



brücke für afrika
norddeutsche mission



Preserving Human Dignity

Texts of the Theological Consultation 2009

held October 12 - 15, 2009

in E. P. Church Seminary Peki-Blengo, Ghana



We would like to thank all who have taken part in the Theological Consultation of the Bremen Mission from October 12 to 15, 2009 in Peki, Ghana, for their contributions and lively discussion.

Imprint

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Preface

„The Church must stand by those, whose dignity is violated.“

Theological Consultation of the Bremen Mission



Hannes Menke

From October 12 to 15, 2009 the Theological Consultation of the Bremen Mission took place in Peki, Ghana, on the topic “Preserving Human Dignity”. Members of the Church Executives of all six member churches, of the Board and of the Theological Committee of Bremen Mission participated in this conference.

“The Church must stand where God stands, by those whose dignity is endangered or already violated. God calls upon his church to follow him, to oppose any kind of injustice, and to stand by those who have been treated in an unjust manner” says the communiqué of the consultation.

The term of dignity has been discussed during the consultation considering its political-legal, cultural and biblical-theological dimension. Dignity is understood “as the value and demand of every human being to receive esteem and respect”.

Human dignity is given by God and therefore applies to all human beings likewise.

Nevertheless it is to observe that the dignity of people in Germany as well as in Ghana and Togo is violated in many ways, especially by the abuse of political and economic power.

“Power may at the same time be good for dignity or is violating it. Enabling power gives dignity, suppressing power humiliates. “

The participants established in a self-critical way that sometimes even churches violate the dignity of their own members and employees.

In addition they claimed the change of social structures that exercise power in an uncontrolled manner in order to ensure human dignity. Both, governmental as well as non-governmental organisations could together with the churches intercede for this change.

The participants of the consultation confirmed “that the Gospel gives us as Christians and churches enormous strength to help the weak standing up for their rights.” They confirm their will to support one another

in solidarity in their commitment to strengthen suppressed and deprived people in their respective societies.

Finally the participants of the consultation state some concrete points which need the action of their churches. This does concern among other things the intensified advocacy for a just economic order and a fair trade as well as the care for the rights and dignity of refugees. In addition the participants emphasize the need of improvement with regard to the situation of children (concerning child labour and child trafficking) and of the elderly (isolation), as well as the battle against female mutilation. Finally the participants argue for the establishment of safe places for those whose dignity has been violated e. g. by domestic violence. Also in this case the church has to recollect its role as shelter and cure of souls.

Theological Consultations of the Bremen Mission are called up every four years in Ghana, Togo and Germany in turn. The conference always holds a spiritual character: every day starts with a bible study, the meetings are accompanied by prayers and hymns, the Holy Communion closes the conference. The intensive substantial work is done in small groups, with lecturers and in plenum. At the end of the consultation a communiqué is adopted and taken along by the participants in order to communicate and deepen the subjects of the consultation within their churches.

Thus the consultation in Peki decided to celebrate the Partnership Service 2010 of the Bremen Mission on the topic “Preserving Human Dignity” and initiated that the Synods of the six member churches in Germany and Africa shall deal with this topic.

**Hannes Menke
General Secretary Bremen Mission**



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“Preserving Human Dignity“ Communiqué of the Theological Consultation

October 12 – 15, 2009 in Peki, Volta Region, Ghana

1. Who, where and why of the consultation

a. who

Delegates came from the six partner churches of Norddeutsche Mission (Bremen Mission). Among them were the Moderators of Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (EPC), Bremische Evangelische Kirche, Lippische Landeskirche, the Bishop of Evangelisch-lutherische Kirche Oldenburg, the Synod Clerk of Eglise Evangélique Presbytérienne du Togo (EEPT), the Vice-President of Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche, and the President and the General Secretary of Bremen Mission.

Delegates also came from Italy (Communauté d’Action Apostolique, CEVAA), Cameroon (United Evangelical Mission, UEM) and PCGhana.

Resource persons were drawn from academic and other institutions in Germany, Ghana and Togo.

where

E. P. Seminary (Green Hills Campus of EP University), Peki, V.R., Ghana hosted the Consultation. Peki is the historical birthplace of the EPChurch, where the first sermon of the EPChurch was preached by the Bremen Missionary Lorenz Wolf in 1847.

why

Bremen Mission Theological consultations take place regularly every third or fourth year in Togo, Germany or Ghana. They focus on the common mission of the six churches within the international and intercultural network of Bremen Mission.

2. Our Procedure

The meeting had a deeply spiritual character. Prayers and hymns accompanied our sessions and we shared in the Lord’s

Supper in the closing service.

Each of the four days started with worship and bible study, papers and perspectives were presented in plenary, experiences and views from our respective contexts were shared in small groups and plenary. The work in smaller groups helped to intensify exchange of ideas and insights among delegates.

The Lorenz Wolf Memorial EP Church, a local congregation in the Peki Valley welcomed delegates to a Sunday forenoon service and to a Monday evening service where an exhibition of history and work of Bremen Mission was mounted for the first time in Africa.

The work of the consultation was facilitated by the logistics of EP Seminary, Peki. The Bremen Mission is most grateful to the Principal and staff of the Seminary once more for good food and lodging, technical assistance, a cultural evening and a wonderful surrounding.

3. What we recognized in the Bible, by the lectures and in story-telling with one another

- For the purpose of our work we understand dignity as “the worth, value and demand for respect which human being have or which can be attributed or accorded them”.
- In the Bible the word “dignity” does not occur. The Bible-study-leaders turned our attention to divers aspects of human dignity:
 - In case of misuse of power, there is a prophetic voice denouncing that as violation of Human Dignity. (1.Kg.21)
 - Overcoming slavery begun with the respect for the slaves as human beings and



- mutual respect in the Christian community. (Philemon)**
- **Violation of human dignity as part of our reality is not excluded from our Holy Scriptures. Breaking the Silence and referring to the righteousness and justice of God are necessary. (2.Sam.13,1-22)**
 - **Judges should know that there is God as the highest judge over them, so that they respect the rights of the weak. The voiceless are encouraged and supported to raise their voice. (1k.18,2-5)**
 - **Victims can sometimes become victimizers. Advocacy can become dangerous. Who is protecting the advocates? (Mt.14,1-12)**
 - **Victims often are blamed. Jesus restores their dignity. (Joh.8,1-11)**
 - **Human dignity is God-given or divinely ordained. God-given dignity is egalitarian, self-made dignity by own achievement (individualistic society) and society-given dignity (communalistic society) tend to bring inequity.**
 - **The gift of human dignity comes with human duty, what has been referred to us “the twin divine gifts of dignity and duty” (cf.Eph.2,8-10).**
 - **Power can promote and/or violate dignity at the same time. When power empowers then it is dignifying and when it oppresses then it is demeaning.**
 - **The prophetic voice of the church in addressing injustice must be clear and powerful but respectful of the victims and their dignity.**
 - **The alliance between powers (political, economic, cultural, intellectual..) and church can be a hindrance to the correction of violation of human dignity done by them. Sometimes churches themselves violate the dignity of their own members and employees. Jesus restored the dignity of the**
- sick, poor, “sinners”, unclean, demon-possessed, foreigners, children, women and the elderly and urged Christians to do the same. (Mk.1,29-34)**
- **Miracles and deliverances can be understood as restoration of human dignity and a way of reintegrating the excluded into society. Jesus consistently removes the curse of exclusion and re-establishes relationships.**
 - **Often we see ambiguities in the approach to restoring of human dignity. Should the individual rights or the communal/social rights or traditional regulations be given priority?**
 - **Both the individualistic and the communalistic approaches to human dignity are not perfect. They have their strengths, but also their weaknesses.**
 - **Criminals have dignity as any human being – cf. the story of Cain and Jesus and the criminals on the cross. Capital punishment and life long sentences do not promote human dignity. Everyone deserves a second chance. Perpetrators should be treated with dignity as victims are because they are all human beings.**
 - **Categories of violations of human dignity can be distinguished:**
 - **physical violation and limitation of expression of human capacities**
 - **violation by structural misuse of power and by rejection of civil rules**
 - **ignorance and violation of dignity**
 - **Human dignity can be violated in such way as:**
 - **uncontrolled financial, political, military and intellectual power**
 - **absence of solidarity**
 - **ignorance and superstition**
 - **poverty**
 - **silence**
 - **shame**
 - **fear**
 - **gender injustice**
 - **Basic social structures must be improved and new ones put in place to promote human dignity. There are governmental and non**

governmental institutions that collaborate with the churches to promote human dignity.

4. Basic Affirmations

The Bremen Mission Theological Consultation 2009 in Peki, Ghana hereby affirms the following:

- That every human being is divinely endowed with dignity. Therefore every human being has dignity. There are no second class human beings.
- That human dignity is the “Mother” of all human rights.
- That the individual must be protected from the societal atrocities.
- That society must be protected from egoistic abuse of power by individuals and groups.
- That we have a duty to promote and protect human dignity in every sphere of life.
- That in Jesus we have an example how to restore dignity to the poor, sick, strangers, prisoners, unclean, physically and mentally challenged, children, orphans, widows, elderly etc.
- That as Christians and Churches, the Gospel gives us enormous power to empower the powerless.

5. Recommendations and some practical suggestions to the churches

The Bremen Mission Theological Consultation 2009 in Peki, Ghana concluded that the Church must stand where God stands, on the side of those whose dignity is at risk or has been violated. He calls His Church to follow him in this, to stand against any form of injustice and with the wronged. God invites His Church to become part of His mission to preserve and restore human dignity for justice and peace to prevail. Therefore the Consultation calls upon the six Churches of Bremen Mission to:

- Strengthen their advocacy for a just economic order and fair trade in the world (e.g. the cases of Bananas and chicken wings).

- Care for the rights and the dignity of refugees, be they political or economical and to spread information on the true situation of the refugees in Northern Africa and Europe.
- Strengthen their programmes for improving the situation of children and act against child-labour, trafficking, neglect, abuse (e.g. trokosi (shrine-slavery), female genital mutilation and refusal of birth-registration).
- Act against discrimination of physically and mentally challenged people. “There is no second class in human beings” or “It is normal to be different” should be the churches’ approach.
- Promote the integration of elderly people in church and society and support them not only to exist as objects of help, but also as responsible subjects with a regained dignity. Their dignity (especially in case of dementia) often is violated by the overstressed helpers in care homes for the elders. The church parish should become a kind of extended family for them.
- Encourage a culture that dignifies the end of life. Unbalanced expenditure on medical treatment and funerals on the one hand and anonymous funerals on the other hand are challenges for the churches.
- Create a safe space for expression of those whose dignity has been violated, e.g. by domestic violence. The churches must attend to their professional counselling work.
- Review lectionary and liturgy so as to give space to tell biblical and contemporary stories of victims of violence. Texts like 2.Sam.13 should be added to the church calendar of biblical periscopes (e.g. Partnership Sunday).



Bible Studies

Bible Study to 2 Samuel 13,1-22

Why is that people lay violent hands on other people and violate their dignity?

1. The victim Tamar
2. The culprits
3. The cartel of silence
4. The good message

To 1: The victim Tamar

Tamar is the sister of Absalom, a son of David. She is very beautiful and lives as a virgin. In the beginning, everything is quite harmless. Amnon, the half-brother of Absalom, falls in love with his half-sister Tamar. He is sick from love „and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her“. This is the wording. He wants to be in contact with her, but this is not easy because young girls were thoroughly shielded from the men's world. His friend Jonadab conceives a ruse how Amnon could meet Tamar. Amnon follows Jonadab's advice. He pretends to be sick. When he is visited by his father David, he asks him to send Tamar to him in order to care for him. David orders Tamar to go to Amnon. She bakes a cake for him. Amnon watches her kneading the dough and baking the cake.

Up to this point, the story seems to be harmless. It is not clear whether the act of violence that follows has been cleverly contrived by Amnon and Jonadab or whether it is true that initially there was no intention of raping Tamar. Up to this moment, seen through the eyes of Tamar, a threat was not apparent. She follows the request of her father: she bakes a cake for the diseased Amnon.

But her goodwill is now brutally exploited. Amnon sends the servants away. He asks her to take the cake to his bed. She does it, apparently still without suspicion. But then, she understands what will happen. She is seized, held tight, and Amnon says: „Come, lie with me, my sister.“ She is exposed to him. But she defends herself in three ways:

She argues:

„No such thing ought to be done in Israel.“ She draws his attention to the valid laws.

„Where shall I cause my shame to go?“ She wants him not to be guided only by his desire but to think of the situation of the victim.

„You will be like one of the rapists in Israel.“ His intentions will have serious consequences for him, the wrongdoer, too.

She proposes a way in which he could satisfy his desire in a legal manner: „Speak to the king; he will not withhold me from you.“

She fights him bodily.

But Amnon does not listen to her and rapes her.

After this horrible crime, another one takes place. Amnon adds insult to injury. He becomes sick of Tamar and sends her away: „Arise, be gone!“

Again, Tamar defends herself:

1. She argues again with the law: „Repudiating me is a bigger crime than the one that you have already committed to me.“
2. Amnon needs a servant to throw her out. This shows that she again resists bodily against the violence that is done to her.
3. When she is outside the door, she makes it apparent to everyone what happened to her. She brings it to public attention: she throws ashes upon her head, she tears the sleeved garment that is only worn by virgins, she shouts loudly.

Tamar has become a victim in two ways: by being raped by Amnon and by being repudiated.

She was purely an object of the desire of a man. She was treated like merchandise that is thrown away after being used. Under the rules of that era, she had no more a chance of finding a husband.

Tamar goes to Absalom, her brother. She is told to maintain silence about the event. She is condemned to silence. She must not tell her story to anyone. Her life is ruined, both mentally and socially. „So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house.“

To 2: The culprits

Anyone who hears or reads the story of the misdeed done to Tamar will, asked for the culprit, immediately point to Amnon who rapes his half-sister and repudiates her afterwards. If you look more closely, you will find that several culprits are involved and that only the cooperation of all of them results in the violation of Tamar's human dignity. And no culprit is similar to the others. Let us look at the story once again under this context:

The first one is Amnon who is described as a love-sick young man in the first two verses of the text. He desires a beautiful young woman who is, however, not accessible to him. One almost feels pity for him. In verse two it is stressed that it appeared impossible for Amnon to do something violent to her (verse 2). But how does it happen then that the apparent impossibility becomes cruel reality? How can ardent love be converted into rough violence? Let us remember that Amnon was not a criminal from the beginning, from his birth, but that he became a criminal. And others helped him with this process...

The first accessory is Amnon's cousin Jonadab. Admittedly, he is not recognisable, at first glance, as a culprit. On the contrary: we recognise him as



empathetic spiritual counsellor and helper. Jonadab recognises Amnon's emotional distress and helps him to vocalise it (verse 4). As a good friend, he does not stop there but proposes a plan to the love-sick young man how he could overcome his social boundaries and see the beloved Tamar (verse 5). As naive unsuspecting reader, one appreciates this ruse and looks forward to the happy end. In any case, it is not clear whether Jonadab encourages Amnon to rape his half sister, as some commentaries suggest. At this point, the story could still lead to a good end!

The third culprit is David. He follows the request of his son (verse 6) and advises Tamar to prepare a meal for the apparently sick person (verse 7). In this manner, David creates the preconditions for the crime. Could David have recognised the danger for Tamar? Ought he perhaps, being king and father, to have recognised it?

The servants become the next accessories. They are sent away by Amnon, they obey (verse 9b). We know nothing of their motives. Do they only leave the house because they are dependant upon Amnon and because he would punish them for any resistance against his orders? Or did they, with a twinkle in their eyes, agree that the young man and the young women should now be undisturbed? Be that as it may, their behaviour made the following events possible.

What follows are the two brutal crimes of Amnon, both being performed in full consciousness. Prior to each crime, Tamar informs him explicitly that he is about to render himself guilty: both the rape as well as the repudiation of Tamar are crimes. According to the laws of Israel, Amnon would have been obliged to marry Tamar after the rape and to pay the full bride price. It does not become clear why the love of Amnon (verse 1 cont.) is converted into violence (verse 14) and then into aversion (verse 15). Could it be that his love was, from the very beginning, not love but pure lust? Or does the disgust result from guilt feelings after the first crime? The story leaves these questions open.

One culprit is still left over, a servant who did not leave the house together with the others. He is ordered by Amnon to expel Tamar from the house forcefully (verse 17) and he obeys (verse 18).

Looking at the spectrum of the culprits in this story, two things will become evident:

1. Even if one of the wrongdoers (Amnon) is the main culprit, he has a network of accessories who participate in many different ways in the crime. Some will become culprits because they obey and carry out their orders (servants); others, because they do not contemplate sufficiently, searching for the possible consequences of their actions (David, Jonadab?). Between 1933 and 1945, a similar network of wrongdoers existed in Germany, causing dreadful harm to millions of

people, similar to the harm done to Tamar in the Biblical story. Whoever is determined to protect human dignity will have to look for structures of wrongdoers, obvious ones and even hidden ones.

2. If one observes the sequence of atrocities from the very beginning, one comes to the conclusion that guilt (which the culprit is aware of) and the influence of fate are closely interrelated: The crime against Tamar is, on one side, the result of human guilt, that is to say lust, violence, carelessness and cowardice, on the other side a product of circumstances which are interlinked in an unfortunate way. Both these fundamental reasons in this story of rape and repudiation mark the story as a tale of human sin. According to Biblical understanding, sin is guilt and fate simultaneously.

To 3: The cartel of silence

After Tamar, raped and repudiated, has left the house of her half brother Amnon, screaming her woe into the world, she has escaped from the immediate danger to her life and limb but this does not mean that everything is alright. Outside the door, she suffers injustice a third time because her desolation and pain are covered with a cloak of silence. And here, too, it is not just one person who acts like that.

Let us look first at the general public. Tamar screams loudly while she leaves (verse 19) which means that there is a strong chance that neighbours or passersby would recognise her need. But silence is maintained: nobody appears to look after the young woman. Even more: nobody enquires who has inflicted the pain and the harm to her. Unfortunately, public silence is, until today, at least in Germany, a widely spread phenomenon. It so happens that we frequently learn of sexual abuse of children by their fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers or brothers but the atrocity will become public knowledge only when the victims are grown up and courageous enough to nominate and to accuse the culprits. Why does it take so much time before they can talk of the incidents? The answer is at the same time simple and horrible: because those that had a premonition of the crime – neighbours, relatives – did not enquire and those who knew about the deed – wives, mothers, brothers and sisters – did not submit the case to a court. It is the collective silence which lengthens the suffering of abused boys and girls, frequently for many years.

The first member in the cartel of silence who is called by name is Tamar's brother Absalom. He knows of Amnon's crime (verse 20) but orders his sister to keep silence, pointing out her commitment to the family. The reputation of the (king's) family might be affected.

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Her father David learns of the crime, too (verse 21). At least, he is outraged. But his wrath remains without consequences. The main culprit Amnon is not brought to justice. At this point, an interesting observation can be made, considering the tradition history of the text: the Bible in Hebrew language mentions only that David did not cause any harm to Amnon. But the Greek translation of the text replenishes the text by adding a motive: „...since he loved him, because he was his first born son.“ This means that the silence was explained (but was it justified?). It is conspicuous how the subsequent translations deal with this text: the Zurich Bible follows the Hebrew version whereas the translation of Martin Luther takes the explanation from the Greek translation without, however, earmarking this addition...

The cartel of silence is continued up to our own time. None of the collections of sermon texts which are known to us contains the story of Tamar's rape. This means that at least in the Protestant church, this text does not play a role for religiousness and theological contemplation. All that we saw so far induces us, however, to say

that this tale is indispensable for a faithful life. The story of the crime committed towards Tamar helps us to understand how violence works. This understanding is, however, necessary for preventing violence and for protecting the dignity which God gave to victims (and to offenders!).

To 4: The good message

This topic will be elaborated in working groups.

Questions for the working groups:

1. For Tamar, the victim of violence, there is no positive perspective. Is there, however, a positive message? For whom?
2. Why is such a story told in the Bible?
3. What is the gist of this Biblical story for the theme of the consultation?

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Preserve Human Dignity

Bible Study by Pastor BESSA, EEPT

In the first paragraph of the presentation note of the information on the consultation (information of the 25th of November 2008), we read the following: “Human Dignity is intangible. We nevertheless make the experience that individuals, groups and entire people are deprived of human conditions of life in diverse ways in economic and political interests” (sic) (Pasteur Hannes Menke, Secretary General).

There we have, put together, all the themes/terms of reference: dignity, man = human being, intangible, individuals / groups, deprivation, (human) conditions of life, economic interests, and political interests. Topics for an encyclopaedia! Furthermore, and as to make the stake explicit, it is written: “Think to learn how human dignity presents itself and to which extent it is violated, in different contexts” (idem). In short, it is a matter of man = the human being, his dignity (declared to be intangible) and the violation of the latter (of these lasts?).

Substantive question: what is man? And what is his dignity?

Subsidiary questions:

- Process/mechanism of the violation of this dignity, can it be defended/be claimed? Can it be preserved and how?
- And the Church of Christ-Jesus in all that? (is it, was it part of it on the side of the oppressor or on the side of the defender?)

From the methodological point of view there is on one hand a step of conceptual approach and on the other hand the approach which will have a tint/an applied colour.

A 1 – What is man?

Here for practical reasons, we are not going to get lost in considerations peculiar to other subjects in Human Sciences. In the framework of Biblical History of the Beginnings, the human being finds himself in the series of the creatures of God. Called to existence to “manage” all that has been created before him (Gen 2, 15).

- Created “in the image and resemblance” of the Creator (Gen 2, 26).
The psalmist would say, that he was

made “a little inferior to God” (Ps 8, 6 Ewe version, and Louis Segond). We would like to sum up the whole debate which these biblical affirmations provoke like this: If God the Creator defines himself as “I am who I am” it is that he proclaims his sovereignty and uncontrollability, his liberty, to say it all. The human being also, is in essence, uncontrollable and sovereign. And the formula: “a little inferior to God” would mean that his “sovereignty, his uncontrollability and his liberty” have a relative status compared to God; The independence of the human being is not effective except if depending on God; crown of glory and of glamour, reign on all works... (Ps. 8, 7) are accorded him by God. Otherwise said, the human being, outside God, or the human being that would separate himself from God makes his “I am who I am” fall, his crown fall, his brilliance fade, his “reign” come to an end, his liberty evaporate.

In these conditions, the sin of man (since this reality is part of the history of the human being) consists of this:

- Wanting to keep the crown, the brilliance and the reign;
- Separating himself from God! Paradox! Liberating himself from God and be crowned with glory, brilliance by reigning over all. Now if we observe the history of the human being from the garden of Eden till today we witness this sad spectacle:
* Either the individual himself liberates himself from God and makes himself king over himself and over the others.
* Or someone else separates him from God, strips him of his crown and brilliance and takes hold of his liberty.

Let us look at Jesus during his passion. In order to maintain seizure on him and be able to make a laughing stock of him, give him a thrashing... ... the Roman army rabble first of all proceeded by conferring another identity/humanity on him: they remove his ordinary dress, put another crown on his head... ... ! And thus, they could do all with him. Let us point out by the way that if one affirms that, in spite of all that, he kept his dignity, that means



that despite the hard and inhuman conditions inflicted on him, he dwelt and remained dependent on God “not My will, but Yours be done, Father” (Luke 22, 42).

A2 – Human Dignity

Here also, let us not waste time among other thing with philosophical debate on the subject. Generally human dignity or more precisely the dignity of the human person is defined as the particular value that any Man (human being) presents as a man. And one understands by man, the human being as a reasonable and free person deserving the respect of all. Dignity is the character of what has value. Value which is not to be confounded with price.

A thing has price when it can be replaced by another equivalent thing. Only persons have dignity or value; things have just price.

To conclude this first part of conceptual and necessarily abstract approach, we can say that the human being is from the biblical viewpoint a creature of God; that he is intrinsically “I am who I am (will be)”. His sovereignty, his uncontrollability, his freedom are not effective except if dependent on the 1st “I am who I am” that means God, the Creator, the one who gave this being “a little inferior to God”, crown, brilliance and reign on every thing. Consequently every human being enjoys from God, as long as he is considered from this point of view, value and remarkable dignity.

Sin, always from this point of view is and shall always be the amputator that cuts the human being from the source of this existence (free, crowned with glory and brilliance) in order to make him malleable as it likes.

B. Are there authorities in our society who guarantee an equal right to dignity for all?

Formulated more simply, the concern can be expressed as this: whom do we turn to when the dignity of someone is endangered, threatened or violated?

To respond to this concern we are going to make two affirmations:

“... We however make the experience that individuals, groups and entire people are deprived of human conditions of life...” (Pastor Hannes MENKE, Information on the Theological Consultation).

“Fundamentally, Justice simply wants that the dignity of the human being should be respected. That is to say it is recognized that he is a being different from an object, different from an animal and that he should be addressed and treated with respect”. “Pastor Kpatcha ALOU, contribution of the EPCT to Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Process).

In clear terms, it falls to Justice and to the Judge to establish or re-establish the dignity of the human person in case it is despised and violated.

A biblical illustration of the administration of justice.

Luke 18, 2-5. Here we find the story of a judge who is said to be iniquitous, did not fear God and had no regard for any person; he acted as he pleased.

A widow (person considered to be weak, socially cut from many family ties, came to ask this judge to render her justice against her opponent. The judge turned a deaf ear to her plea; but there came no day when the widow did not come to ask him to render her justice.

The conclusion of this story was that this judge ended in saying to himself:

“Although I do not fear God and do not have regard for any person, nevertheless because this widow is disturbing me, I will render her justice so that she does not continue to come and break my head”.

This story on one hand shows the insistence and tenacity of the widow and on the other hand the casualness of the judge who does not well play his role for the welfare of his fellow citizens and especially towards the deprived persons or at least toward those who are so considered.

We do see in it the tenacity of the widow giving thus testimony of the inalienable (intangible) character of dignity and urgency to render justice whatever be the social situation of the person who is demanding it. She at the same time obliges the judge to render justice and proclaim the law.

To proclaim the law, the judge in our passage indicates by negation the qualities required for this function: Fear of god on one hand and respect of human beings on the other hand. The verbs from which the above mentioned nouns are derived are quite strong. The verb phobeomai = to fear, includes the respect that one owes

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to an important person generally considered to be above oneself; it is used here for God.

As for the verb *entrepomai* (used for the human being), it means to let oneself to be moved, made relent, to be concerned with doing something.

As far as possible, let us have judges who are conscious of the fact that there exists above them another judge, the ALMIGHTY, to whom they owe respect, judges who are concerned with the welfare of their fellow citizens in general and of the “weak persons” of the society in particular.

Pastor Dr. Gerson Kodjo Bessa
Eglise Evang. Presbytérienne du Togo



“Society and Human Dignity: Legal Approach“ (Togo)

INTRODUCTION

In a universe characterized by a diversity of cultures, requirements and needs, where human beings must necessarily live together and bloom in complete peace and perfect harmony, the respect of the human creature : MAN, has always been a problem.

And it is in view of bringing the members of the whole community to this ultimate objective that a UNESCO, authority, Colin Power, stated this: “educational institutions like families must become privileged places of social progress that shall permit future generations to understand human dignity”.

This Statement refers to two notions: that of Society and of Human Dignity.

What do they consist of and how do we conciliate the legitimate desires of the members (men, women, handicaps, aged people and children, rich or poor people), in such an entity in perpetual transformation (scientific development, in medicine etc) and preserve for the human being his survival, security, his physical, moral, intellectual integrity, etc.?

In the dynamics of the aforesaid entity, what could or should justify this demand for the respect of the human being in front of a flow of divergent and/or contradictory interests in all circumstances or situations (of conflict or of peace, of bitterness or joy, of indigence or abundance of superiority or inferiority...)?

Those are several challenges that brought the International Community (a form of Society); confronted with horrible attacks on the human being, to agree on the concept of Human Dignity, a notion which does not cease to raise controversies and difficulties regarding its apprehension and respect.

In our process of the legal approach to the topic, we shall first of all try to bring out the theoretical elements that can give some explanations of the concepts: SOCIETY and HUMAN DIGNITY; then we shall tackle the problem of Human Dignity within the Society from the practical viewpoint in order to enable the Church to be cast in short, mid and long term in a prospect of enrichment of the reflection

and/or of actions to be undertaken for the welfare of the human being.

I - THEORETICAL APPROACH OF THE CONCEPT

1. Society

The notion: society is vast and diverse according to the very different (anthropological, legal...) contexts in which one places oneself to the varied dimensions or according to how one tackles the notion in consideration of a given objective.

We are not going to pretend to venture in all these directions although they all raise the question of respect of human dignity.

Let us nevertheless note that the term evokes in all the contexts and at different levels, the idea of less or more organized groups of individuals living or coexisting together, designated under the generic term of “family”. They can take different forms according to the objective the members are pursuing, the geographical space, the nature and number of persons which form it. It can be a question of: Financial Societies, Agricultural Societies, limited companies, cooperative companies, civil societies, political societies...

In the precise context of our topic, the form which interests us is, of course, that of Political Society. It is defined according to constitutional Law as: "Society covering other social groups (families, enterprises etc...). Political societies assumed diverse forms (city, seignior, empire...). Today the dominant form is the State Nation”.

This is similar to the Democratic Order described by Raimundo RANIKKAR. As for him: “Society is conceived as a sum of free associated individuals to achieve objectives which otherwise would be out of reach”; “human rights have as function to protect the individual against the society, that is to say the State, that theoretically expresses the will of the people or of at least the majority”. This implies that:



- “every individual is considered to have an equal importance and consequently is invested with equal responsibility towards the welfare of the society;
- That society is nothing other than the sum of individuals, whose wills are sovereign and who decide as a last resort ;
- That the rights and freedom of an individual cannot be limited except when they approach upon the rights and freedom of other individuals, what rationally justifies government by the majority”.

Thus described, the fundamental objective of this social group is to ensure the security, the survival and the welfare of its members. In this group, this power is devolved to the representatives.

The International Community represents a form of this social group designated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 under the term: “Human Family” whose role is to ensure the protection of the rights and freedom of all human beings composing it and who are moreover regrouped in the States.

Perceived in this sense, society poses without any ambiguity the problem of the legal basis of rights and freedom. Otherwise, what determines, in Law in the aforesaid society or within its members, the “State-Nation” the limit vis-à-vis of each of the individuals living in it to avoid that one violates it and that one so undermines human nature ?

To this question, Blaise Pascal writes this: “Law without dignity is just mediocrity and dignity without law is only insanity”.

2. Human Dignity

The concept of Dignity according to this idea of Blaise Pascal is not less complex to define, in contexts as diverse as philosophical, scientific and religious as it is in classic Positive Law.

Although the notion benefits from a large recognition as legitimacy value of human rights, it is however used in the absence of any definition and its acceptance by the legal order causes a certain number of difficulties.

We will not give a precise definition, because it would be impossible to avoid having recourse to philosophical and religious explanations, what would be leading us off the context; we shall try to evoke some elements that would enable us to give explanations to the said notion on the legal level.

But before delimiting human dignity, we are going to start from human rights which have as basis the protection of the subject. What is the fundament of human rights?

According to M. SAYAH, Professor of Law in the University of Grenoble, “in a secular society, Law makes man the referent and it is Dignity that becomes the fundament”.

In the same sense Professor Emine Eylem AKSOY of the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland), analyzing the fundament of human rights declares that: “the idea of belonging to Humanity appears often in the explanations relative to the notion of human dignity. It refers itself to a quality, inseparably related to the human being, a distinction that makes Man a value to be respected without any other condition to be a human being”.

From this idea of human dignity as fundament of human rights, let us try to see what it is from the theoretical point of view.

- The theoretical difficulty of the notion of human Dignity.

Be it in theory or in practice, this notion raises as many difficulties as controversies.

We are compelled to recognize that the expression “Human Dignity” is often used with a very vague meaning, what encourages the inflationary and sometimes improper use of which it is sometimes subject. It even happens that it is cited to sustain contradictory claims.

It is the case of the debate on euthanasia and certain practices such as cloning and genetic engineering.

In the first case, those who are for as well as those who are against the practice (of

euthanasia) evoke the idea of human dignity. In the same way in the case of cloning, human dignity is sometimes wrongly used as an easy and rapid argument (“knock-out argument”) to criticize certain practices to avoid the difficulty of having to bring out additional explanations.

Many authors among which Adam Schulman or Anne-Marie Le Pourhiet (Jurist Professor of Public Law in the University of Rennes), stress the ambiguity of dignity and its formal content, which makes it possible to give it so many concrete definitions that one wishes Anne-Marie Le Pourhiet speaks of “stuff all and hackneyed”(2).

It is the case of the American Bioethician RUTH Macklin(3) who qualified it as “useless concept” in medical ethics because, for her, the concept would mean nothing more “than what is already contained in the ethical principle of the respect of persons: the requirement of enlightened consent, the protection of the confidentiality of sheens and the necessity to avoid discriminations and improper practices”.

(1) “Bioethics and the Question of Human Dignity”, in Human Dignity who Bioethics report of the Council of the President of the United States on Bioethics (in), March 1998, p. 3-18

(2)“Dignity constitutes today the most direct threat to Lights Philosophy and the Republican Idea, the fatal weapon against our liberty. .Setting up this philosophical and moral notion, eminently subjective and relative, in legal standard is madness. One is observing several years already that it is in the name of the dignity of individuals and of groups that narcissist militants obtained the multiplication of the criminal accusations of moral and sexual harassment, of discriminations and sexist remarks, homophobes, handiphobes, etc. ..., ending in a repressive arsenal threatening particularly the freedom of expression and of the press. Again it is in the name of human dignity that a “very active” euthanasia is demanded and it is neither a hazard if the far-fetched, most intellectually indigent, recent and jurisdictional decisions were rendered on the fundament of this stuff all and hackneyed notion. “Figaro, 24 May 2008”, “Do not touch my preamble!”

(3) In the article published in December 2003 in the British Medical Journal.

One therefore understands the theoretical difficulty and the possibility for the jurists to make of the notion of human dignity, wide interpretations or to oppose it resolutely and to consider it as a “concept void of sense” used more or less for purposes which do not really suit them.

- In spite of these difficulties, the notion of dignity entails also a requirement of the “respect of human dignity” or the “respect of persons” as Anne-Marie Le Pourhiet admits it.

But we are stressing that the two notions are not however identical.

For those who are for “the respect of human dignity”, “the respect of persons” is just the consequence of their dignity. If one must unconditionally respect every human being, whatever be his age, his sex, his physical or mental health, his religion, his social condition or his ethical origin, it is precisely because he has an intrinsic value or dignity. The idea of dignity is therefore prior to that of respect and aims at answering the question “why must people be respected?”

The notion of dignity in this context refers to a quality inseparably related to the very essence of man, what explains that it is the same for all and does not admit any degrees.

One could also understand that what the matter here is, is the question of “inherent dignity” and not “ethical dignity”. The first is a static notion, since it comes back to every human being on the sole account of his existence and irrespective of the moral qualities of the individuals in question.

For supporters of “ethical dignity”, and consequently of the “respect of persons”; dignity is a dynamic notion because it does not apply to the being of the person but to his behaviour and permits to affirm, for example, that an honest man has “more dignity” than a burglar.



- The principle of "human dignity" is equally defined in law as a requirement of non-instrumentalization of the human being:

As formal concept, human dignity seen from this angle, occupied the first stage in the new International Biomedical Law. Some authors do not hesitate to qualify it as "matrix principle" of bioethics. The objective of this principle is to avoid that science makes of the human being a thing.

The idea of dignity as requirement of non-instrumentalization of the human being can better be perceived through the famous Kantian formula according to which every person must always be treated as an end in itself and never just as a means.

This imperative aims at giving the sign that the human person is just the opposite of the "thing": while things have a "price" from the fact that they can be replaced by other things as an equivalent, persons have a "dignity" because they are unique and cannot be replaced by anything.

It is finally a great help on the daily medical practice level. When doctors and nurses have this idea present in mind, their attitude towards patients will be completely different from what it will be without it. The medical practice becomes then something more than a simple technical question to constitute the expression of an activity profoundly human. Illness will no longer be a "case" of which one takes care of but indeed a "person", that is to say a unique and ineffable being who needs to be helped and accompanied in his suffering.

In order to precise better the eminent role recognized for these principles, it will be useful to have recourse to the reception by legal order of human dignity and to the practice made out of it.

II - RECOGNITION OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN LAW AND ITS PRACTICAL USE

1. Recognition of Human Dignity in International Law

The ultimate basis, in spite of difficulties and controversies to recognize Human Dignity in Law, resides in the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (USHR) of 1948 and the rights following from it.

A first appearance of this notion can be noted in the aforesaid Declaration which recognizes that all members of the human families have an "inherent dignity" as "foundation of freedom, justice and peace" (Preamble) and provides that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights...", Article I).

This text established the principle "of respect of human dignity" in the provisions relative to the rights to life and integrity of the person (Art. 3), to the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatments (Art. 5).

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, certain norms or texts such as the United Nations Pacts, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000), the Rome Treaty of 2004, the African Charter of Human Rights and of People, the European Convention of Human Rights, etc. ..., draw their inspiration directly from the principle of respect of human dignity. Human dignity materializes through the right to life, the inviolability of the human body as well as the prohibition of torture and of punishments or inhuman or degrading treatments (Art. 2 and 3 of the European Convention). Here it is question of rights strictly related to human dignity.

The notion became from there, an operating legal concept to designate what is human in Man, what deserves to be protected. All that tends to deny the humanity of Man shall be considered as an attack on this dignity. The notion: "respect of human dignity" requires the unconditional character of guaranty and of its protection.

The principle of respect of human dignity equally becomes a shield that can be justified as a means of preventing any hindrance to human condition.

2. On the internal level

Many constitutions and national texts refer to this notion on the internal level.

In Germany the notion is written down in Article I of the constitution.

In Togo the Constitution recognizes the notion in the preamble in these terms: "We, People of Togo, putting ourselves under the protection of 'God, ... decide to build a State of Law in which the fundamental human rights, public freedom and the dignity of the human person have to be guaranteed and protected,...".

This Constitution provides furthermore in its Article 11, Subparagraph 1 that: "All human beings are equal in dignity and in rights".

In the same way the Law n° 80-1 of August 13th 1980 instituting the criminal law provides for crimes and offences that "undermine the person" (Art. 9).

The adoption of this principle by States in their constitutions and national texts, calls for its respect by them.

It is in this regard that Ronald Dworkin affirmed that it seems clear today that : "the one who pretends to take human rights seriously is obliged to accept the vague but powerful idea of human dignity" and demands that nobody should be treated in a manner that the sole importance of his life comes to be denied".

But what is really the outreach of this in the practice?

3. The Principles of "Human Dignity" and the Practice

The principle of human dignity, basis of all international instruments relative to human rights, as we precised it above, particularly those concerning the prohibition of torture, slavery, inhuman and degrading treatments, discriminations of all kinds, etc..., ratified by almost all the countries and quoted in quite a number of national constitutions, has an important place in Internal Law of Human Rights and in Internal Law of certain countries.

It has an eminent place in Humanitarian Law and particularly in texts relative to the United Nations Bioethics, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Genome and Human Rights of UNESCO (1997), the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights of UNESCO (2005), the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine of the European Council (1997).

Examples in West and African Societies will enable us to elucidate better the question, particularly the interpretation of practicing jurists on the same topic:

• In Togo

- That of a recidivist person, who one let undergo popular justice (cutting of the limbs, stoning...).
- That of a minor put in a household, for whom moral and corporal violence becomes a daily experience for days and for years: on him fall the most difficult housework; for him becomes the passing of the day a long and unbearable night mare; and if his name is most called, it is more or less because of utility than affection; and worst of all, the slightest actions and gestures which could recall that she is still a child, are punished by flogging and humiliation.

• In the West

- That of the prayer of a detainee in these terms: "Lord, when one is in prison, one is nothing. When one is nothing, one has the desire to talk. But when one is nothing, one thinks about nothing! Then one says nothing".

These few examples can call our attention the expression "loss one's dignity".

- The loss of dignity of a person, who one leaves half conscious, exposed to all eyes in the corridor of emergencies for hours.
- The loss of dignity in the "throwing of dwarfs", a practice successfully imported in some "clubs" in the South of France.

This last example which was subject of several proceedings in French law, illustrates very well the orientation of the different looks that can be cast on the same subject; two Commune Mayors wanted to make the "game" stop by issuing a prohibition order; the person concerned himself attacked the order with the reasons that this activity was procuring him a job that he was going to lose



because of the order whereas his "handicap" would not enable him to find another job.

The problems were the following: Throw dwarfs or unemployment? Priority of the body or instrumentalization?

From Court to Court, it was the opinion of the Council of State that in the long run imposed a prohibition on account of human dignity, the "game" being considered as dangerous and making the human being an instrument (according to this jurisdiction).

The Constitutional Council had formerly raised dignity to the rank of "principle with constitutional value" in his decision of 1994 relative to the Law on Bioethics(4). In this frame, dignity is considered to be a party to personality laws, which are inalienable.

The following year, the Council of State in its famous Order of October 27, 1995 relative to the case of "dwarfs throwing" - Morsang-sur-Orge, included the notion of "human dignity" as a component of Law and Order. The Council of State considered, in fact, that the Mayor, by virtue of his administrative police powers, had the right to forbid a show of "dwarfs throwing" on the grounds of the trouble caused to public order - and this, even if the dwarf in question was voluntary and consented to this activity of commercial order, given that dignity is supposed to be inalienable. In fact, the judges considered that such a show violated the dignity of the human person and that this was a full part of the Law and Order(5).

(4) Constitutional Council. Decision N° 94-343/344 DC of July 27th 1994. Law relative to the respect of the human body and Law relative to talents and to the use of the elements and products of the human body, to the medical assistance to procreation and to penal diagnostics, 27th July 1994.

(5) See Order on the site of the Council of State: "Considering that the entertainment of "dwarf throwing" consists in spectators' throwing a dwarf, leads to using as a projectile, a person affected by a corporal handicap and presented as such; that by so doing, such an entertainment undermines the dignity of the

human person; that the Authority invested with the power of the municipal police could therefore forbid it, even in the absence of particular local circumstances and even when protective measures had been taken to ensure the security of the person in question was voluntarily getting ready for this show for payment.

The Council of State did not see nor wanted to perceive the fundamental question rose between the person and his body. Beyond Human Dignity, the Council condemned the game or the use of the deformed body. What is also a problem in the societies is the commerce of the body or organs of the body as well as many other parts in medicine.

A round exploration of the question from the legal point of view enabled us to bring to the fore questions raised by the Law: the relation of man with his environment (social body) and the relation of man with his body (being).

The question of the relation between man and science is also raised from the moment that it is possible to make him become an instrument (average man or tool), even if there is no legal text that clearly challenges the concept of "Dignity".

CONCLUSION

Science and Law, two necessities in every society, have this domain in common which is MAN but their universalities confront each other. Science has the tendency to make Man become an instrument and the human being become fragile in order to reach its objectives. Law and Human Rights on the contrary, seek to avoid instrumentalization, to avoid that the being is not deprived of his humanity.

Therefore it is dignity that "make the tie" or that is the interface of these two tendencies. Dignity is consequently understood at the same time in a static sense (as difference between man and the rest of the universe) and in dynamic sense (once posed, intangible, it demands an action, an act). And these are the two faces this same reality.

The two temporalities of Law and of Science although different, science pres-

ently advances more rapidly than norm in a same society. Reference to human dignity becomes for this reason the last rampart against liberalism and barbarity in an often hostile environment.

Finally let us all think about the following question: if reference to "Human Dignity" surpasses Law, borrowing from other subjects such as Philosophy and Christian Religion that constitutes one of its historical sources, which role does the Church play today in front of these challenges, with which MAN is constantly confronted in a society in perpetual transformation?

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Human dignity in an intercultural perspective

1. Introduction

When we, as representatives of different cultures within the world wide church, exchange views and insights on human dignity, can we actually arrive at a joint understanding taking into consideration our various origins and backgrounds? This is a real challenge not to be underrated. What we understand when referring to human dignity might have different connotations in our various perspectives. This is due to the different ways in which we construct the world in which we live, the ways our life is organized, and how we communicate our reality. The sociology of knowledge, socio-linguistics as well as cultural anthropology have drawn our attention to this fact.²

In this paper I will highlight some cultural aspects in West-Africa and in Western Europe which have an impact on our respective conceptions of human dignity. As cultural strangers, Europeans for example have difficulties understanding how life functions in West-Africa. In fact, what we see from our various perspectives, we can only understand according to respective our system of knowledge, and this means that we are almost bound to misunderstand by our inability of grasping the deep meaning of activities with respect to the inside-view, i.e. by confusing ethic perspectives.³ In order for us to be sensitive to these limitations of cross-cultural understanding, I would like to illustrate this point by means of the following ethnological observation: In Germany, when a father would try to correct his child, he would typically expect that his son or daughter looks him straight into the eyes,

indicating that full attention is being paid to his words. In West-African cultures, however, the contrary is true; the father would expect his child not to stare at him, but to avoid eye contact, indicating submission.⁴

Therefore, in order to come to a joint understanding on human dignity, it is vital that we take our time to explain to one another what values constitute human dignity in our respective cultures. In what follows, I would like to assist in clarifying aspects of our various cultures and traditions which inform our understandings of human dignity. In addition, I would like to draw our attention on our joint mission as the Church of the Gospel (Evangelical Church). In particular, I will present a New Testament perspective on human dignity. This has the advantage of taking into account a point of comparison which is valued and dear to all of us, regardless of our respective cultures and traditions. This might also safeguard us from two temptations which are expressions of intercultural ignorance of arrogance, i.e. paternalism on the one hand, and romanticizing African traditional culture on the other hand.

2. The individualistic concept of human dignity in the Western world

The modern concept of human dignity was brought into sharp focus by philosophers of the Enlightenment period, especially by Emmanuel Kant in the 18th century. He declared: "Humanity in itself is a dignity; for a human being cannot be used by another human being as a means only. He should be treated as an end in and of himself. This constitutes his dignity, i.e. his personality. He should acknowledge the dignity of humanity in every other human being on a practical level."⁵ This concept highlights the universally equal dignity of individuals.⁶ With this concept,

¹ This paper was presented at the Bremen Mission Theological Consultation at Peki in the Volta Region, Ghana, 12th-15th October 2009, on Preserving Human Dignity. For publication, the lecture has been slightly revised.

² Cf. the classic study of P.L. Berger and Th. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, New York 1966.

³ Cf. the ground-breaking study by K.L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour*, Paris 1967; idem, *On the emics and ethics of Pike and Harris*, in: T. Headland, K.L. Pike and M. Harris (ed.), *Emics and Ethics. The Insider/Outsider Debate*, Newbury Park/CA 1990, 28-47. For a discussion of these concepts with respect to Biblical exegesis, cf. W. Kahl, *Jesus als Lebensretter. Westafrikanische Bibelinterpretationen und ihre Relevanz für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (New Testament Studies in Contextual Exegesis 2)*, Frankfurt 2007, 153ff.

⁴ The example is given from the Bajju ethnic group in Nigerian, in K.L. Pike and C.V. McKinney, *Understanding Misunderstanding as cross-cultural emic clash*, in: K.R. Jankowsky (ed.), *The mystery of culture contacts, historical reconstruction, and text analysis: An emic approach*, Washington 1996, 39-64.

⁵ Translated from *Metaphysik der Sitten (Metaphysics of Morals)* §38, 1797.

⁶ When it came, however, to the question of applying this principle to the relationship between Europeans and Africans in general, and to the acknowledgment of Africans as human beings with intellectual capabilities and capacities in particular, Kant at least borders on racial prejudices, cf. K. Tiainen-Anttila, *The Problem*



Kant stands in the tradition of previous philosophical thinking, especially Descartes' individualistic and intellectual notion of *cogito ergo sum*: I think, therefore I am. Furthermore this individualism was prepared theologically by Martin Luther's insistence on an immediate relationship of the individual with God. Luther's focus on the faith of the individual, of course, had the function and actual effect of undermining the authority of the Roman Church.

In the Enlightenment period, however, the concept of human dignity, coupled with the quest for individual and universal human rights, was also an expression of the will to political power and to have a share in economic riches by the whole population, in overcoming absolutism. Eventually, the individualistic and universalistic understanding of human dignity paved the way for the democratic constitutions in the Western world.

In Germany, especially after the Nazi crimes, the safeguarding of human dignity has been considered essential for the democratic state, and the basis of the German constitution gives witness to this. However, even though the German citizens enjoy to a large degree human rights, one wonders if our human dignity is not in danger of being undermined: Individualism to many seems to be limited to the realization of one's own potential without paying attention to the needs of others, including one's family. In a system in which the free market economy pervades every aspect of life, people are in danger of becoming a calculated function of the economy while being reduced to consumers. In this context, the wish to realize one's potential is tantamount to fulfilling desires which are being created by mass advertisement.⁷ Fact of the matter is, that a growing number of Germans live quite isolated from each other. That is good for the economy, for when you have many single households, there is a lot to be bought. But this situation does not serve people as human beings well: To live isolated lives might eventually lead to despair and to the loss of a meaningful orientation in one's life. You are aware, that in the Western world it has become

quite common for old people to be put in old folks homes by their families. The family members, this holds true for a large section of our society, do not feel prepared to take care of their parents. The service these old people receive, especially if they belong to the poorer stratum of society, is often degrading. This is only one example which to my understanding is indicative of the fact, that human dignity is threatened in Western culture due to a development which pushes individualism to an extreme.

3. The communalistic concept of human dignity in West-Africa

To live in relationships seems to be an all pervasive feature in West-African cultures. This phenomenon comes into sharp focus especially when seen from a Western perspective, and it has been described by a number of African philosophers and theologians.⁸ In order to illustrate this point, I would like to share but two experiences of intercultural misunderstanding that I had in Ghana on trips that I took there with students from Germany:

- After a few days in Ghana some of the students would typically withdraw from the group, and they would just want to rest, to think, and to regain their strength. And they would insist to be left alone in their room. The typical reaction of our Ghanaian guests would be: Why, is she sick?
- Once I had sent my students ahead from Accra to a village close to Mankessim where they were to stay overnight. At about midnight I received a phone-call from the group. They were bitterly complaining that I had put them into a dangerous situation. What happened? When the students got to the house I had rented for them, there was light-off in the whole village and it was pitch dark. The family staying there tried to help them in carrying the luggage into the house; the students however were afraid that their suit-cases would be stolen. Inside the house, the family would not leave the stu-

of Humanity. The Blacks in the European Enlightenment (Studia Historica 50), Helsinki 1994, esp. 155ff.

⁷ This observation was, of course, brought into sharp focus by the leading representatives of the Frankfurt School, like Th.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, and J. Habermas.

⁸ E.g. K. Gyekye, African Cultural Values. An Introduction, Accra 1996; J. Pobee, Toward an African Theology, Nashville 1979.

dents alone but was getting ready to sleep together with them in the huge hall. The family was just expressing hospitality, meanwhile the students were fearing for their very lives.

What comes to expression in these two examples is a clash of individualistic and communalistic values. When discussing the concept of human dignity in West-African contexts it is essential that we take note of the communalistic organization and understanding of life. This knowledge system, which is informed by communal life experiences, also comes to expression in the grammatical structure of West-African languages. I give an example from the Akan language family: The question, What is your name?, is rendered in Twi: *Yɛfrɛ wo sɛn?* This literally translates: They call you how? The answer is accordingly: *Yɛfrɛ me XYZ* – They call me XYZ. Compare the German: *Wie heißt du?* The expected answer is: *Ich heiÙe XYZ*. In the Twi version, the pronoun “they” constitutes the grammatical subject of the act of naming, and this personal pronoun stands at the very beginning of the sentence. In telling your name in this way, one brings to expression that you are related to a group of people by means of which you give respect to those before you, i.e. those who named you. This aspect is neither denoted nor connoted in the German example which puts the personal pronoun of the first person singular at the beginning of the sentence, in conjunction with *heiÙen*, i.e. a verbum intransitivum, which by definition excludes the involvement of another active subject and which therefore can also not be used in the passive voice.⁹ In my understanding, these differences at the level of utterance are not accidental or peripheral as might be suggested from a structuralist perspective. These differences are significant because they point to rather different ways to construct and perceive of reality. John Pobee has suggested that the organization and communication of reality in West-Africa, at least for the traditional experience of life, is informed, and gives expression to a communalistic ontology. A West-African equivalent of Descartes’ well known formula should be *cognatus ergo sum*, i.e. I am related by birth, therefore I

⁹ Therefore, the German *heiÙen* is also not functionally identical with the English verbum transitivum *to call/to be called*.

am.¹⁰ This means, people understand themselves on a fundamental level as being part of, and actually as being dependent on a network of relationships, and that at different levels.

- Synchronically, i.e. in a relationship within an extended family. Within this setting I have to play the role expected of me: to be respectful and obedient to those older than I, to take care of those younger than I, the same way those ahead of me take care of me. The communalistic understanding of life is however, not limited to extended family. It also comes to expression by addressing one another as brother or sister when belonging roughly to the same age group. This address can also be extended to visitors from foreign countries.
- Diachronically, in two directions: first, with respect to the ancestors, and second, with respect to those yet unborn, connected with the responsibility to continue the family line into the future.
- Spiritually: The observable world is considered as being embedded in a wider spiritual realm. Spiritual forces, both life enhancing and life threatening, are potentially at work in every aspect of the life of an individual as well as of the community or society, i.e. the causes of a predicament could be traced to the activity of a spirit.

Within this framework of relationships the concept of human dignity in West-Africa is to be understood. A precise description of the concept of human dignity within this context is given by the well known Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye whose insights are quoted here at length:

A conception of human dignity and the sanctity of human life is explicit in the Akan maxim:

All human beings are children of God; no one is a child of the earth. This insistent claim that every human being is a child of God has moral overtones or relevance, grounded as it is in the conviction

¹⁰ E.g. J. Pobee, in his *Toward an African Theology*, Nashville 1979.



that there must be something intrinsically valuable in God. Human beings, as children of God, by reason of their having been created by God, and possessing, in the Akan belief, a divine element called soul, ought to be held as of intrinsic value, as ends in themselves, worthy of respect. A concept of human dignity can be linked with – or derived from – the concepts of intrinsic value and respect. Also implicit in the maxim is the equality of the moral worth of all human beings – of all the children of God.

Concepts of human dignity, intrinsic value, and equal moral worth generate a notion of moral rights that, as deriving ultimately from God or as belonging fundamentally to every human being as creature of God, could be linked with the notion of innate rights. Such rights would belong to every human being by nature. Thus, to the extent that what are called human rights, they can be derived from conceptions of human dignity. That is to say, a human rights concept can certainly be said to be already involved in conceptions of human dignity. The conception of human dignity compels the recognition of rights – some rights – not only in an individualistic but also in a communal context. In other words, the derivation of human (individual) rights from supernaturalism cannot be confined to an individualistic context.

(...)Individuality (...) is not incompatible with communalism. Communalism as understood and practiced in the traditional African society does not, on (sic.) my interpretation, absorb individuality, but accommodate it and make it coexist with individuality. The significant implication of this accommodation or coexistence is that communalism is not at variance with the concept of individual right – that is, human rights. It is indeed the exercise of individual rights – which include the right of the individual to exercise his or her unique qualities, talents, and dispositions – that enhance cultural development

and insure the material and political success of the community.¹¹

This concept of human dignity is inherent in traditional culture, regardless if Akan, Ewe, or Ga. The right to individual freedom and development is not denied but related to the rights and needs of the wider community. It is expected of the individual to show some degree of responsibility for the community. In this context there are also instances where human dignity is being threatened. These instances, however, need close attention and careful examination, especially when the Western or modern perspective comes in, due to unavoidable and instant intercultural misunderstandings.

For example, in Northern Ghana we encounter the phenomenon of so-called witch-camps which, from a Western perspective, is quite irritating. Some Western NGOs have campaigned for the dissolution of these camps, and in the West people would readily give their support. Amongst Europeans typically the atrocities committed against so many women during the witch-hunts in European history would come to mind immediately coupled with the conviction that evil witches do not exist. In West-Africa, however, it is a fact that the belief in the existence of witches is widespread. The so-called witch-camps in the rural areas of the North in Ghana are very often the only places where individuals branded as witches can find refuge. To just dissolve these camps would not solve the problem but would in fact aggravate the situation for the inhabitants who have no other place to go. It seems to me that the solution of the problem is quite complex, and it involves social, educational, and last but by no means least, spiritual strategies.

Therefore, if we as representatives of partner churches in various contexts and cultures observe practices abroad which are very irritating to us and which seem to cry for abolition, it is essential that we consult one another and have the partners who live in that context, explain to the others the problem in its complexity, in order to develop effective strategies to tackle the issue.

¹¹ K. Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*. An Introduction, Philadelphia and Accra, 1996, 150-151.

4. A New Testament perspective on human dignity

In theology, the concept of universal human dignity is traditionally being linked to the *imago dei* concept as it is presupposed in the first creation narrative (Gen 1,26-27). And the Old Testament is replete with examples of abuses of human dignity, like the narrative of Tamar being raped by Amnon (2Sam 13,1-22). In this paper, however, I would like to draw our attention to the New Testament which has been somewhat neglected in this respect. First of all, I would like to point out Paul's understanding of the Christ event, at its most fundamental level. Here I can draw on the Pauline studies of the South-African born New Testament scholar Hendrikus Boers who taught for four decades at Emory University in Atlanta, GA.¹² Boers shows that Paul was fundamentally concerned with refuting claims to religious exclusiveness by interpreting salvation through Christ in a universalistic manner: Christ has died for all to partake in divine grace. This egalitarian dimension of Paul's reasoning is not restricted to the religious sphere in a more narrow sense; it also has repercussions with respect to the social sphere as comes to expression in Gal 3,28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Paul's writings we have evidence that in his understanding of the Christ event, God is particularly concerned with bestowing his grace and justice on those whose dignity has been undermined in society by those claiming religious and social privileges. God balances former imbalances and he restores dignity. Typically in 1Cor 1, Paul emphasizes that those who do not count in this world are the privileged addressees of God's redeeming activity: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things

¹² H. Boers, *Theology out of the Ghetto. A New Testament Exegetical Study Concerning Religious Exclusiveness*, Leiden 1971; idem, *The Justification of the Gentiles. Paul's Letters to the Galatians and Romans*, Peabody, MA 1994.

that are, so that no one may boast before him" (1Cor 1,26-29).

On the surface level of his expressions or in concrete situations, however, Paul constantly compromises his theological insight. When dealing with the question of the role of women in the congregations (1Cor 12 and 14) or of the status of slaves (1Cor 7; Philemon) we see him struggling in doing justice to his fundamental belief and to the solution of burning problems, at the same time.

Now it is remarkable that the Pauline understanding of salvation also comes to expression in the narratives of the Synoptic Gospels; most clearly in the Gospel of Luke (cf. only the Hymn of Marie in 1,46-55, esp. 52: "He pushes the mighty ones from the thrones and he lifts up the low ones"; and his version of the beatitudes in conjunction with the following condemnations of the rich in 6,20-26). However, not only in the sayings-material of the Synoptic Gospels, but also in the very narratives about Jesus' activities is communicated what seems to be at the heart of the Gospel: Jesus extends the blessing and salvation of God especially to those who are being disregarded in society or actually regarded as devoid of human dignity and who are excluded from society – the sick, the demon possessed, the sinners, the unclean ones, the foreigners. Against this background it also makes sense that in the Gospel narratives a particular emphasis is laid on Jesus' concern for children and on the commitment to Jesus by women which exceeds that of his male followers.

It is quite revealing to read the Gospel of Mark from the perspective of human dignity. In fact, Mark should be read as a narrative about the affirmation of human dignity on both a fundamental level and on a pragmatical level for those who read and understand.

Fundamentally, the Markan narrative in chapters 1-15 describes the ironic unfolding of the plan of Jesus' enemies to get rid of him. His shameful death on the cross serves as a gross expression of the negation of his human dignity. However, the Gospel of Mark does not end there. It continues in 16,1-8 with the miraculous restoration of Jesus' life which indicates the divine affirmation of his dignity. As miracle this event presupposes God's intervention, and it is the shortest miracle narrative in the New Testament, encapsulated in just one Greek word describing



as one narrative move the transformation of a certain situation into its very opposite by means of just one action:¹³ *égerthé* – He has been resurrected. This word in the aorist passive voice is a so-called *passivum divinum* and should be understood as saying: God has resurrected him (from the dead). By means of this act, God has inverted the verdict of the Roman and Jewish authorities.

Now interestingly, within the Gospel narrative Jesus basically emulates God's redeeming activity when he restores people from sickness to health, from death to life, from insanity to sanity, from social exclusion to inclusion. These are paradigmatic restoration stories which bring to expression what the Gospel about the unfolding Kingdom of God (1,14-15) is all about: the restoration of a dignified life. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the ultimate and fundamental miracle story of Early Christianity and serves as the model for the other miracle stories. It is therefore no coincidence that in a number of these stories the verb *egeirein* (to raise, to wake up) occurs indicating restoration (cf. 1,31; 2,9.11.13; 3,5; 5,41; 9,27; 10,49). These restorations are not only according to the will of God, they also need divine power. Therefore, right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus is bestowed with the divine spirit (1,10-11) which allows him to overpower Satan (1,12-13) and by implication all demonic, i.e. life threatening and dignity undermining evil spirits.

Interestingly it is especially the miracle healing stories which communicate the affirmation of human dignity. I would like to point out some relevant motifs in the first three miracle healing stories in the first chapter of Mark.¹⁴

Mk 1,21-28: Jesus delivers a man from an unclean spirit

Jesus teaches in the synagogue at Capernaum. The people witnessing the event are utterly astonished about the authority

¹³ Cf. the definitions of "Récit" and "Programme narratif" in A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, Paris 1993, esp. 307: The simplest form of a narrative – récit simple – could be described as "le passage d'un état antérieur (...) à un état ultérieur opéré à l'aide d'un faire (...). Dans cette perspective, le récit simple se rapproche du concept de programme narratif."

¹⁴ For a structural analysis and comparison of New Testament miracle stories, cf. W. Kahl, *New Testament Miracle Stories in their Religious-Historical Setting: A Religionsgeschichtliche Comparison from a Structural Perspective* (FRLANT 163), Göttingen 1994.

(*exousia*) with which Jesus teaches (V.22). The reader, however, will not be astonished since s/he knows from Mk 1,1ff who Jesus is! Up to this point within the narrative it is only the unclean spirit residing in a man who knows about Jesus' identity. And he also knows that the presence of the "holy one of God" means destruction for the unclean spirit (24). Consequently Jesus rebukes (*epitimaó*: terminus technicus in exorcism stories) the spirit, commanding him to shut up and move out: *phimóthéti kai exelthe ex autou* (25). The spirit acts accordingly (26). Again the people are surprised and filled with fear; sensing Jesus' power they wonder what this means (27).

In this story comes to expression the Early Christian conviction that Jesus is able to overpower spirits that take possession of people making them unclean. It should also be noted that this incidence takes place in a synagogue, a place where it was expected of people to come before God in a purified state. The exorcism at this very location implies that Jesus is able to restore the *purity* of the possessed man by driving out the unclean spirit. The reader understands: *Jesus' cleanliness is more contagious than the uncleanness of spirits.*

The dimension of a spiritual power struggle between divine and satanic powers is fundamentally presupposed in the Gospel of Mark. To listeners and readers in antiquity, this was nothing strange but expected. From the short temptation story in Mk 1,12-13 – in narrative function a test after Jesus, the hero of the story, has been bestowed with the divine spirit – it can be concluded right at the opening of the Gospel that this power struggle has been ultimately decided in favour of Jesus.

Mk 1,29-31: Jesus delivers Peter's mother-in-law from fever

The fever of the sick woman is most likely conceived of as a spirit, for the fever is portrayed as active subject of the performance bringing about the dissociation of fever and woman. The fever engages in this action after Jesus establishes a physical contact with the woman while grasping her hand. Clearly Luke has understood this episode as a spiritual deliverance incident, for according to his version Jesus rebukes (*epitimaó*) the fever. The activity of rebuking is typical for ancient including New Testament exorcism practices.

It is also significant that Jesus touches the woman supposed to be infected with a fever spirit, i.e. he does not shy away from having physical contact with a person considered as spiritually contagious. He takes her serious as fellow human being who is in need not only of healing but also of relationships expressing love and compassion. It should also be noted that Jesus raises her up which is rendered by the Greek word *egeirein*, which of course is the same verb used in 16,4 indicating Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The miracle healing story in 1,29-31 functions as a minor resurrection story reflecting the fundamental miracle story of the New Testament, i.e. Jesus' resurrection. Hermeneutically we can say: The will of God is manifest, whenever people are being lifted up, when they can walk upright again, when broken communal relationships are being re-established. In V. 31 it is communicated that the women served them. According to the form-critical analysis of miracle stories this signifies the successful restoration of the woman: Now she can take up again her function in the household. In a semantic universe, however, where illness can be attributed to the activity of evil or unclean spirits, the concluding sentence of the episode takes on an additional function which might be well appreciated in a West-African perspective: Her serving the guests with food is indicative of a social reintegration in the sense that the guests accept her services, i.e. they are not afraid of being infected by a spirit dwelling in her. They trust the effectiveness of Jesus' deliverance and they accept the woman.

Mk 1,39-44: Jesus delivers a man from leprosy

A person with leprosy approaches Jesus begging him for healing, i.e. purification (*katharisai*). He presupposes that Jesus has the ability to bring about purity and appeals to his will. Jesus is deeply moved by the request (*splagchnistheis* – Matthew and Luke omit this emotional motif since it does not fit their conceptions of Jesus who is, especially in Luke, supposed to be in control of himself) and he agrees to engage in the required act: He touches the leper with his hand, i.e. Jesus establishes physical contact with a person who in antiquity was stigmatized and isolated from relationships. Jesus commands healing and the leprosy as active subject leaves the person. Again, it is presupposed that a sickness causing spirit was

responsible for the predicament rendering the person unclean. Therefore in this episode the verb “to cleanse”, “to purify” occurs three times and the noun purity/purification once. The purity of Jesus, due to his indwelling spirit from above, overrides the impurity caused by the leprous spirit. In order for the man to be accepted into society, Jesus sends him to the priest to declare him clean, and to bring the necessary offerings.

The miracle healing stories in Mark, and the same holds true for the other Synoptic Gospels, exhibit a common structure:

1. Jesus establishes a relationship to those excluded from society or regarded devoid of human dignity.
2. He removes the spiritual cause of the exclusion by means of a stronger spiritual antidote.
3. He prepares the formerly excluded person for re-inclusion into the community.

It should also be noted that in these narratives, those stigmatised and excluded from relationships are being put at centre stage (clearly 2,1-12; 3,3; 9,36).

A close and contextual reading of the miracle healing episodes in the Gospel of Mark reveals two essential aspects which usually go unnoticed in a Western exegetical perspective:

1. The spiritual aspect of sickness and healing

Very often it is presupposed that the sickness has a spiritual cause. In many cases this is attributed to the activity of a so-called unclean spirit. Within the semantic universe of the ancient Mediterranean world in general and within Early Christianity in particular this was nothing strange but rather self-evident. Therefore we should reckon with the possibility that the involvement of a spiritual agent in causing a sickness might be presupposed in a given story even though this might not be explicitly stated. There, however, might be hints within a story which are indicative of such an involvement. This is particularly the case when a sickness occurs grammatically as the active subject of a clause, as in Mk 1,31: “And the fever left her”, or as in Mk 1,42: “And immediately the leprosy went away from him.” In such cases, a stronger power is required to overcome the unclean spirits, i.e. the spirit from above (cf. Mk 1,10f.).



2. The social dimension of sickness and healing

It is no coincidence, that the spirits causing sickness and/or strange behaviour are usually qualified as *unclean* or *impure*. If a person in Jewish antiquity was regarded as impure, this not only affected negatively his or her access to the temple, it also meant constant *social stigmatisation* bringing to expression the fear of infection, not just with sickness but with the spirit of the sickness. Within this semantic universe the proclamation of the advent of the Kingdom of God – the new, just, redeemed, reconciled, and all inclusive divine society – only made sense when it included the deliverance from unclean spirits. Therefore miracle healing stories in the New Testament are usually concluded by the description of an activity indicating social inclusion and the restoration of relationships.

Kingdom is a term denoting a particular form of socio-political organisation widespread and taken for granted in antiquity. The *Kingdom of God*, as proclaimed by Jesus, is unique since it means the inclusion of *everyone* with an emphasis on those whose dignity was disregarded in society. Despite the fact that Mark portrays Jesus as successful miracle worker – and he does so in order to communicate his conviction that this Jesus, who died at the cross, is the Son of God – it would be problematic to over-emphasise miraculous healings at the expense of the significance of the inclusive character of the Kingdom of God. According to the faith and the experiences within Early Christianity as witnessed to by the New Testament writings, healing was always regarded as a free gift from God; it never was regarded as precondition for the entry into God's Kingdom. The latter would actually contradict the teaching of Jesus and the experiences of his followers many of whom suffered persecution, sickness and premature death (cf. only the Beatitudes in Mt 5 and Lk 6). In the Synoptic Gospels, the miracle healing stories have the basic function of signifying the advent of the all inclusive Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 12,28 par. Lk 11,20). As such, they *foreshadow* the expected ultimate salvation.

The last miracle healing story occurs in Mk 10,46-52. Formerly blind Bartimaeus decides to follow Jesus on his way into Jerusalem. Following Jesus is the appeal

of Mark to his readers. The disciples of Jesus in Mark, however, are those who never fully understand who Jesus is. They function as example for those who have not yet understood the implication of neither the miracles of Jesus nor their own mission! The readers are expected to understand and act accordingly. They are called to emulate the example of Jesus.

Mk 12,28-34 give a summary of Jesus teaching: The respect and we can say the human dignity that I expect granted me, I should also grant others. The individual is seen here in a net of respectful relationships between God, others and oneself.

When these relationships get imbalanced, human dignity is potentially being threatened, e.g. in the case of an extreme individualism in the modern world. In the Western world this individualism is increasingly coupled with a loss of faith that God has bestowed us with his grace and dignity.

5. Ephraim Amu: *Yen ara asase ni* & *Biakoye*

Ephraim Amu, a child of Peki and the outstanding Ghanaian musician of the 20th century, has pointed out the danger of modern individualism for society. In his famous Twi song *Yen ara asase ni*, originally written in 1929 in Peki-Ewe, he has this to say – I present the English translation by Philip Laryea of Akrofi-Christaller-Memorial Centre in Akropong.¹⁵

Yen ara asase ni / This is our own land

This is our own land, it is precious to us,
Blood did our forefathers shed to obtain it
for us.

It is the turn of me and you to continue.

Unproductive knowledge, cunning and
selfishness

Have destroyed our life

And have affected our love for our land.

Whether our nation will prosper

Or whether it will not prosper

It is an established fact that this depends
on

The conduct of her people.

Book knowledge that is vain

Or property acquired without toil,

And dishonesty, destroy a nation and
defame it.

¹⁵ Ph. T. Laryea, "Yen ara asase ni": Ephraim Amu's philosophy on nation building, human growth and advancement, in: Ghana Bulletin of Theology 3 (2008), 42-76. I have adjusted the English translation at a few places for better clarity.

Main Lectures

Obedience and respect, wishing your
fellows well always,
Unlimited dedication to everyone's needs,
These bring peace and progress to a nation.

Whether a nation prospers
Or whether it does not prosper
It is an established fact that this depends
on the
Conduct of her people.

Amu's song brings to expression the insight that an undue concern with one's own affairs at the cost of caring for the needy, is a threat to the peace and progress of a nation. The Biblical concept of the love of the neighbour is clearly present in the song, cf. the lines "Obedience and respect, wishing your fellows well always, unlimited dedication to everyone's needs, these bring peace and progress to a nation". In a sermon Amu delivered around 1970 in the chapel at Peki Training College, he complains "that we are being inspired by a vision of our own selfish ends".¹⁶ Amu, however, integrates New Testament values with African traditional values such as neighbourly love and unity which to him serve as the foundation for building a lasting and socially progressing nation. In his song *Biakoye* of 1933 which has become "the union song for all Singing Bands in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana"¹⁷, Amu explicitly refers to the teachings of Jesus concerning unity:¹⁸

Biakoye / Unity

With our minds and deeds,
Our way of life and zeal
We show that oneness is proper and worthy.

It is a command of Jesus,
We shall live it today and forever.
Neighbourly love is good, unity is good.
It refreshes us, it encourages us,
It makes us mature and progressive,
It transforms us through and through
And so let us hold on to it at all times.

Philip Laryea has shown that Amu's lyrics at this point have been informed by the *double-commandment of love* as presented in Lk 10,25-27. Jesus' values coincide with traditional African values concerning community life in rejecting an individualistic self-understanding and

conception of life as it dominates Western thinking and existence.

6. Conclusion

The Gospel is not to be had above culture. The Gospel becomes alive within distinct cultures and concrete life situations. It both challenges certain aspects of our cultures, and supports others. As we have seen, at the heart of the Gospel lies the insight that each and everyone is bestowed with divine grace and dignity from above. The church, called to emulate the example of Jesus, should also be with those whose dignity is being undermined in our societies. The church should be a place where everybody is somebody.

An undue emphasis on individual as well as on communal rights paves the ground for abuses of human dignity. What is needed in the church is a Christ centred balance of both, the individual and communal dimensions of human existence, which is to be realized always in relation to particular situations in culture and context.

How to identify abuses of human dignity and the strategies to be employed by the church in preserving or restoring human dignity will have to be a matter of ongoing intercultural debate. Since cultural strangers will have difficulties understanding matters in a different culture at depth, they should refrain from passing premature judgment. However, we in the one *Church of the Gospel* should not get tired to remind one another of our special service towards those whose human dignity is threatened of being undermined. And we should assist one another in devising programs aimed at the implementation of strategies to overcome unbearable situations, making use of our diverse resources.

Our common theological ancestor Dietrich Bonhoeffer claimed during the Nazi era that the church should not continue chanting Gregorian hymns, unless the church stands with the Jews who were severely persecuted at that time. This might serve as a call onto us to stand united as brothers and sisters, trying to have the Gospel become transparent in our activities for, and together with those whose human dignity is being disregarded. In so doing, I believe if we go wisely about it, we could even make an impact in our various societies.

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¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁸ The translation is again taken from Ph. Laryea, *ibid.*, 51.



Introducing the Biblical Case for Human Dignity

The task of the Ghana delegation to what we might christen as the Bremen Mission Fraternity Consultation 2009 is to assist in elaborating the claim that according to the Bible and the Christian faith, all human being have a God-given dignity which should be acknowledged, respected and enhanced by all, and which should not be denied, ignored nor violated.

Owing to limitations of time, we are unable to undertake the logically prior exercise of definitions and illustrations of what we mean by human dignity. We would urge that some attention should be paid to this area during the discussion sessions.

For the purpose of our presentation, by human dignity, we mean:

The worth, value and demand for respect which human being have or which can be attributed or accorded them

As we look more closely at the assignment we realize that we are required to find answers to, at least, the following questions:

- 1 What evidence do we have in the Bible that God has endowed the human being with inherent dignity?
- 2 What is the Biblical evidence that God demands that all humans must acknowledge the divinely endowed dignity of the human being (individually as well as socially) and promote and fulfil it?
- 3 How has humanity obliged in acknowledging and advancing this human dignity in the Bible.
- 4 How has humanity neglected or rejected or abused and violated this divine demand – perhaps not only in the Bible, but also in the extra-biblical history of the world?
- 5 What lessons can we learn from the above to enable us a) to develop deeper insights into the content and intent of the divine endowment, and b) fulfil its demands?

And we are supposed to present these answers in half an hour!

Under these circumstances, we recall what our parents said to us ages ago when we were young and complained that the food was too much. They said, “Start eating!”

First, as is well known, there is no set of biblical texts which directly declare that God has endowed human beings with dignity. Nor is there any which directly instructs us to acknowledge and enhance such a gift in all people. There are direct declarations that God has bestowed “honour”, “power” and “dominion over other creatures” and even “love”, but not specifically “dignity”. Our conclusion on human dignity is derived from our interpretation of Scripture and our understanding of what the authors and redactors of the various books say or imply. We therefore believe that the case for the biblical claim of divine source of human dignity and for advocating for all to accept and promote it must be based on conclusions drawn from the following types of scriptural data:

- 1 Genres and narratives of the primordial – the origin and purpose of the created world and humanity and from explanations of natural and social phenomena
- 2 Narratives and comments about particular persons and groups and the implications of religious and moral decisions taken by them and others.
- 3 Specific records of “Dos and Don’ts” which have implications for human dignity and rights, and
- 4 Teachings and literary materials which have explicit and implicit significance for asserting human dignity or the denying and violating of it.

Rather than attempt to study a large number of samples, we shall select a limited number in both the Old and New Testaments to illustrate their type and their significance for the claim for human dignity. The OT instances will be from the normally recognized periods of the Bible times and the special insights each seems to have contributed to the development of our understanding of human dignity will be indicated.

OT



1 The sample of Divine Source of Human Dignity The Two Creation stories (Gen.1:1-2:4a, and 2:4-25)

As pointed out by Anderson, both of the Creation Stories imply and also affirm the divine source of human dignity. In the P Account, “The Man” is created as the climax of the creation drama. The Cosmos, the elements, time, plants and animals are all brought forth by God’s command. But man is created a) by a solemn decision announced at the divine council and b) in God’s image and after his likeness.

It is vital to point out that man’s task and responsibility are indicated at the same time – to administrate and tend God’s works (see later Ps. 8:5 and Heb. 8:6 also Luke 2:49, 4:43).

In the JAccount, man is formed first from earth and the divine breath. A portion of the world’s wilderness is carved out for him and made into an ideal garden. Again, we must note that this dignity and honour is closely related to the requirement to cultivate and guard the garden. Yahweh then takes the special trouble to find a suitable companion for the human being by creating animals and birds, and Yahweh gives man the special collaborating function of naming them. Finally Yahweh creates the female “out of man” to the complete satisfaction of man.

We must note well the narrator’s concluding ethical and sociological comment, linking the marital status of human kind to the divine creative act and intent.

There are multiples of passages in the Bible acknowledging this divine gift of life and opportunity for service (see specially the Psalms and the Prophetic literature). We can term it the “Twin Divine Gifts of “Dignity and Duty”

We must mention here also that this perception was a most vital driving force in the vision and mission of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

By way of presentation at this Consultation, it would have been logically right to discuss the positive human reactions to, and demonstrations of divine gift of “dignity and duty” first, and then the unfortunate instances of negative reactions and demonstrations of it. But the circumstances of rampant human failure, which, I believe, forced the story of the fall to feature prior to the Redemptive episodes

in the Bible, compel us also to deal with the human negation and violation of the “dignity and duty” first and thereafter, its affirmation.

2 Samples of Ignoring, Denial and Violating of Human Dignity

Primordial Period Samples

a The Fall (Gen. 3)

Humans (Woman and Man) degrade and insult their dignity by yielding to Satan’s tempting (i.e. testing with intent to cause failure). The result is estrangement and expulsion from the garden of blessing and guiltless bliss.

b Cain (Gen. 4)

Cain gets wrongly upset for his brother’s righteous act of offering acceptable and pleasing sacrifice. He violates Abel’s dignity by killing him. At the same time, he insults and degrades his own dignity and duty demand.

Samples Affirming and Promoting Human Dignity

Noah (Gen. 6-4)

Human wickedness and violence results in Yahweh deciding to destroy all life. Yahweh honours Noah (and his family) and saves them and a very limited number of creatures – only one pair. God’s reason for saving Noah was because “he was righteous and blameless in his generation”. Noah’s total trust in Yahweh encourages him into faithful tireless labour of preparation at the ridicule of observers. God saves him and makes him custodian and representative of the post-flood “remnant”. We also note the natural phenomenon of the rainbow is linked to his favourable sacrifice and covenant with Yahweh. Noah upholds human dignity.

Unfortunately, Noah later tainted his own dignity through drunkenness. But the “dignity with duty” maxim holds firmly in his case.

A couple of samples from the Patriarchal Period are also presented.

Abraham – The Friend of God and Father of all Believers (Gen 12-25)

Yahweh dignified Abraham by selecting him and cutting a covenant with him. It is

important to see the two clear parts of the covenant:

I will bless you and your descendants – Dignity and Honour

1 Through you I will bless the nations of the world – Duty and Responsibility.

Most of the time Abraham faithfully trusted Yahweh, e.g.

- Agreeing to depart from Haran for Canaan, paying tithe to Malchizedech
- Waiting for a long time for the birth of Isaac, the test of near-sacrifice of Isaac, liberal
- hospitality to the divine visitors (God) and the friendly conversations with God,
- specially the pleadings for Sodom and Gomorrah.

We note his human failings, however, and his indignity in:

- his pretending that Sarah was his sister in Egypt in order to avoid a perceived threat of
- death and his yielding to Sarah's request to have a child by Hagar.

In sum, Abraham's example also highlights the human situation of opportunity of dignity due to unique divine choice and the associated challenge of becoming the primary agent for dignifying (blessing) of all human kind.

Joseph (Gen. 37-50)

Right from the beginning Joseph's future honour and dignity are foreshadowed in his name and his dreams. His brothers endeavour to deprive him of his father's affection, his freedom and his dignity by selling him. In Egypt, no sooner was his dignity restored than Potiphar's wife degraded him (and herself!) by falsely accusing him. In this depth of dishonour, indignity and despair, God sustains his relationship with him and Joseph also maintains his cordial and dignified human relationship. Then he gets more than fully restored by Pharaoh and he reaffirms his dignity in the high office to which he is raised and was forgiving to even his wicked brothers. Finally, he became the saviour of the emerging Hebrew clan and helped to establish them in Egypt to prepare for the Exodus.

Whereas his malefactors dehumanized him and violated his dignity God on all

occasions restored it to him and used him as a major agent for establishing Israel as a nation.

Human Dignity in the Exodus and Settlement Stories

Again we cannot discuss the instances of human dignity, its promotion and its violation in the Exodus and early Settlement narratives in full detail. It is necessary however to point at the most significant personality and the most momentous episode of the Exodus: Moses and the Decalogue.

Moses (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy)

The life and teachings of Moses stress the importance of how God dignifies mankind through Moses and Israel on the one hand, and how Israel (and by extension human kind) must dignify God, on the other.

The major purpose of the Moses saga seems to be:

- 1 to liberate the Hebrew children from bondage and degradation under the Pharaohs.
- 2 to make an everlasting covenant between Yahweh and the Hebrew children – and by the “duty” extension, “all the nations of the world”.
- 3 to train the Israelites to understand Yahweh and his demands more clearly so that they would comply with them as they settle in the Promised Land.

The many instances of Moses' teachings and efforts to instil the theological, personal and social implications and demands of the statement “I shall be your God and you shall be my people “on Israel, constitute his life's labours in the wilderness. We can only say here that the relevance of Moses' leadership to the development of the sense human dignity is evident. The Decalogue seems to sum it all up.

The Decalogue (Ex 20:1-17, Deut. 5:1-21)

Very briefly speaking, of the Ten Commandments, the first four demand acceptance, reverence, worship and complete devotion of life (i.e. complete dignity-duty response) solely to Yahweh. The second six demand recognition, dignity and compassion for the neighbour. Herein is encapsulated the essential Judeo-Christian obligation for “full worship for God” and



“full respect for the other”. For a further distillation of this concept, see the summary in Deut 6:5 and 11:1 etc. The insights of Jesus into the Decalogue and their relevance for our understanding of human dignity should be a topic for a group discussion at this Consultation.

Lessons from the Monarchy Narratives on Human Dignity

As is well attested, becoming a ruler or king over a people presupposes the wielding of power and authority by the ruler over the ruled. How this developed in Israel is well known. According to the author/redactors of the monarchy narratives, earlier premonitions and predictions of problems in a monarchical dispensation in Israel proved to be more than realized. In our context, individual and social rights and obligations towards the citizenry were swept aside. As the monarch grew more powerful so did its arbitrary infringement of the rights of the governed. Moreover, apostasy and disregard for the laws and ordinances of Yahweh increased. The kings and people in power got more and more powerful and godless (except in a few cases) and the down-trodden and underdog multiplied in numbers and their suffering increased.

Fortunately, the Yahweh-ethic Prophetic tradition persisted and admonished, protested and sometimes rebelled against excessive abuse of authority and unlimited use of power.

In terms of human dignity we have a lot of evidence in these narratives. Two of the most prominent instances are the Nathan protest against the David-Bathsheba and Uriah and the Elijah protest against the Ahab and Jezebel and the Naboth episodes (2 Sam 11 & 12, 1 Kings 21 & 22). The lessons on the abuse of human dignity and the necessary rebuke for so doing are starkly evident.

It is clear that this insatiable quest for power got both the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah into conflict with greater international powers and led to their final tragic defeat and extermination.

The New Testament

Our view as human dignity as mirrored in the New Testament is based mainly on the life and teachings of Jesus and developments of the idea which emerged, thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit, after the Lord had left this life.

As T. W. Mason rightly said, Jesus' life and teachings were based on his deep personal experiences of God a) as the Everlasting Father and b) as the Eternal Sovereign. The colourable conviction of Jesus was that he was the Unique Son of the Father and the Obedient Subject of the King. He knew that he was the “Anointed One” and the “Suffering Servant” at the same time.

It is within this context that we see Jesus living a life in which he was convinced that God had bestowed Sonship and all its privileges on himself – and through him, on his followers “by adoption”. At the same time also, Jesus saw himself as the special and unique subject of the Sovereign Lord who knew exactly what the will of the Lord was and was obliged, not only to respect and obey it but also to propagate it to all as well.

He was the Son of God who called himself “Son of Man”. He had decided right from the Temptation (if not from childhood) to obey God faithfully and out of love.

He would proclaim in Nazareth that he had come to bring goodness to the poor, proclaim release to captives, give sight to the blind, release to the oppressed and announce God's changed situation and time.

He pronounced blessings on the poor in spirit, on mourners, on the meek, those keen to do God's will, the merciful, the pure in heart, peacemakers and those persecuted for doing God's will.

He proclaimed that he had come to fulfil the Law and the Prophets.

He gave a new understanding of the beginnings of the sins of murder, adultery, divorce, false swearing and retaliation.

He taught his disciples to pray most fervently and comprehensively.

He taught us not to worry excessively about the future and that we are of great value to God – even the lost one among the 100 sheep and that God takes good care of all his creation.

He taught and demonstrated that we must be true, loving and devoted neighbours of one another.

He gave us the new Law that we must love one another as he himself loved us and gave up his life for us etc, etc, etc.

From this mass of Gospel material, from the Birth all the way to the Crucifixion

Main Lectures

narratives, there can be no modicum of doubt that Jesus more than strongly believed and lived to demonstrate

- God has endowed human kind with great and significant dignity
- that mankind is enjoined to understand and promote this dignity in a selfless manner
- that violating this dignity in other persons is contrary to the divine will and against what we are meant to be.

Of course we know that after Jesus, his disciples who did not have a full understanding of his teachings with the help of the Holy Spirit, received greater and deeper understanding

It is from these New Testament teachings and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit

that Christians of the past and those of today endeavour to find the will of God and the right way to appreciate violations of human dignity and to do all they can to restore it to victims. It is also from these sources that we scrutinize ourselves whether we are Reinforcers, Victimizers or actual Victims of Human Dignity.

One thing which is certain is that our perception and sensitivity to human dignity is not complete yet. Mankind has been discovering new ways in which dignity must be extended to people who did not know it before. The Holy Spirit will continue to assist us to see more closely and more widely what the will of God is for his creation.

**Prof. Gilbert Ansre
E. P. Church, Ghana**



PEOPLE IN NEED WANT TO CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS – WHERE AND HOW CAN THEY DO IT?

1. Who are the needy persons and why are they in need?

Needy persons are people of both sexes and of all age groups who live in continuous poverty and destitution without having any chance or hope of improving their living conditions. They are deprived people living in neediness or even in extreme poverty. Since poorness is a state which covers all areas of human life (physical, moral, material and cultural), the people in need cannot

- nourish themselves appropriately;
- clothe themselves;
- obtain medical assistance in case of sickness;
- obtain education and vocational training;
- live in suitable quarters;
- develop and flourish.

In short, they cannot claim the fundamental rights which are due to them.

There are manifold reasons for this situation. We wish to list some of them:

- discrimination;
- injustice and unbalanced distribution of wealth;
- insensibility and indifference of people in power and of other members of society;
- lack of responsibility of some people;
- human wickedness and disinterest.

According to the basic principle of „*respect of human dignity*“, these persons deserve special attention of the society and of the communities, because it does not suffice to grant rights to them and to guarantee these rights. In addition it is essential that they possess instruments of power.

2. How can they claim their rights?

We wish to discuss means

which are at the disposal of the people in need if they want to claim their rights.

In Togo, actions for improving the subsistence level of needy people are initiated both by governmental institutions and by others. The framework of these actions is laid down in a strategical document for the reduction of poverty:

„Document Stratégique de Réduction de la pauvreté (DSRP)“.

The fight against poverty needs the participation of all those sections of society who constitute institutional governmental and non-governmental mechanisms, especially legal means, both inside and outside the courts. To be more precise: courts of law, the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), the social services, the non-governmental organisations defending the human rights, the charitable institutions and the churches. But the following question needs to be answered: are the needy people capable of using these means that are made available to them?

Most of them, being rejected, despised, vulnerable illiterates, do not dispose of the necessary information which would enable them to approach the person or office in charge and to explain their problems.

In many cases, even if they have the information, they do not possess either the courage or the boldness. Therefore, they accept the situation as it is. Another handicap is the fact that they underestimate themselves.

It is the obligation of the institutions which were already mentioned (the government, the non-governmental



organisations, the institutions for the defence of the human rights and the religions confessions) to become active in daily life, to provide to these people means and tools like education, rising of awareness, support and eradication of illiteracy. In this way, they become capable of claiming or defending their rights.

An example for the contribution of EEPT

EEPT endeavours to defend and support the rights of poor and weak people. In addition, it is always guided in its actions by its determination to offer best preconditions for the development of mankind. This objective is anchored in its church social service („Diakonie“) which constitutes the missionary base for authentic faith in the integral salvation of mankind, expressed in everyday life. It becomes apparent:

- 1. in Christian education, endeavouring to lead every individual towards the authentic faith, inside and outside of the church, enabling him or her to become the human being that God intended;**
- 2. in school systems, contributing to a good education;**
- 3. in Christian solidarity, to emphasise the actual presence**

of the church at the side of those who live in poverty, especially of those who constitute fringe groups;

- 4. in the social network and in social advancement, contributing to the respect for human dignity and preservation of the creation.**

EEPT confirms its special objective of teaching and training in all areas that are related to life, according to God's wish. EEPT accepts the following tasks:

- to protect the life of one person or another, assuming this responsibility towards God (1 Gen 4);**
- to talk to all „shepherds“, i.e. those bearing some kind of responsibility: the religious leaders, the ruling persons and those bearing political responsibility as well as the economic powers, to liberate those that are suffering from slavery in all its multifaceted manifestations (Ezekiel 34);**
- to announce the Good Message to the poor and liberation to the prisoners (Luke 4,18-20, Isaiah 61,1-4);**
- to evoke conscience (Amos);**
- to follow the objectives of improving the living conditions of mankind and of preserving the creation.**

**Dr. Bertille Pialo HETCHELL-MADITOMA
Pastor of EEPT**

Program

Monday, October 12th, 2009

- 8.00 hours** Welcome / introduction / arrangements / segmenting in groups
- 8.30 hours** Bible study: Ghana
- 9.30 hours** Intermission
- 10.00 hours** Main lecture:
„God gave inalienable dignity to each of His children, a dignity that can never be lost“ (biblical-theological perspective)
- 11.00 hours** Intermission
- 11.15 hours** Discussion in groups
- 12.30 hours** Lunch break
- 15.30 hours** Sharing of Situation and Experiences: lecture from Ghana, topic
How does economic pressure or exploitation lead to violation of human dignity?
- 16.15 hours** Intermission
- 16.30 hours** Group work
Are we – in our different contexts – involved? As church or as Christians?
- as culprits
- as victims
- as fighters against injustice
- 18.00 hours** Exchange in the plenary
- 18.30 hours** Dinner
- 20.00 hours** Presentation/exhibition: the work of Bremen Mission

Tuesday, October 13th, 2009

- 8.00 hours** Bible study: Germany
- 9.00 hours** Intermission
- 9.15 hours** Main lecture: there are two different contexts: in one context, the dignity of a person is derived from his or her singular identity, in the other context from his or her membership of a community. How can these two perspectives be brought into a relation to each other? (philosophical/intercultural perspective (or rather intercultural-sociological aspects?))
- 10.15 hours** Intermission
- 10.45 hours** Discussion in groups
- 12.30 hours** Lunch break
- 15.30 hours** Sharing of Situation and Experiences: lecture from Germany dealing with the topic „violation of human rights“: sociological facts from our societies
- 16.15 hours** Intermission
- 16.30 hours** Group work
- Who are the „losers“?
- How do they become „losers“?
- Where is God, looking after the people affected? (outside, behind the door)?



- 18.00 hours** **Exchange in the plenary**
- 18.30 hours** **Dinner**
- 20.00 hours** **Free time**

Wednesday, October 14th, 2009

- 8.00 hours** **Bible study: Togo**
- 9.00** **Intermission**
- 9.15 hours** **Main lecture: the society provides all humans with an equal right to human dignity (legal perspective);**
- 11.15 hours** **Intermission**
- 11.45 hours** **Discussion in groups**
- 12.30 hours** **Lunch break**
- 15.30 hours** **Sharing of Situation and Experiences: lecture from Togo dealing with the topic:
Where can the weak obtain legal protection? Or, where should they be able to obtain any kind of protection?**
- 16.15 hours** **Intermission**
- 16.30 hours** **Group work
In what way are our congregations involved in offering protection and help (asylum)?
Are we ready to be measured/evaluated by our own norms?**
- 18.00 hours** **Exchange in the plenary**
- 18.30 hours** **Dinner**
- 20.00 hours** **Cultural evening**

Thursday, October 15th, 2009

- 8.00 hours** **Bible study: Ghana**
- 9.00 hours** **Intermission**
- 9.15 hours** **Sharing of Situation and Experiences:
Impulse presentations from Ghana, Togo, and Germany to the subject:
„Reports of commitment and stories of reassurance“: Christians, congregations and churches stand up for human dignity**
- 11.15 hours** **Intermission**
- 11.45 hours** **Working in groups
a) Editing the joint statement (only editing group)
b) Proposals for analysis and evaluation activities
(church service proposals, tract literature, and draft for confirmation classes, academy work, Animation Théologique, ...)**
- 12.30 hours** **Lunch break**
- 15.30 hours** **Discussion of joint statement**
- 16.30 hours** **Intermission**
- 17.00 hours** **Closing service with a congregation with Eucharist/Lord's Supper?**
- 18.30 hours** **Dinner**