Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine are all greatly indebted to neoplatonic thinking when one considers their perception of *contemplatio* or divine *ratio*. However, Christian theology not only allowed Christians to discern between good and evil in their everyday deeds, but even to relate to the Divine through conscious, active and public involvement in *this* life—a powerful alternative to a neoplatonic's retreat into passive and private contemplation. Formally and even liturgically ordered communication with God stood side by side with ethically reflected everyday action.

This is the reason why two final chapters on Christian practice had to be included, if only to make some additional exemplary excursions in order to show the mutual interdependance of anthropology and life. Those immediately associated with anthropological consi-derations (abortion, abandonned babies, people with disabilities) show a remarkable consistency within Christian thinking, especially in the light of all the contemporary doctrinal differences and conflicts. Abandonning

babies and abortion were universally condemned (such a historical observation cannot, of course, dispense with a careful consideration of the matter in the moral philosophy of the 21st century). A number of arguments from the anthropological discussion appear which shaped these opinions. In short, two levels can be discerned, one "creationist" (*Schöpfungstheologie*) and one "teleological" which incorporated Logos theological concerns. They somehow demonstrate the different state of anthropological reflexion, but must also have influenced Christian anthropology in a number of details such as the development and animation of the human embryo. Looking into those sometimes difficult anthropological theories may actually help us to understand ancient theology as, say, Tertullian's views on the soul's animation, Clement's epistemology or Lactantius' perception of the honour of God the creator which has to be guarded against human sacrilege.

Looking at people with disabilities and epilepsy and their participation in Christian life and worship opens up yet new facets of the interdependence and interaction between Christian anthropological thinking and practice. Especially the controversial discussion of the pre-Constantine Christian cult amid pagan attacks on its inclusivity reveals parallel developments in Christian anthropological theory and Christian life. This concerned not only matters of rank and prestige, but also of physical and mental capabilities which were viewed quite differently in light of different anthropological concepts, for example those of gnostics and defenders of the physical resurrection. For Justin Martyr baptism gave credence to his Logos-anthropology, for Tertullian baptism was pivotal for experiencing the anthropological distinction of *similitudo* and *imago Dei*. Baptism addressed the anthropological condition after the fall by accessing the Holy Spirit. Eastern ὁμοίωσις τοῦ θεοῦ-ethics on the other hand could draw on the eastern tradition of prayer. Clement's definition of prayer as a continuous dialogue with God found an analogy in a "dialogical" understanding of the anthropological relation between Creator and created. Again, a mutual influence between anthropology and Christian practice can be observed here.

The new formation of Christian worship after Constantine was accompanied by a subtle reception of Old Testament ideas which led to new ritual differentiations. A reassessment and reinterpretation of conventional social values and more elaborate considerations of purity and impurity stood side by side, which again raised the issue of the value and dignity of the human body. Hellenistic dichotomy and the ascetic tendencies of early Christian theology created a tension with regard to the teaching of the image of God and Jesus' preaching. This is perhaps where the most significant contribution of ritual practice to the anthropological debate is to be found: some of the major innovations of

Christianity came from a different approach to (Jewish and pagan) perceptions of impurity which could not but have an impact on anthropological reflexion. Not least the ritual burial of human remains kept the question of the dignity and value of the human body alive. Origen's or Chrysostom's thoughts were clearly influenced by this. One may almost be inclined to see some justice in the coincidental, but most prominent reappearance of the Augustinian *dignitas hominis* in early medieval mass liturgy. In any case, however, the history of the idea of the "dignity of (hu)man" cannot be recounted appropriately without taking into consideration the complex matrix of Christian theory and practice, piety and theological reflexion, ethics, liturgy and theological anthropology.

Turning to the current debate on human dignity, there are at least three issues to be considered in the light of its ancient "roots" within this history of ideas: firstly, it should have become clear that "dignity of man" is not an invention of the Enlightenment or modern times. A knowledge of the—admittedly complex—intellectual arguments and debates on anthropology in antiquity seems to me fundamental to understanding what human dignity is, can be, and perhaps should be. One may wish that future intellectual histories on the idea of human dignity will be more conscious of this and make more use of the wealth of thought in the ancient sources. This even includes very minute ethical details such as those regarding embryonic animation or dealing with human disabilitites. The history of the medieval and humanist reception of the patristic insights portrayed—and beyond—still has to be written. Secondly, the results of this study may help to modify reductionist views of a "Christian image of man" which suggest "Christianity" had always known about the dignity of man and how to protect it. The patristic genesis of the idea of *dignitas hominis* was immensely complex and anything but free from contradictions, aporiae, errors and dead ends. Finally, the ancient sources examined here show a certain "foreignness" of the patristic world and its anthropological reasoning—despite the current relevance of the topic. A reminder of this may guard us from drawing some short term argumentative strategy from it too readily. Here also lies an opportunity, however, if this insight into the thoughts and inquiries of the ancients brings fresh challenges and questions to our own theological and ethical judgement.