CHAPTER 4

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.

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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.[1] During the heated Christological debate that spawned the

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.[2]

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.[3] 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!")[4] 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),[5] 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: *Omelie 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 adbreviatum (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.[6] Of the mentioned 143 letters (published with an additional thirty from Leon's addressees), the authenticity of only two, numbers 40 and 140, is questioned.[7] 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.

6 A. Hamman, *Prosper of Aquitaine*, in: Di Beradino (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.[8] 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).[9] 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[10] ("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.[11] 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.[12] 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.

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8 I have first described this use in: J. Guerrero van der Meijden, *Późnostarożytne apele o rozpoznanie godności ludzkiej: Bazyli z 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*.[13] ("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.[14] This is made apparent by the practice of addressing speeches dedicated to men only with other vocatives, such as *viri* ("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*.[15] They also remained marginal in medieval Latin.[16] 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,[17] ("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 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.*[18]
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> 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*).[19] And he appealed right after: *Quisque igitur christiano nomine pie et fideliter gloriaris, reconciliationis huius gratiam iusto perpende iudicio*.[20] ("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.[21] Leo appealed one final time, *Agnosce, Christiane, tuae sapientiae dignitatem, et qualium disciplinarum artibus ad quae praemia voceris intellige*[22] ("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 Aquilleia 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*.[23] 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 Nostri*: 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*

23 Leo. M., trac. 21.3 (CCL 138, 88, lineae 70–71).

naturae)[24] or "the dignity of our race" (*dignitas generis nostri*),[25] and ending with superlatives such as "the most splendid dignity" or the "very splendid dignity" (*dignitas speciosissima*) of a human being.[26] 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*)[27], living as if a "ray in the mirror" (*tamquam in speculi nitore*)[28] of God's goodness (*bonitas*),[29] justice (*iustitia*),[30] kindness (*benignitas*),[31] or will (*voluntas*).[32] 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.[33] 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.[34] 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.*[35]
>
> 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.")[36] 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*[37] ("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.[38] ("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.*[39] ("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*).[40]

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.[41] 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*[42] (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.[43] ("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"),[44] because, *nos et misericordia Dei misericordes, et veritas faciat esse veraces*[45] ("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*[46] ("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*),[47] because, *oratione enim propitiatio Dei quaeritur, ieiunio concupiscentia carnis extinguitur, elemosinis peccata redimuntur*[48] ("God's propitiation is sought by prayer, fasting extinguishes concupiscence of the flesh, and almsgiving is an atonement for sins.")[49] 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?*[50] ("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*).[51] 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.[52] 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.[53] 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.[54] 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 comprehendi, ante tempora manens esse coepit ex tempore, universitatis dominus servilem formam obumbrata maiestatis suae dignitate suscepit, inpassibilis Deus non dedignatus est homo esse passibilis, et inmortalis mortis legibus subiacere.*[55]
>
> 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.[56]

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*.[57] ("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*.[58] ("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*.[59]
>
> 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.[60] 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.

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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.[61] 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.[62] 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*.[63]
>
> 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.

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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-1brillonline-1com-11me20vjt1cec.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*)[64] 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.*[65]
>
> 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.[66] 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: Obalanie 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. Gruchoła, *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*,[67] "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

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.*[68] "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*[69] ("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")[70]. Leo adds: *nobis cum* [*est*] *puritas sacrificii, baptismi veritas, honor templi*[71] ("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 inveniantur inmundum*[72] ("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 inplicati, tot species habent diaboli, quot simulacra mendacii.*[73]

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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 universumque 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!*[74]

> 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 rationabilisque materies ad extructionem templi huius adsumitur, et per spiritum gratiae ut voluntarie in unam conpagem congruat incitatur.*[75] ("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*).[76] 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.*[77]
>
> 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,

77 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[78] ("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*[79] ("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.*[80] ("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.*[81] ("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.*[82] ("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 inpendere quod largitur intellegat. ("May the one who supports those in need understand that he spends on God, what he gives away.").[83]

The November 443 sermon, the one that raises the point of respecting the poor, proposes practical, organized engagement for the cause of the poor.[84] 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*[85] ("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*[86] ("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*[87] ("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".[88]

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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.[89] *Sinistris vero quid obicietur, nisi neglectus dilectionis, duritia inhumanitatis et pauperibus misericordia denegata?*[90] ("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*.[91] ("Such rich men are more in need that all those in need.") In Sermon 16, Leo adds: *nihil est uniuscuiusque tam proprium quam quod inpendit in proximum*.[92] ("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*.[93] ("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*.[94] ("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*.[95] ("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."[96]

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[97] or as the leader of the Church in general.[98] At times, dignity is also used in reference to Peter's "episcopal dignity" (*episcopalis dignitas*),[99] 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*.[100] ("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),[101] as he does in a letter to the bishops of Mauretania Caesariensis, where he (or the Roman Curia) use *dignitas* interchangeably with *honor*.[102] 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.[103] 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*,[104] ("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*)[105] 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.[106] *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, linea 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 psalmorum 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 psalmorum* 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?*[107] ("Lord, what is the human beings that you notice them and what is the Son of Man that you value him?").[108] 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*[109] ("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

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*.[110] ("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?*)[111] ("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*).[112] This first remark shows evident similarity to the second of Jerome's calls: *Videte quanta sit dignitas: et dii vocamur, et filii*[113] ("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*.

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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.[114]

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*,[115] 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?

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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: Γνῶθι σεαυτοῦ τὴν ἀξίαν!—in the Latin translation: *Agnosce dignitatem tuam—Know your dignity!* Also: Σύνες σεαυτοῦ τῆς τιμῆς—in the Latin translation: *Intellige tuam praestantiam!*—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 ἁμαρτίας—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),[116] 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.[117] 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 send by Basil to Ambrose, we know that the two thinkers exchanged correspondence,[118] 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.[119] 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.[120] 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.[121] 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:

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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.*[122]
>
> 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, least 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.[123]

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*).[124] 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' *Hexaemeron*, which is heavily reliant on Basil's *Hexaemeron*, 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*.[125] ("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*.[126] ("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*[127] and *Videte quanta sit dignitas: et dii vocamur, et filii*.[128] 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.

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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).[129] 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*.[130]

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129 Ambr., psal. 118.2,13 (CSEL 62, 27, linea 20).

130 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).[131] 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

131 G. Sobrero, *Catechesi mistagogiche, trinitarie e cristologiche: Inviti alla penitenza*, in: Anonimo Veronese, *Omelie mistagogiche e catechetiche. Edizione critica e studio* (G. Sobrero trans.), Rome 1992, 182–183.187–195.

century were inaccurate.[132] 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.[133]

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.*[134]
>
> 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 forfend, accidently 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 *filii 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.[135] 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.*[136]
>
> 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).

> *conversatione 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*.[137]
>
> 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.[138]

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*.[139] ("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.*)[140] This is why the author of the sermon argues:

> *Hinc intellegamus quanta sit animi dignitas, in quo, si proditionem non operetur voluntas, locum invenire non valet impietas sicut etiam nunc ex hoc triumphalium puerorum certamine intellegi datur.*[141]
>
> 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." (*spiritale bellum non corporis sed animi viribus geritur.*)[142] 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*.[143] 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*.[144]
>
> 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*.[145] We will discuss this treatise in detail in Chapter Five; here, we concentrate on the reception of the Leonian call and ideas.

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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.[146] In his appeal against Gottschalk of Orbais, the author of a predestinarian doctrine,[147] 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*.[148] 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.[149]

Among many references to Leo the Great, Hincmar quotes a passage pertaining specifically to human dignity,[150] one line directly after which a version of an appeal to recognize one's dignity is formulated in Leo's *Tractatus 22*.[151] 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*[152] ("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.*[153] ("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.*[154]
>
> 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.*[155] ("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.*[156]
>
> 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".[157] 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,[158] 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,*

156 Hincm. Rem., praed. 25 (PL 125, 227).

157 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.

158 Bern. Cl., De dil. D. 2 (SBO 3, 121, lineae 15–17).

agnosce gloriam conditionis humanae[159] ("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 commingles 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*).[160] 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.[161] 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*[162] ("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*[163] ("know yourself, for you are my image"). Elaborating on human axiology, he adds: *Tu tibi vilis es, sed pretiosa res es*.[164] ("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 *Beniamin 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*.[165]
>
> 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.[166]

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?*[167] ("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 stylistics 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").[168] 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.*[169]
>
> 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*.[170] 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.[171]

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.[172] 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.*[173] ("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.[174] 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.[175] Aquinas's views on human personhood also stress that human natural design, being a person, is a basis for humanity's great dignity,[176] 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*.[177] 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*[178] 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*.[179]

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.[180]

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.[181] 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.[182] Consequently, Catherine stresses human superiority over the angels, whose nature was not assumed by God.[183] 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!*[184] ("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 inquinet 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.*[185]
>
> 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.[186]

185 Dion. Cart., comm. 3.1, q. 1, col. 2 (DCOO 23, 36).

186 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*.[187] 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

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.[188] In particular, the three oldest sacramentaries, *Sacramentarium Leonianum, Sacramentarium Gelasianum* and *Sacramentarium Gregorianum*, list one prayer attributed to Pope Leo,[189] which introduces not only the concept but also Leo's conception of human dignity right into Christmas celebrations.[190] The earlier sources do not indicate the presence of this prayer in liturgy.[191] 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.[192]

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 Aeclesiae Ordinis Anni Circuli: Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, Rome 1981, no. 27 (p. 10) [orthography in "*Aeclesiae*" 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.[193] 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.[194]

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 mirabilius reformasti: da, quaesumus, nobis Iesu Christi filii tui eius divinitatis esse consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps: per* [*scil. eundem dominum nostrum*].[195]
>
> 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.[196] 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 Sacr. Ver. no. 1239 (p. 157).

196 Sacr. 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.*[197]
>
> 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.*[198]
>
> 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*].[199]

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.[200]

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

200 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.[201] 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.*[202] 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

201 Pratesi, 1991, 9–23.

202 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.