

Bilateral Working Group of the
German Bishops' Conference and the
United Evangelical Lutheran Church of
Germany (Ed.)

God and the Dignity of Humans



*Lutheran Theology:
German Perspectives and Positions 2*

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Vol. 2



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Foreword

»God and the Dignity of Humans« is the title of the closing document of the third Bilateral Working Group. With a mandate from the German Bishops' Conference and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), the group has dealt with this topic since 2009. With this study paper it submits the results of its deliberations and discussions to the public.

In this way, the third Bilateral Working Group stands in the tradition of its two predecessor commissions, which published the documents »Communion in Word and Sacrament« (1984) and »Communio Sanctorum - The Church as the Communion of Saints« (2000). As in the two previous rounds of discussion, the third Bilateral Working Group sees its work in the context of the dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; this dialogue celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2017 and reached a highlight in the worship service for the Reformation Commemoration in Lund on 31 October 2016, celebrated jointly by Pope Francis and the President and the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan and Rev. Dr Martin Junge.

In its methodology, the commission ties into the tradition of previous Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogues at the national and international level. The search for a differentiated consen-

sus is the guiding hermeneutic principle of the study. Like its predecessor commissions, the third Bilateral Working Group aims to describe ecumenical commonalities in a differentiated way. Existing differences are identified and evaluated according to whether they are open to each other in their diversity and may be mutually accepted as a complementary enrichment of one's own view, or whether they do count as grounds for division.

In terms of content, however, the Bilateral Working Group has turned to a topic that had not received much attention in the bilateral dialogue of our two churches up to now, but is virulent in recent years not only in the German context, but also in Europe and worldwide: anthropology and the consequent ethical decision-making in our churches. The theme »God and the Dignity of Humans« assigned to us by the decision-making bodies of our churches has proved to be a stable basis for demonstrating on the one hand the great theological similarities of our churches in the teaching of anthropology, whilst on the other hand doing justice to the clearly delineated differences in the ethical assessment of individual issues of human conduct.

The study builds on the results of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which was solemnly signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church in Augsburg on October 31, 1999. At the same time, however, it also deals constructively with its partly critical reception in theology. The document explores new paths in the ecumenical handling of ethical questions and controversies by examining whether the methodology of differentiated consensus can also be effective in the field of ethical judgment. Divergent positions in individual ethical questions are to be understood as

limited dissent, which does not reveal a fundamental contradiction in anthropology or the methodology of ethical judgment, but only makes differences recognisable in the application of ethical principles and in the assessment of controversial borderline issues.

The publication of this final report lies in the responsibility of the Bilateral Working Group. It asks the commissioning churches to examine whether the considerations outlined here help both to strengthen the theological similarities in anthropology and in many areas of ethics, as well as to understand potential conflicts in ethical issues better and to deal with them in a proper fashion. The Working Group hopes that the results will bring the churches closer together and empower them to work together even more strongly for the dignity of people in our society.

Although this study is primarily aimed at the commissioning churches, we would be pleased if it proves to offer help and stimulus to the other churches in Germany and may open up the discussion with all who are engaged in promoting human dignity. We request the representatives of academic theology to participate in the examination and further clarification of the questions raised.

Bishop Prof. Dr Friedrich Weber accompanied the third Bilateral Working Group as Lutheran co-chairman from the very first preliminary considerations. His premature death prevented him from finishing this work. The Bilateral Working Group is grateful for his great commitment and for his theological and structural clarity, which played a significant role in this study. Thanks are due in the same way to Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, who helped to launch the Working Group and

accompanied it intensively as Catholic co-chairman before being appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2012.

Magdeburg/Bückerburg, 25 November 2016

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Introduction

1. The Christian churches have participated in public debates on ethical, political and legal issues for many years at the international, national, regional and local level. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Bishops' Conference have repeatedly expressed their opinions on current concerns in society as a whole, and they will continue to do so. The same applies to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), the individual regional Evangelical churches, the Catholic dioceses and the manifold Christian organisations involved in social activities. New perspectives emerged when the Evangelical and Catholic churches decided to express their agreement on socio- and bioethical issues in »Common Texts«¹. Taking ac-

¹ The first text »Gott ist ein Freund des Lebens. Herausforderungen und Aufgaben beim Schutz des Lebens. Gemeinsame Erklärung des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz« (Trier 1989) was followed by a number of »Common Texts«, for example the statement »Zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Deutschland. Diskussionsgrundlage für den Konsultationsprozess über ein gemeinsames Wort der Kirchen« (Hannover/Bonn 1994), »For a Future Founded in Solidarity and Justice. Statement of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Bishops' Conference on the Economic and Social Situation in Germany (Hannover/Bonn 1997),

count of current threats, for example the armaments race and the increasing environmental pollution, expressing their concern for the protection of life and the handling of asylum seekers, and examining the economic and social situation of people in Germany, the churches jointly formulate their concrete ethical claims on state and society and bring them to the notice of the public. These texts have demonstrated a great ecumenical commonality in many ethical issues. In practical terms, the churches implement these theological and ecumenical impulses in diaconal action and common public initiatives. All this was seen to be a signal for the growth of ecumenism in Germany.

2. In the political debates on stem cell research over the last fifteen years, differences arose between the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches concerning the deadline set by the German parliament, which was in the centre of the public debate. There were also differences in the assessment of certain aspects of assisted suicide. On the Catholic side, these differences were often seen as a new confessional demarcation line,

»... und der Fremdling, der in deinen Toren ist.« Gemeinsames Wort der Kirchen zu den Herausforderungen durch Migration und Flucht« (Bonn/Frankfurt a. M./Hannover 1997) and »Gemeinsame Verantwortung für eine gerechte Gesellschaft. Initiative des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz für eine erneuerte Wirtschafts- und Sozialordnung« (Hannover/Bonn 2014). In 1990 they published a declaration on organ transplantation, in 1998 a working aid on xenotransplantation and in 1999 another on Patient Decrees; the latter was brought up to date and published again in 2011 under the title »Christliche Patientenvorsorge«.

threatening to challenge the previous common basic consensus and making a joint political commitment questionable. For the Catholics, common witness to the Christian faith also includes a common witness on Christian action. From the point of view of the Protestant churches, on the other hand, the differences are often assessed otherwise, because the individual's freedom of conscience belongs to the basic understanding of the Protestant faith, and differences in specific cases and in the development of ethical theories are interpreted as legitimate expressions of Protestant freedom. This study seeks to reduce possible mutual irritations by a methodically guided dialogue process which objectivises the discussion by differentiation and thus focuses on the common social mission.

3. On behalf of the German Bishops' Conference and the Church Council of the VELKD, the third Bilateral Working Group dealt with the theme »God and the Dignity of Humans«. It draws on the numerous socio-ethical texts of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Bishops' Conference. However, it goes beyond these texts by taking a more fundamental theological position whilst addressing the respective denominational convictions and making them jointly fruitful. In this way, the Bilateral Working Group follows the tradition of its predecessors, which dealt with classical ecumenical issues of the church and their communion.² The Bilateral Work-

² Kirchengemeinschaft in Wort und Sakrament, Paderborn/Hannover 1984 (abbreviated here to KWS); *Communio Sanctorum – The Church as the Communion of Saints*. Official German Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue, Liturgical Press 2004 (abbreviated here to CS).

ing Group does indeed break new ground by explicitly addressing ethical issues for the first time. To be sure, it remains faithful to the previous conviction of pursuing the question of unity in faith according to the foundations of ecumenical hermeneutics.

4. The purpose of this text is to clarify how the churches may be enabled to stand up for human dignity together in a convincing manner despite certain differences in ethical questions. Together we start from the conviction that the Christians of all churches are connected to one another by their deep desire to lead their whole life by faith in the living God, revealed in Jesus Christ for the salvation of humankind through the Holy Spirit, and to devote themselves freely to others as children of God. Faith and action only work together for good if at the same time the churches' differences in judgment and action are taken seriously theologically. The incessant struggle for a common understanding of faith and for action in accordance with the gospel should not be cancelled out by authoritative acts or pluralistic indifference. In the present day, Christians face the same challenges together. These differ from those of previous decades due to their confusion and complexity, requiring new joint efforts to bring human dignity to the attention of the public.

5. This text is structured to reflect this concern. It begins with an introduction to the ecumenical debate on human dignity, followed by a summary of the Catholic and Lutheran approaches to ethical judgment. The aim is to enable a mutual understanding of the different patterns of reasoning together with a respectful, critical and constructive treatment of ethical

dissent. In this section, the text analyses principles of ethical judgment in the light of denominational traditions. The third section presents a common theological anthropology on the biblical basis, which is shared by both denominations. This leads to consequences for the common advocacy of human dignity. Despite the differences in individual ethical positions, there is a deep-rooted and broadly diversified consensus between Lutherans and Roman Catholics in the understanding of human dignity. At the same time, different opinions on individual ethical issues are to be found not only between the denominations but also within them. Firstly, they reflect the ambiguity and complexity of the scientific, legal and economic situations to be described. For example, when empirical facts are irresolvably ambivalent, the same basic persuasions can lead to different ethical judgments. Secondly, differences arise because factual issues always require solutions within a certain cultural, economic and political context. In both cases, the differing ethical judgments are due to factors outside theology. Thirdly, differences can be traced back to divergent procedures of reasoning in the denominations. For this problem area, our study has two intentions: 1. The emphasis on the common concern of human dignity does not exclude different patterns of reasoning and limited differences in ethical questions. 2. Specific limited differences of judgment in certain cases do not prevent the Catholic and Lutheran churches from working together in the cause of human dignity. This is described in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter unfolds the ethos of humanity in the form of an interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

6. The socio-ethical documents published by the churches since the late 1980s take it for granted, with remarkable clarity and consistency, that they have a common Christian understanding of humanity, which belongs to »the fundamental intellectual forces influencing the common European culture«.³ All these documents deal with the dignity of humans as persons: »The human being is a person. This is the basis for all ethical statements.«⁴ The ecumenical documents represent the common Christian conception: »Theologically, the recognition of humans by God constitutes them as persons.«⁵ This pattern of reasoning runs through all the arguments; they all understand a human being as a person with a unique and inalienable dignity. Even though the concept of human dignity is open to different interpretations, the testimony of Christians and the Christian churches in a pluralistic society depends on their fundamentally unanimous, common conviction of the inalienable dignity of humans, which finds its basis in their creation in the image of God.

7. The special nature of this text requires some clarification as to the mandate, the responsibility, the frame of reference and the context of discussion which this document is intended to address. On the basis of their *mandate* and *responsibility*, the members of the Bilateral Working Group (BILAG) can only speak for their respective confessional background. They are

³ For a Future Founded in Solidarity and Justice (see footnote 1), No. 92.

⁴ »... und der Fremdling, der in deinen Toren ist«, (see footnote 1), No. 115.

⁵ Gott ist ein Freund des Lebens (see footnote 1), p. 42.

directly responsible for this alone. For the Lutheran members of the working group, this applies first of all to the Lutheranism of the German regional churches represented in the VELKD, but beyond that also to the Lutheranism of the international communion represented in the Lutheran World Federation. For the Catholic members of the working group, it applies to their responsibility for Catholic theology in Germany in relation to the worldwide theological and ecclesiastical discourse in Roman Catholic provenance. The *frame of reference* makes it advisable to refer in addition to common ecumenical statements made by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the German Bishops' Conference. Without being able to speak for the EKD and its member churches as a whole, nor for Old Catholics and other denominational fellowships, the appropriate statements and discussions are taken into consideration. The public discourse on ethical issues determines the *context of discussion* of the text formulated by the BILAG, which thereby intends to meet its claim of making a contribution to the debate within the church and the public in Germany.

8. This text has been drawn up with regard to responsibility for the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in Germany, in the context of the common dialogue at the world level, by reference to the joint responsibility of the churches in Germany in their different denominational characteristics, and with respect to the scientific and social community in Germany. That makes the task complex and diverse. But the issue is of such importance that such a text cannot fall short of this claim.

1 The Ecumenical Dimension of the Debate on Human Dignity

9. Every human being is entitled to human dignity. That does not depend on origin, race, sex or religion. It applies unconditionally. This dignity cannot be lost, even if it is disregarded by others. From a Christian point of view, it may be said that human dignity is a gift of God and for this reason not subject to disposal. In biblical terminology, every human is created in the image of God. This is the conviction of the Christian churches that they represent in the current debate on ethical and legal problems for which society and the state are seeking solutions. The churches' advocacy of human dignity aims to bring people by arguments and witness to form their own well-founded judgments and to act accordingly.

10. The churches are painfully aware that they regarded human rights movements for a long time with a large degree of scepticism. They were afraid that they would relativise truths of faith or a freedom founded on Christianity. It took a long time before the churches came to associate the concept of human dignity with the basic biblical conviction of the image of God in every human being and finally to adopt it themselves. In the secular emancipation movements of the modern age, there was a long struggle before human dignity and human rights as guiding categories for politics and ethics also found acceptance in church doctrine. A number of advocates of the

modern concept of human rights reject any claim to the religious justification of human dignity, seeing in it the church's claim to dominance, but others maintain the opposite, seeing the modern concept of human dignity as based solely on occidental Christian cultural tradition. Both perspectives are one-sided. It is no coincidence that the concept of human rights was developed in Europe and North America, i. e. in principally Christian cultural areas. There are also independent philosophical and legal traditions that have led to the recognition of human dignity and human rights in modern times. It should be noted here that it was only after the Second World War, in the aftermath of the Shoah, that statements by the church emphasised the concept of human dignity fully. For the Catholic Church, it was the Second Vatican Council with its Declaration on Religious Freedom of 1965 which initiated the breakthrough to a modern consideration of human rights. Today the churches are all the more grateful for all the movements and initiatives which have campaigned for respect for the human dignity of all people and continue to do so. Even now, all Christian denominations are struggling against fundamentalist tendencies that make reference to God in their attempts to relativise human dignity and restrict human rights. The Protestant churches and the Catholic Church in Germany, together with many others, repeatedly raise their voices in rejecting such tendencies decisively.

11. In the course of their history, the churches have frequently made themselves guilty of doing wrong to humans and their dignity. The churches tolerated the injustice of slavery for a long time. In the name of God violence was perpetrated against people and their rights were disregarded. In particular,

Jewish fellow humans were ostracised and persecuted. For centuries people were executed for their religious beliefs. Equal rights for women and men were also denied. In many cases, women were not treated in accordance with their dignity. The list of misdeeds is long. They call for remembrance of the victims with shame and pain, grief and regret. The churches are grateful for the fact that prophetic voices have repeatedly been raised in church reform movements, in philosophical and theological reflections, in numerous pastoral initiatives and in art, calling for a change of direction. Today the Christian churches accept their ecumenical responsibility to work together for human dignity and human rights.

1.1 Human dignity in the public debate

12. In recent years, new developments in biotechnology, medicine and society have confronted us with opportunities and problems to which conventional ethical orientations can no longer adequately respond.⁶ Individual ethical decisions are necessary, but they come up against limits of knowledge and the power of judgment. Binding legal norms have to be negotiated in complex political processes. Social norms are created within society, which is shaped by various actors, who all bring different interests, concerns and patterns of justification into

⁶ Cf. *Wieviel Wissen tut uns gut? Chancen und Risiken der voraus sagenden Medizin. Gemeinsames Wort der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zur Woche für das Leben 1997: »Jedes Kind ist liebenswert. Leben annehmen statt auswählen«, Hannover/Bonn 1997.*

play. This also includes the interpretation of the Basic Law as the legally binding basis of all legislative procedures. Here the dignity of the human being plays a decisive role. Human dignity asserts itself not only as an incontestable legal principle, but also as the guiding principle of ethical debates in Germany.

13. No public debate on ethical issues today can refrain from referring to human dignity. We relate the expression »dignity« to human beings, thus making a distinction between them and material assets or animals' rights to protection. Whether human dignity can only be conferred by others, whether it be society or the state, or whether a person possesses inherent dignity, is one of the crucial questions in the current public debate.

14. The argument regarding human dignity plays an especially prominent role in the discussion in the German-speaking world. This is also due to the specific historical experiences and memories. The shock caused by the violation of human dignity during the brutal National Socialist dictatorship as well as political and social experiences after the War in the Federal Republic of Germany have had a marked effect. The principle of human dignity appears here as an unquestionable moral and legal authority. This is convincingly expressed in Article 1 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, which states that human dignity shall be inviolable. This article comes into play whenever it is argued that some ethical or legal standardisation or another violates human dignity. The recourse to human dignity then performs various functions. Firstly, the reference to human dignity is intended to express the inviolability and invulnerability of the human person; secondly, this argu-

ment is intended to ensure that humans may not be instrumentalised, and that their self-determination or physical and mental integrity is guaranteed.

15. Against this background, science and politics warn against an inflationary use of the argument for human dignity. However, it retains its basic function as orientation. For its fulfilment two conditions have to be met. Firstly, it is necessary to justify exactly why human dignity can and must be used as an argument in an ethical question. Secondly, the concept of human dignity itself needs to be exactly defined so that it can be used precisely. At this point the Christian churches bring their experiences, insights and convictions into the public debate. They assume that there is general recognition of the aim of forming a just, life-supporting and sustainable society. When Christians speak publicly about ethical questions, they feel united with all those striving to shape the future in a humane way. They respect the different positions arising from divergent persuasions and seek to introduce their own arguments into a public discourse.

16. Social debates on ethical and legal issues are based on competing ideas of human dignity. It needs to be clarified whether human dignity is primarily a legal principle or a fundamental ethical position, whether it results from a philosophical or a religious finding which is essential for its effectivity. The concept of human dignity provokes fierce debates in medicine, jurisprudence, philosophy and theology. In particular, there is controversy as to the role played in ethics by autonomy – the self-determination of human beings – and as to the role of rational thinking and behaviour in morality. Ultimately, it is all about

the question: what is a human being, and who is a human being. The individual areas for ethical discussion demonstrate how shifts in emphasis on the understanding of dignity have a direct effect, and also how difficult it is to derive individual ethical norms for respective ethical and legal problems directly from the concept of human dignity. What is seen to be a violation of human dignity also depends on the understanding of the dignity of humankind. Here Christians feel especially obliged to get involved and raise their voices on behalf of those whose voices are hardly heard or who cannot speak for themselves. Despite the controversial nature of the concept of human dignity and the plurality of its definitions and descriptions, it is closely associated with the conviction that there is a fundamental norm for law and ethics as an ineluctable instance of justification. Consequentially there are numerous debates on the relationship between human dignity and human rights.

17. Talk of human rights undergoes changes in the course of the discussions about human dignity. In recent decades, there have been intensive debates about what belongs to human rights. There is meanwhile consensus that, alongside the individual civil liberties enshrined in the constitutional rights of the Federal Republic of Germany, there must also be recognition of basic social, economic and cultural rights which today determine the cohesion of societies. Human rights thus include not only individual civil liberties but also the rights to social participation. Because human dignity is accorded to all human beings in equal measure, the basic principle of justice is derived from the principle of equality associated with human dignity. In this way, questions of justice always affect human dignity at the same time.

18. The debate on human dignity has intensified in recent years. A fierce controversy about human dignity has broken out. On the one hand, doubts haven been raised concerning the validity and effectiveness of a metaphysical and religious justification. This is claimed to be in contradiction to the liberal constitution of the state. It is asserted that a religious understanding of dignity is only shared by a minority of the German population and can therefore no longer be generally accepted in a pluralistic society. By implication this often suggests that the reasoning brought forward by people on the grounds of their faith cannot be described in a comprehensible fashion or imparted as generally acceptable reasoning. On the other hand, it is partly argued that the entire concept of human dignity is an illusion, deriving from cultural conditions of the Western world which no longer exist and never had universal validity. These two objections compel the Christian churches to formulate their theological arguments in such a way that their preconditions are presented transparently and the formulation of their contents shows that they are obviously capable of connecting with other discourses.

19. This debate can be seen to be intensified when it is argued that the specific mention of human dignity is purposely made in a secular and abstract legal language. According to this view, this detached, originally legal vocabulary ensures the distinction to religious or ideological creeds, thus making general and universal validity possible for all peoples, societies and states, independent of their religious backgrounds. The implicit accusation here is that a religious or metaphysical justification would obscure this universal standpoint and minimise the chances of creating a legal principle for all peoples

and states. Thus there are a number of reasons for desisting from talk of religion when justifying human dignity. On the other hand, however, religious justifications contain sense potentials which could enrich the general debate. For the Christian churches, the virulent starting position has thus been massively intensified once again. The Christian churches must therefore now ask themselves how they can introduce their own religious justification of human dignity in such a way that they advance the cause of human dignity without being wrongly suspected of religious indoctrination.

20. Thus the churches set themselves apart both from consequential one-sided fundamentalist as well as from secularist positions. Just as a religious justification of human rights is often regarded as particularist and therefore as weak, the opposite criticism maintains that a decided rejection of religious justifications would encourage relativism and indifferentism. The argument goes that any kind of justification necessarily results from a certain position, so that a justification that does without religion can therefore be criticised in the same way as one based on religion. On this basis it is then emphasised that only a theological justification can guarantee that human dignity is inviolable. According to this position, human dignity can only be a sustainable concept for state and society if it is based on Christian principles.

21. On the other hand, the churches are also confronted with the criticism that a religious argumentation can lead to an erosion of true secularity. This would come about if the church were to argue with ideas that appeared to be ideologically neutral, but were in fact based on Christian positions; this would

be the case for a justification by natural law that prevails above all in the Catholic tradition. Such a concept of human dignity would have to be abandoned, since a merely ostensible secular legitimation would harm the true secularity of the concept of human dignity. So while the liberal secularity of state and society is described by some as a loss of religious substance, there are others who fear a Christian usurpation of secularity, leading to the loss of the intended universality.

22. A purely Christian justification conjures up the threat that the concept of human dignity be understood as an ideological project of an exclusively western-occidental nature, which will be rejected precisely on that account by other peoples, societies and cultures. On the other hand, a purely secular justification is also in danger of being seen as a western-occidental ideological project that denies the possible religious dimensions of human dignity conceptions and thus specifies a typically western paradigm of secular enlightenment as absolute. In each of these cases, human dignity and the human rights associated with it as a norm that is equally binding on all people would lose their sense, their significance and their normative effect on societies and their legal systems. Against this background, it is important to communicate with other religious, ethical and legal concepts of human dignity and to be open to other concepts of their justification. From a Christian point of view, the dialogue with the other world religions and with modern ideologies makes it necessary on the one hand to declare one's own position clearly as a basis for discussion; on the other hand, different concepts of human dignity should neither be fought against nor mistrusted, but rather esteemed on account of their own intentions and possibilities. There is

no alternative to seeking understanding with people of other religious or ideological convictions in order to ensure that human dignity and human rights are regarded as unconditional and inviolable everywhere in the world.

23. Taking the »the autonomy of earthly affairs«⁷ seriously without giving it absolute status is the challenge presently confronting all the Christian churches, and it is only to be met ecumenically. Here the example of religious liberty proves helpful. The right to religious freedom is firmly established in the constitutions of modern democracies that respect human rights. It requires no further religious justification as such. On the other hand, the religious justification ensures that religions recognise this right and accept it both for themselves and for others as the basis for peaceful coexistence in a society and between peoples. In this respect, a religious justification continues to be irreplaceable and indispensable. By taking this path, the Christian churches prove themselves by their ecumenical efforts to be capable of modernisation and at the same time needful of it. Under the title »God and the Dignity of Humans« the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church want to raise the issue of the reference to God in the concept of human dignity and also emphasise its necessary generality and universality for all nations, states and peoples of this earth.

24. The churches repudiate the suggestion that only attributes a negative function to the concept of human dignity, namely that of discrediting opposing views or convictions; such

⁷ GS 36.

a strategy disregards the positive effects. It is true that it is difficult to derive direct ethical consequences from human dignity; precisely on account of its universality and basic significance, it has to be put into concrete terms, which often remain controversial in individual cases. Differences in the justification and substantive content of the concept of human dignity lead to conclusions which are partly different or even contradictory.

1.2 Human dignity as an argument in the debate on ethical and legal issues. Selected examples

25. Three areas of ethical problems and activities have been selected in what follows in order to show paradigmatically how positions of the Protestant and Catholic sides, whether shared or divergent, are justified and weighted. All three examples are highly controversial. The first example, stem cell research, is connected with the beginning of life and its protection; the second example, child poverty and education, concerns the middle of life; while the third example, active and passive euthanasia, takes place at life's termination. These examples have been chosen for this study in order to deal, at least partially, with all phases of life. All three cases play an important role in public debate and are ethical questions involving human dignity. The examples cannot, however, be examined as such in this study; the study does not serve the purpose of finding a common ecumenical position on these ethical problems; this would require a far more detailed treatment than is possible here. The present descriptions are not intended to search for exact ethical solutions – this must be left to the intensive debates by experts – but rather to reveal the different usages and the relevance of

the human dignity argument. In this respect, the present considerations are to be understood as prolegomena to an ecumenical formation of ethical judgment. These examples are therefore only discussed *as examples* of the ways in which common as well as partially divergent positions are adopted by the Catholic side on the one hand and the Protestant side on the other. These examples should only demonstrate the relationship between fundamental commonalities in anthropology (which are described in Chapter 3 on a biblical basis) and the statements on individual ethical questions which are sometimes in agreement and sometimes divergent. It is also the question how strongly such differences influence ecumenical dialogue. The examples have been selected to present in the first place a controversy, in this case stem cell research, then the intensive and well-tried accordance in questions of child poverty and education, and thirdly euthanasia, where there is basic and wide-reaching agreement, but nonetheless differences in some particular points.

26. It is clear to the Bilateral Working Group that there are other important areas of ethics in which differences between the Protestant and Catholic sides are currently surfacing; human dignity can also play a role in these issues. In particular, the topics »sexuality« and »living in same-sex partnerships« are currently receiving a great deal of attention in church bodies and among experts. The positions cannot be clearly distinguished along denominational lines, because the differences run through all denominations. The working group did not include this topic among the explicit examples because the group's mandate was limited to the discussion of fundamental issues. However, the Working Group is convinced that in these

and other areas similar arguments to those in the selected topics could apply.

At the beginning of life: stem cell research

27. Embryonic stem cell research raises high expectations for new possibilities of treatment. Realistic goals of stem cell research offered by biomedicine are regenerative therapy and cures for diseases such as Huntington's chorea, Parkinson's or Alzheimer's disease as well as cancer. Biologically, it consists of the extraction of cells which develop after the fifth day of fertilisation in the interior of the blastocyst, i. e. shortly before implantation in the uterus. Embryonic stem cell lines can be cultivated from the cells removed, and these can develop into any type of cell in the human body. The German Stem Cell Act of 2002 prohibits the production, cloning or destruction of embryos and also of blastocysts for research purposes. However, the legislation allows research on imported stem cells under strict conditions if they were obtained before 1 January 2002. This deadline was later deferred in 2008, making it possible to import stem cells obtained before 1 May 2007. With regard to the moral and legal-ethical status of embryonic stem cells, the question at issue is the point at which one can speak of a human being entitled to full human dignity, and whether one can or may distinguish between the beginning of human life and personhood.

28. The societal positions differ first and foremost in how the personhood of the embryo is to be defined in time. Points of time which could possibly be defined here are fertilisation of the human egg, the nidation, the emergence of sentience, or later events. Another valid alternative is a phased status con-

cept, which reckons with several morally relevant stages of development of the human embryo. Those opinions which regard the fertilised ovum as the beginning of personhood endowed with full human dignity argue that the embryo belongs to the human species, point to the continuity in the embryo's development, its identity with the later child and adult, or else with its potential, given that the embryo can only develop into a human child. Advocates of other stages in time, on the other hand, point out that certain specific attributes have to be identifiably existent in order to ascribe a moral status. Just one thing is clear: at whatever stage human dignity applies to the human embryo, it is also connected with the protection of life and the prohibition of instrumentalisation.

29. In connection with the question of the moral or legal status of the embryo, different positions on embryonic stem cell research can be identified. The positions are in various ways strongly divergent, and the essential question is whether such bioethical problems are to be interpreted as moral conflicts between different ethical properties or whether clear answers may be obtained from overriding principles. The opinion that human dignity begins at fertilisation and that research with embryonic stem cells is therefore to be rejected is often criticised by medical research as anti-scientific and anti-progressive. Conversely, the proponents of comprehensive protection of life for the fertilised human ovum fear that other positions appear to give technical possibilities priority over ethical misgivings.

30. In the discourses evaluating stem cell research, a more far-reaching question is often raised. It concerns the possibility that an opening in this respect would have consequences for

the general social attitude to human dignity or for the entire system of values. There are many other individual ethical questions whose significance for the general attitude to human dignity is implicitly or explicitly discussed, and brought into connection with forecasts of a so-called »landslide«. Even if research with embryonic stem cells is no longer so dramatic as it was a decade ago, the debate demonstrates in exemplary fashion the importance of responsible formation of the human future in the service of mankind.

In the middle of life: child poverty and education

31. Germany is not a child-friendly country. For many years, reports on child and youth welfare have been pointing out that large families are particularly prone to poverty. The risk of poverty is closely related to public social benefits, national origin, education and social class. Risk factors are unwanted pregnancies, unemployment, restricted housing conditions, drug consumption and long-term illnesses. Low levels of education have been increasingly identified as a decisive factor of poverty, above all child poverty. Especially in their early years, many children suffer from a lack of developmental learning incentives. Low access to education reduces opportunities for work that ensures an adequate livelihood. In public debate, poor people are often considered responsible for their own plight, but it is not helpful to apportion blame sweepingly. In the welfare state, those who are affected are given financial support to alleviate the consequences of poverty. There is controversial discussion as to the extent and effectiveness of such support. However, when concentrating exclusively on financial transfer payments, it is easy to overlook the real struggle to

combat the causes. The normative justification nowadays is orientated towards the function of guaranteeing what is necessary and adequate in order to live a dignified life and towards the concept of participative equity. This makes the issue of a decent life more complex, because it goes far beyond the purely financial aspects. Efforts to eradicate poverty in the educational sector have a great deal to do with the social and psychological environment in which the education and development of young people can and should take place. In particular, the self-esteem of the children, which is orientated towards dignity, is paramount here. Combatting poverty on the basis of education involves a wealth of basic social and everyday skills as well as cultural techniques leading to vocational qualification. An important role is also played by the struggle to prevent violence among young people. This depends on a comprehensive culture of adolescence. Pedagogical efforts aim to make each individual capable of leading a self-determined and meaningful life. Education has to do with the whole person; it is a dimension of people's humanity and an expression of their dignity. Education is therefore one of the social human rights. The stagnating risk of poverty in spite of increasing economic growth, the growing gap between rich and poor which is statistically proven, and the widening gap in the distribution of income have recently led to a stronger accentuation of the normative model of distributive justice.

32. A similar social problem is visible in the relationship between the generations. Today's generations live at the expense of those to come. No generation before the present one has understood so clearly that the economic, financial and social actions of our time will affect, shape, enable and possibly limit

future generations in the area and scope of their life, existence and action to a previously unprecedented extent. Since the 1960s, the problem of the limitation of natural resources has figured in the ecological debate under the concept of sustainability. Apart from the obvious limits of growth associated with the increasing exploration of natural resources, it is global climate change which determines the social and political discussions about the threat to the livelihood of future generations. As far as this threat is caused by humans, the focus of political action lies on a wide variety of countermeasures, which go hand in hand with criticism of the way in which present generations form their individual lifestyles. While former generations in a mostly rural environment saw their purpose in life in taking care of house and property in order to pass them on to their successors, the boundless technical, economic and financial possibilities of today's generations direct attention much more strongly to the future aspects of present-day action. Whereas in the past the principal considerations in the relations between generations were the authority of parents over the children and the care of the children for their parents in old age, the relationship between generations has now not only changed radically, but even been turned on its head. Formerly, it was the task of the next generation to take care of the previous one; nowadays the parents are responsible for securing the livelihood of the next generation. In addition, the question of solidarity no longer solely concerns parents and children, but is a matter for individuals, partnerships, families and groups in an increasingly complex generational solidarity. Contributions to the family are no longer self-evident within a person's life plan, but have to be justified and decided on separately in each case. Whereas the demand for, and the political plausibility of,

social justice used to cover merely distributive justice between richer and poorer sections of society, this social justice now extends to the demands for enabling freedom and opening up future opportunities. Generational justice today presents itself as a diachronic dimension of social justice. It includes the obligation to do justice to the next generations by providing the necessary living spaces and enabling them to realise individual freedom.

33. Human dignity includes all the aspects and factors that make life possible at all and open up living spaces for future generations. Every human being is entitled to claim such life-enabling conditions, also with respect to ecology, health and culture. It is a question of justice that people are given these conditions. In terms of content, this also refers to generational justice, meaning the right of future generations to a life in an intact environment and a life-promoting society. In modern society, this is the point at which the dignity of children has to be reconsidered.

At the end of life: euthanasia

34. Dying with dignity is a topic which is of existential importance for many people. Due to the greatly improved methods of diagnosis and therapy, life can be prolonged into very advanced stages of illness, especially in connection with the development of medical support devices. The number of people who are severely ill and in need of nursing care is constantly on the increase. Caring for these people is not only a challenge for the health system, but also for relatives and families. Society needs to take action; the churches must make

their contribution. At the same time, the patients and their relatives are often deeply afraid that they will be simply the object of institutional and medical action. It is especially when dying that people long to be recognised and accepted in all their individuality.

35. For many people, the aspect of »dignified life« or »life in dignity« plays an important role. The question then arises whether there can be medical conditions which render dignified life impossible. For some people, certain minimum conditions for autonomous living are indispensable for a dignified life. Others consider it the epitome of human dignity that no mental deformity or physical disfigurement can be seen to set limits on a person's inviolable dignity.

36. The autonomy of patients obliges doctors to accept and implement the will of patients seriously, also as expressed in a Patient Decree, even and particularly in the case that this involves the rejection of certain life-sustaining or life-prolonging medical options. In certain cases, this can lead to a profound moral conflict for doctors, because they are aware of their professional duty to preserve life. In this context, a distinction is made between active euthanasia (killing on demand), passive euthanasia (letting people die) and indirect euthanasia (treatment to ease the end of life) as well as assisted suicide. The discussion about passive euthanasia is now considered to have been decided after rulings by the highest court; only a small minority favours permission for active euthanasia; but the admissibility of medically assisted suicide remains controversial even after the latest legal regulation.

37. Among many other arguments, the reference to human dignity also plays a central role in the debate on euthanasia. Some see it as an expression of human dignity to be able to decide the time of one's own death within the bounds of medical and human feasibility. The measure of respect for human dignity is then conformity with the self-determination of the person dying. Other positions interpret human dignity in such a way that no human being is entitled to decide on the life and death of a human being, and that includes an individual's decision on his or her own death. Thus respect for human dignity would include the most intensive possible accompaniment for dying individuals in accordance with their wishes and that everyone should respect the fact that life and death are not at their disposal. A further interpretation regards human dignity as the justification for the duty to preserve life. In some people's opinion, this also entails the obligation to employ life-sustaining and life-prolonging measures even against the patient's will under certain circumstances.

38. Several years ago, the various social and legal debates presented here were not apparent, but they show how important the concept of dignity is for human self-understanding. At the same time, it becomes clear that the concept of dignity has to be precisely explained and interpreted if it is to lead to a concrete orientation. However, the variety and rivalry of differing ideas also demonstrate the extent of the dispute about the concept of human dignity. The Christian churches now recognise that the discussion on human dignity was conducted along the lines of denominational reasoning. This denominational approach frequently failed to show the extent of ecumenical common ground.

2 Principles for Forming Ethical Judgement in the Light of Confessional Traditions

2.1 Different denominational approaches to ethical reflection

39. There is a widespread conviction that the foundation and specification of Protestant ethics offer options that differ from Catholic moral theology. In such comparisons, the denominations are often endowed with one-sided attributes: Protestant ethics envisioned the individual human beings with their non-transferable freedom of conscience, while the Catholic moral teaching laid down universally valid norms, authoritatively proclaimed by the magisterium. Public debate is strongly dominated by such denominational stereotypes. Instead, differentiations and clarifications are needed in order to avoid schematic demarcations and to define commonalities and differences precisely.

40. Due to the historical development of the disciplines, the Catholic side traditionally refers to moral theology, while the Protestant side uses the term ethics. However, this difference in terminology does not indicate a contradiction in the subject. The invariable focus lies on the assessment of ethical and moral phenomena, on the establishment of values and norms, and on motivation to act in the interests of others and for the good of the whole. Nonetheless, it is true that different forms of ethical concepts and types of ethical argumentation have de-

veloped In Protestant and Catholic theology. Some of the most important forms will be discussed here in terms of their confessional character and how they can be understood in an ecumenical dialogue (2.5).

41. This study deals with the theological foundations of ethics, both in the relationships between Scripture and tradition as well as in the fundamental distinction between law and gospel (2.3). Both are classical parameters of denominational and ecumenical theology. The text also examines the significance of the non-theological sciences for the formation of theological judgment (2.4). Because of their especially controversial nature, the relationships between the churches are examined at the end with regard to the way in which the human conscience may be described in relation to the free discourse of opinions on the one hand and to the authority of the church on the other (2.6).

42. An ecumenical perspective shows the way to an understanding on fundamental questions of social orientation, in this case on the topic of human dignity. There has been a positive change in dialogue efforts in recent times. The recognition is growing that common efforts to understand each other's different forms of ethical judgment are an enrichment to the whole Christian community. The different traditions in the formation of ethical judgements have gained respect and attention. With regard to the characteristic denominational treatment of this topic, one may take account of the basic approach known as »Receptive Ecumenism«, which is currently much discussed and is closely related to the »Ecumenism of Gifts«. This means that when a subject is treated in a way that is foreign to one's own tradition, one should be willing to appreciate

this from one's own point of view as a possible enrichment of one's own horizon. This does not rule out disagreements about alternative positions at the next stage. Given the great significance of global ecumenical efforts to speak with one voice on Christian ethics, it is obvious that this challenge is closely linked to fundamental questions of church teaching. But the differences to be considered are not always of a denominational nature; in the case of marriage, family and sexuality, for example, clear differences in culture and mentality are discernible within one and the same denomination.

2.2 Growing ecumenical understanding in ethical reflection

2.2.1 Ethical discernment as a common task of the churches

43. In the ecumenical discussion, it is meanwhile agreed that basic reflection on the principles determining the formation of ethical judgment is the path into the future. At the moment, the Catholic Church is currently involved in study processes on the international level, particularly in the multilateral ecumenical context, with the aim of concentrating interest on anthropological and ethical issues. The Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church had already begun to pay increased attention to issues of social and individual ethics as early as 1987. From the outset, the participants were guided by a two-fold consideration: ethical questions could prove to be both a source of further alienation and an encouragement to a new committal to common social witness. This study project was completed in 1995 and was published under the title »The Ecumenical Dia-

logue on Moral Issues»⁸. In view of the complexity of the topic, this paper did not include an analysis of specific controversies and the formulation of substantial ethical standards. Instead, it contains an analysis of the situation and a reflection on possible future paths in the dialogues on questions of ethics. Fundamental reflections are a prerequisite for understanding when it comes to specific ethical topics.

44. The study by the Joint Working Group points out the difficulty of an adequate hermeneutics of biblical witness and recalls the distinction between »first-order (and unchanging) principles and second-order (and possibly changing) rules«. In this context, the differences between the denominations when referring to human »nature« and to the »natural moral law« appear to be of primary importance. The document repeatedly addresses the ecclesiological implications of the formation of ethical judgements: It is true that »[t]he task of moral formation and deliberation is one which the churches share. All churches seek to enhance the moral responsibility of their members for living a righteous life and to influence positively the moral standards and well-being of the societies in which they live.«⁹ At the same time, however, in the churches there are »different authoritative means [for] ... moral discernment and the development of specific ethical positions«. ¹⁰ Ten »Guidelines for Ecumenical Dialogue on Moral Issues« are to

⁸ World Council of Churches/Joint Working Group, The Ecumenical Dialogue on Moral Issues: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/crete-08-e.html>.

⁹ Ibid., II/5.

¹⁰ Ibid., IV.

be found at the end of the document: calls for mutual understanding and respect; the commitment only to compare ideals with ideals and to refrain from looking for weaknesses in the practice of other traditions; the expectation of affirmation of what is shared in common; the common readiness to take part in social discourse.¹¹

45. In the bilateral ecumenical dialogue on the international level between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, within the context of the »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« (JDDJ), it was emphasised that the »relationship between justification and social ethics« needed further clarification. A study on the biblical foundations of the achieved convergence in the doctrine of justification has recently been published in the course of the international dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.¹² With a view to issues of individual ethics, it will be necessary to examine its relevance to the understanding of the relationship between anthropology and ethics.

46. The increasing efforts made since the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Vancouver in 1983 to reach closer agreement between ecclesiological and ethical issues have led to a corresponding focus in the study pro-

¹¹ Ibid., VI.

¹² Cf. W. Klaiber (ed.), *Biblische Grundlagen der Rechtfertigungslehre. Eine ökumenische Studie zur Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre*, Leipzig/Paderborn 2012 (engl: *The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification*, Paulist Press 2012).

grammes of Faith and Order in the following years.¹³ This concern was reaffirmed at the 5th World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela in 1993. The results of the subsequent consultations were published in 1997 under the title »Ecclesiology and Ethics«. ¹⁴ This anthology documents the reports on three consultations at the beginning of the 1990s and presents reflections by named authors on the entire study project. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties arising through a closer connection between two ecumenical paths which have existed since the beginning of the Ecumenical Movement – the so-called social ecumenism on the one hand and the search for visible institutional church unity on the other – Faith and Order sees itself on the right track as it strives to combine these two perspectives: »The Right Direction, but a Longer Journey«. ¹⁵

47. Continuing on this journey, and taking up the wish expressed at the 8th WCC Assembly in Harare in 1998 to pay more attention to issues of human sexuality, Faith and Order published a study document on Christian anthropology in 2005. ¹⁶ Taking account of contemporary challenges which threaten

¹³ Cf. World Council of Churches (ed.), *Church and World. The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community. A Faith and Order Study Document*, Geneva 1990.

¹⁴ Cf. T. F. Best / M. Robra (eds.), *Ecclesiology and Ethics. Ecumenical Ethical Engagement. Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*, Geneva 1997.

¹⁵ Cf. L. Rasmussen, *The Right Direction, but a Longer Journey*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 105–111.

¹⁶ Cf. World Council of Churches (ed.), *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology. A Faith and Order Study Document*, Geneva 2005.

human dignity in many ways, especially that of the sick and of people who are prevented from fulfilling their aspirations in life, the document refers to the biblical message that every person is made in the image of God and calls upon the churches to find a common ethical commitment. Starting from this, Faith and Order began further considerations in 2007 using a new methodology under the working title »Moral Discernment in the Churches«: case studies were intended to provide a better insight into the recognition of principles for the formation of ethical judgment. On the basis of the conviction that ecumenical controversies in ethical questions can be traced back to manifold factors, this access to exemplary controversies represented a methodical innovation by taking biographical aspects as a source of awareness. This methodical approach is also closely connected with the identification of the subject in church decision-making processes. At the same time, these case studies are intended to make it clearer which forms of argumentation used in theological tradition are relevant for gaining insight in certain contexts.

2.2.2 Consensus in the understanding of the gospel as the basis of common ethical understanding

48. The texts on ethical questions jointly published by the EKD and the German Bishops' Conference make it abundantly clear how the awareness of ecumenical commonality in faith in the triune God has grown over many years. The guiding principle is the common conviction that the churches live from the Word of God, as it was originally given to them in the testimony of Holy Scripture. In spite of differences regarding the definition and interpretation of Holy Scripture and in the un-

derstanding of tradition and customs, there is no dissent in the understanding of the basic message of the Bible and its testimony in the living heritage of faith. It is emphasised over and over again: humanity can only trust in God's loving faithfulness, in his grace and mercy. The authority of Holy Scripture is recognised as the basis of understanding in ethical questions. Thus the documents follow the insight into the common way of listening to the word of God in Holy Scripture which is now firmly rooted in ecumenical dialogue, for example in the »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification«.¹⁷

49. After more than one and a half decades, in which the churches have made joint statements on social, economic, scientific and civic problems, a few decisive core areas can be identified where understanding has been achieved in principle.

2.2.3 The image of God as a fundamental article of theological anthropology

50. With remarkable clarity and consistency, social-ethical documents of the last few years have taken a common Christian understanding of humankind for granted. The document »For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice« even speaks of »the Christian view of humankind«, which »is one of the basic spiritual forces of our common European culture«.¹⁸ All the documents start from the dignity of the human being as a per-

¹⁷ W. Klaiber, *The Biblical Foundations* (see footnote 12).

¹⁸ *For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice* (see footnote 1), No. 92; cf. also »... und der Fremdling, der in deinen Toren ist« (see footnote 1), No. 97.

son when presenting perspectives and impulses for action to shape the world: »Human beings are unique persons.« This is the basis for all ethical statements.¹⁹ Here reference is not only made to the Christian tradition, but in the same way to Western intellectual and cultural history. This fundamental article of every kind of ethics – whether Christian or not – forms the irrevocable starting point for the course of argumentation. Whereby it is conceded that the concept of person proves to be pluriform both in the public discussion as well as between Christians and churches. Nevertheless, the document »Gott ist ein Freund des Lebens« (God is a friend of life) dares to make a common terminological explanation to which all later documents refer. The orientation towards humans and their dignity is the sole basis for the relevance of various ethical concepts such as the ethics of virtue, norms, responsibility and property, insofar as, from a Christian point of view, it is humans on whose behalf action must be taken.

2.2.4 Social proclamation as a common ecumenical task of the churches

51. Because the church lives from the Word of God, it is important to the church to convey to people the biblical message entrusted to it within the context and discussion of contemporary social and political challenges. »The proclamation of the Word of God, his love of all people, is at the centre of church action.«²⁰ The Christian churches understand their commit-

¹⁹ Ibid., No. 115.

²⁰ Ibid., No. 253.

ment to this task in common witness and service. It is the special task of the churches to proclaim the basic trust in God's promises and His grace and thus to open up a basic orientation for life.²¹ The contribution of the Christian faith consists in creating confidence in life by trust in the grace of God. »Faith desires to give people hope in life.«²² In this respect, it is the task of the church not only to proclaim the Christian message of faith in God's grace and salvation, but also to take care of the individual human being and to accept responsibility for a humane, free and just public order in solidarity.²³ In this way the common position of all churches is revealed. Given the increasing complexity of ethical challenges in modern times, it remains the primary task of the churches to proclaim the gospel to the people and propagate the biblical message among them. In connection with the debate on the doctrine of justification, the ecumenical dialogue has shown that the churches can and must draw joint consequences from the message of justification for the world. There can be no doubt about their special responsibility for social and political issues. »The churches can make their special contribution all the more convincing, the more they succeed in witnessing unanimously to the message of Christ's love.«²⁴ There is a close connection between consensus in the understanding of the gospel and the churches' proclamation in social questions; they cannot be separated from each other.

²¹ Wieviel Wissen tut uns gut? (see footnote 6), p. 19 f. (No. 5).

²² Ibid.

²³ »... und der Fremdling, der in deinen Toren ist« (see footnote 1), No. 211.

²⁴ CS, No. 122.

52. The church recognises another important task, which is distinct from this primary mission but nevertheless results directly from it, namely the commitment to help individuals in the formation of conscience so that they can make an independent ethical judgment.²⁵ In another aspect of the churches' mission which is neither identical to, nor separate from the primary mission of proclamation, they are called to propagate a value orientation committed to the biblical message and the Christian faith. In this case, it is the church's contribution to change attitudes and behaviours.²⁶ The churches therefore see their competence primarily in their service to society and within it, made in a Christian spirit, rather than in taking on direct political and economic responsibility. Taking this into account, when describing the churches' tasks in the social and political field, it is commonly acknowledged that a distinction must be made between primary church proclamation and secondary social responsibility.

2.3 Theological foundations of ethical reflection

53. The far-reaching rapprochement which has meanwhile been achieved in the ecumenical discussions on determining the appropriate relationship between Holy Scripture and theological tradition is highly significant in the context of anthropological considerations in ethical questions. Here the relationship between law and gospel, which is typical for Evangelical-Luther-

²⁵ *Wieviel Wissen tut uns gut?* (see footnote 6), p. 18f. (No. 3).

²⁶ *For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice* (see footnote 1), No. 5.

an tradition, must be discussed specifically. There is also the issue of the relationship between biblical directives and decisions taken on the basis of human reason. Attention must also be paid to the relevance of respecting non-Christian philosophical traditions and science outside theology when forming ethical judgments.

2.3.1 *Scripture and tradition – basic theological determination in an ethical context*

54. As the ultimate norm of faith, Sacred Scripture is the original testimony to the truth of the God revealed in Jesus Christ. A determination of the relationship between Scripture and tradition which is appropriate and capable of ecumenical acceptance is provided by the conviction that the Word of God as Holy Scripture is itself embedded in the process of transmission in the faith community. The gospel that was handed down in the apostolic message (i.e. tradition in the singular) has evolved variously as the biblical message was often applied in the face of changing historical and situational challenges, so that specific denominational traditions (i.e. traditions in the plural) can be distinguished.²⁷

55. From a Catholic point of view, the recourse to Sacred Scripture (as *norma normans non normata*) is always required, since Scripture is the source of all gospel truth necessary for

²⁷ Abschließender Bericht, in: Th. Schneider / W. Pannenberg (eds.), *Verbindliches Zeugnis, III. Schriftverständnis und Schriftgebrauch, Dialog der Kirchen, Bd. 10, Freiburg i. Br. / Göttingen 1998, pp. 288–389.*

salvation and the sole yardstick of the proclamation of the church; but that does not remove the importance of respecting tradition (as *norma normans normata*) in the formation of theological judgment. Pointedly, the Second Vatican Council teaches that »it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty.«²⁸ In terms of content (*materialiter*), Scripture remains sufficient as the sole source of knowledge, as far as saving truth is concerned; formally (*formaliter*), veneration for the testimonies of tradition by communication and exchange in the church is a way of constant self-assurance. Sacred Scripture needs to be interpreted in the life of the church. The Second Vatican Council expressly states that the »teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.«²⁹ Tradition does not add content to Holy Scripture, but is indispensable for understanding it. The Constitution on Divine Revelation »*Dei verbum*« did not provide for an explicitly critical function of Holy Scripture in relation to tradition.

56. When the Evangelical-Lutheran perspective emphasises *sola scriptura*, it is referring precisely to the way in which tradition is criticised by Holy Scripture, which thus fulfils a genuinely reformatory function. But *sola* does not overlook the fact that

²⁸ DV 9.

²⁹ DV 10.

Scripture itself originated in a process of tradition and is handed down and preserved by traditions in the church. This also means that Scripture has to be interpreted; this is how traditions emerge. Protestant exegesis is also aware of the pre-understanding which it brings to the interpretation of the texts and which has to be constantly recalled in a hermeneutic process which can never be completed. The *sola scriptura* emphasises the special function of Scripture as *norma normans non normata*; on the other hand, the church confessions are *norma normans normata*. In this way, *sola scriptura* places Scripture over against the church as a critical instance, so that all the church's preaching must be measured by its conformity with Scripture. Holy Scripture is the criterion for church dogma and the Christian life.

57. This fundamental determination of the relationship between Scripture and tradition has effects on the relationship between faith and action. The biblical texts were written at a time when many questions that now need to be judged ethically had not yet been posed. This applies in particular to the entire field of human activities made possible by advances in medicine and technology. There are other areas – for example, marriage, family and other issues concerning the life of individuals – in which one must take the changing insights into consideration that have been made since biblical times on the level of human science and psychology, since these affect the formation of ethical judgments. Here it requires basic hermeneutic consideration as to how the biblical directives are to be understood and adopted today in the face of their historical context and the developments of recent times. This hermeneutical approach of modernisation cannot be called into question, because the Bible always depends on an up-to-date interpretation in all areas of

faith and morality. However, different opinions as to the criteria and the results of this updating exist, partly between the denominations, but also often within them. The consequence can only be a deepening of scriptural hermeneutics. There are new proposals in this direction both on the Protestant³⁰ and on the Catholic³¹ side. The present study will not deal with the hermeneutics of Scripture as such. But under the aspect of human dignity and its theological significance for ethics, the witness of Holy Scripture is exegetically raised in a joint ecumenical paper (in 3.1) and examined theologically (in 3.2).

2.3.2 Law and the gospel – a theological differentiation in the ethical context

58. The theology that was shaped by Martin Luther's Reformation made the distinction between law and gospel the criterion for the right interpretation of Scripture. The differentiation of law and gospel became a permanent theological task. This is not identical with the contrast between the Old Testament and the New Testament, as is sometimes misinterpreted. It also has nothing to do with the differences between Jewish and Christian exegesis. Rather, it is a specific manifestation of Christian scriptural hermeneutics that distinguishes the law in

³⁰ M. Bünker/M. Friedrich (eds.), *Gesetz und Evangelium. Eine Studie, auch im Blick auf die Entscheidungsfindung in ethischen Fragen*, Leuenberger Texte, Heft 10, Frankfurt a. M. 2007.

³¹ Pontifical Biblical Commission: *The Bible and Morality, Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (11. Mai 2008), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20080511_bibbia-e-morale_en.html.

its judgmental function from the gospel, the »power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith« (Rom 1:16f.).

59. This definition of the relationship between law and gospel has consequences for ethical questions. From a Lutheran point of view, commandments are by no means *eo ipso* suspected of legalism. If they correspond to the gospel, they rather lead the believers to live according to God's directives. To be sure, salvation cannot be earned by keeping the commandments. Nevertheless, one may not behave just as one pleases. Good works are a consequence of justification, not its prerequisite. Commandments are fulfilled in faith; this takes place through the action of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the good that comes from God is to be passed on to people, enriching the community in which Christians live.³²

60. This distinction between law and gospel is not to be found in the tradition of Catholic moral theology. In its traditional handbooks it searched for a philosophical, but not a biblical foundation for Christian ethics. It is even claimed that Catholic moral theology was traditionally »oblivious to Scripture«. The Second Vatican Council therefore rightly demanded a renewal of moral theology from biblical sources. Moral theology, in its scientific exposition, was to be nourished more on the teaching of the Bible.³³ The Bible contains the proclamation of the saving message of the gospel, to which ethics also belongs. The proclamation of God's saving action precedes all commandments. The

³² Die lutherische Zuordnung von Gesetz und Evangelium, in: Gesetz und Evangelium (see footnote 30), pp. 23–35.

³³ OT 16.

hermeneutics of the commandments must therefore remain connected with the fundamental preaching of salvation. With regard to ethical questions, the interpretation of Holy Scripture is oriented towards God's expectations of humankind as testified in the Bible. From this point of view, Catholic moral theology is also familiar with the various usages of the one Word of God. Sacred Scripture contains the commandments of the Torah, which were not abolished by Jesus, but fulfilled (Mt 5:17-20); it hands down Jesus' ethics, stamped by his own behaviour; it also testifies to the commandments of the apostles, who rediscovered the gospel's ethical claim in another historical context. Moral theology applies these commandments to people's different life situations. Therefore Catholic moral theology also speaks of tension in the relationship between the Kingdom of God, the comprehensive concept of salvation, and ethics, the concrete orientation towards life. Against this background, the door is opened between Catholic theology and the Lutheran concept of law and gospel, as long as it is interpreted ecumenically within the recent discussion. The cooperation of preaching and teaching plays a decisive role here. When Catholic theology emphasises the positive function of the law in witnessing to God's righteous will, this is based on the gospel, which in the words of Jesus demands repentance and faith (Mk 1:15).

2.4 Findings from the dialogue with non-theological sciences

61. In all questions of individual and social ethics, it seems today not only advisable, but actually imperative to seek dialogue with the non-theological sciences. This course of action is the consequence of the fact that extensive areas of human

life and decision-making are nowadays largely influenced by technical and scientific advances and findings. The complexity of the questions to be decided upon makes it essential to obtain comments and opinions from experts. For the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council has expressly encouraged respect for the autonomy of the sciences in their judgment. Lutheran theology can also acknowledge other non-theological sciences for the way in which they shape the conditions of life, because it appreciates the use of reason in humanity's dealings with the world. Nonetheless, in each case it has to be made clear how the background reference to God can be integrated into scientific and technically oriented decisions.

62. The most interesting non-theological sciences for theology are those that can be generally termed »life sciences« or »human sciences«. The economic and social sciences also come under this heading in a broader sense. Here the focus is on relevant areas of life outside the medical and technical fields which require ethical orientation. This terminology may not be clear in every respect, but it draws attention to the fact that certain scientific disciplines – primarily medicine or psychology – have human life as the subject of their scientific consideration. The emphasis is thereby not merely on purely biological conditions; modern medicine also pays attention to the psycho-social framework of life. It makes highly differentiated observations of the factors which are favourable or harmful to life, with recourse to the results of long-term studies. Besides medicine, the legal sciences also lay claim to contributing to ethical judgment in society. The preservation of the lives of as many people as possible is the primary interest of a number of different sciences and scientific fields.

2.5 Basic forms of ethical argumentation in Christianity

63. Every ethical understanding involves the representation and refinement of various philosophical and theological theories which have been handed down and concern life which is right and good. Ethical theories and conceptions are often evaluated differently by the denominations. Even if philosophical and theological concepts of ethics differ in their justifications, they demonstrate parallels simply because of their common history. The churches have an interest in conducting a plural discourse in which theological-ethical positions are formulated in such a way that they can be perceived as a contribution to the formation of judgments by society as a whole. The following section describes some basic ethical orientations which are often presented in public debates. This shows that the basic orientations can often overlap and do not have to be mutually exclusive.

64. The following discussion of several normative approaches aims to keep in mind that there is a difference between principles and individual norms. Norms are not discovered and laid down simply by applying basic principles. The formation of ethical judgment is not limited to the application of standards. The formation of ethical judgments is crucially determined by a thorough analysis of the specific situation. From a Christian point of view, the purpose of ethical standards is to perceive other people and their well-being – to see them at the centre of ethical reflection. Ethical norms for their own sake are not interesting for Christians. Over and above this, it is necessary to be able to assess one's own capabilities realistically when judging what needs to be done.

2.5.1 *Natural law and natural moral law*

65. In recent times, Catholic moral theology has tended to abandon the argumentation from natural law to justify concrete norms of behaviour and has turned instead to other arguments. If natural law is mentioned at all, then in the form of critical reflection. However, efforts are also being made to come to a differentiated view of natural law and natural moral law.³⁴ After the Second Vatican Council and the renewal of moral theology, attention turned to the productive confrontation with the idea of humankind's irrevocable autonomy in ethical questions. This was by no means a superficial attempt to remove the moral theological provisions from the context of church dogma, but rather intended to make moral statements compatible with reason, rationality and truth. This insight is based on the conviction that reality contains an inherent truth or reasonability that can be recognised, expressed and communicated. This rationality of reality has its own autonomy. Therefore the Second Vatican Council also quite consciously spoke of a certain autonomy of earthly affairs.³⁵ Moral judgments can be formulated, understood and applied. In its methodical reorientation, scientific theology has relied entirely on the rationality of moral norms and judgements. Such articulations of reason are not objects which can be arbitrarily manipulated, but arise from human practice and impart experiences and historical knowledge.

³⁴ International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law*, Rome 2009.

³⁵ GS 36.

66. Today Catholic deliberation on natural law begins with the universal search for an ethical language common to all human beings.³⁶ The ethics of natural law should be universal ethics. It concerns basic orientations of moral action which are in agreement with human nature. Given the universal claim of the modern concept of natural law, it is clear that Christianity does not itself possess a monopoly on natural moral law, which is based on the rationality common to all human beings. Natural law is thus not intended to be a special area of general ethics, but aims from the outset to determine the universality of ethical questions. Natural moral law is not a closed and complete system of moral norms. The basic orientation begins with the precept of natural law, which can already be found in Thomas Aquinas, that good is to be done and evil to be avoided. Certainly, natural law does not stop at this generality. It therefore focuses on going beyond this generality of the law. Today's Catholic concept of natural law asserts three essential aspects: to preserve and develop one's own existence, to achieve and secure the survival of the species, and to enter into dialogue with all people of good will. Altogether, the historicity of natural moral law has to be taken into account. Traditional Catholic moral theology saw itself predominantly as an ethic of law, concentrating principally on the fulfilment of commandments. Today's moral theology differs from such an ethic of law by propagating the idea of rationality and the justification of norms by reason.

³⁶ In Search of a Universal Ethic (see footnote 34), No. 3.

67. In the course of its history, Reformation theology has also advocated natural law, although it has repeatedly criticised it sharply or even rejected it. Following Rom 1:19, it was convinced that God had inscribed his commandment into the hearts and minds of all people. This commandment of God, which in its content is not subject to the cultural, historical or religious context, applies in all places and at all times. This natural law includes the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule and the *Aequitas*. For Luther, the three estates of the realm which existed in the sixteenth century were also part of natural law. For Luther, the actions of the believer were, of course, to be guided by the gospel, not by the law, insofar as a person became free for the love of God and his neighbour through faith in justification. A Christian's deeds should be dictated by the real needs of others, not by a general norm. Natural law therefore functions within the area of the secular regiment of God. In the realm of the spiritual regiment, however, the gospel applies without restriction. In later Protestant theology, in the context of the critique of Natural Theology, there was a strong rejection of the concept of natural law, insofar as arguments taken from natural theology were used to support the National Socialist ideology of race and people. To combat this, it was objected that only a strictly Christological orientation made it possible to hinder the justification of any arbitrary ethical norm by resorting to natural law. Recent contributions, above all from Luther research in Scandinavia, have outlined a Lutheran concept of natural law which may serve in particular to justify the universality of human rights.

2.5.2 Ethics of responsibility

68. Every ethical orientation seeks to do justice to human responsibility for one's neighbour. While ethics shaped by natural or rational law places a stronger demand on action orientated by principle, an ethics of responsibility focuses on the encounter with the other person. The term responsibility is therefore directed towards relationship. In this sense, Protestant ethics is oriented more toward the guiding category of responsibility than to principles or norms. It wants to emphasise that each human individual with his or her particular need is the primary object of good deeds. This conviction is based on the fear that in the case of an excessive orientation towards principles – whether towards general obligations, virtuous living or the good to be achieved – it is easy to overlook one's neighbour. For Catholic moral theology, as for Protestant ethics, the concept of responsibility belongs to the guiding concepts of an ethics which is looking to the future.

69. To bear responsibility means to be accountable. In contrast to a material orientation towards things, goods and values, the ethics of responsibility places the accountability of humankind before God, one's neighbour or society in the foreground. To be responsible means to consider the consequences of one's actions in advance and to accept liability for the corresponding decision. A variety of contexts can be distinguished. Ethics of responsibility seeks to find answers to the following questions: who is responsible, what are they responsible for and to whom, for what reasons, for how long and in what way? The decisive factor in answering these questions is the recognition that the different types of question can be com-

bined with one another in order to take a closer look at the situation of responsibility in which the individual or institution finds itself. Ethics of responsibility should not simply end with an appeal to the sense of responsibility, but must also point out ethical concretions.

70. In Protestant tradition, conscience is the place where God's justification is experienced. God frees man from his enslavement in sins and binds him to his word. In their conscience humans are confronted with God's judgment of their actions. Thus, at this time and under the prevailing historical conditions, God shows a person the way of faith in and according to his law, which is already fulfilled in Christ. The commandments of God remain valid for those who are justified. According to this understanding, humans live their lives in responsibility before God. Humans must ultimately comply with this responsibility before God as they are variously called to bear responsibility in the world.

2.5.3 Discourse ethics

71. Standards for action can be justified in different ways. With regard to certain moral problems, various normative claims to validity can be made. It is desirable and understandable that agreement should be reached in the case of moral problems that lead to persistent controversy. In recourse to Kant's ethics, discourse ethic aims to find a reasonable and peaceful consensus by means of free argumentative debate between individuals and groups in society concerning the responsible course of action. An understanding on the validity and scope of norms is to be reached by discussion.

72. Discourse ethics is not about the justification of norms in the proper sense, but about clarifying the question of how a consensus on controversial norms can be reached in dialogue. Theological ethics – regardless of provenance – cannot disregard this matter either. On the basis of its Christian faith, it has to present arguments that are both rational and aimed at consensus. In order for such a dialogue to succeed, discourse ethics has established rules, in particular to ensure that the dialogue between the various members of society is held in honesty and enduring openness. 1. Any subject capable of speech and action may participate in discourses. 2. Each and every person is entitled to question any assertion, but he or she must explain the reason. 3. Each and every one should only introduce topics to the discussion of which he or she is actually convinced. 4. No one may be prevented from exercising his or her rights of discourse by coercion within or outside the discourse.

73. The advantage of discourse ethics is that it is highly plausible in the context of modern societies. It sees itself as independent of culture and time, equally comprehensible by all reasonable beings, i.e. universal. Nevertheless, it is open to the constant changes of life and tries to integrate people's experiences. Whatever proves to be consensus in the discourse then possesses normative validity. Discourse ethics is mainly questioned because it considers that every fundamental conflict can be solved by procedure. The discourse also presupposes elementary moral principles, such as the honesty of the participants in the discourse, their mutual right to life and their freedom of opinion. That means that these moral principles are not the result of discourse. A further issue to be considered is how to deal with the absence of those who will be affected in the

future (embryos, small children, future generations) and with those who are not (yet) capable of discourse (mentally severely disabled). Finally, the critical question arises as to whether and to what extent a consensus can be reached discursively at all. The discursive understanding regarding contents is to be distinguished, even if not separated, from the normative claims of discourse ethics. The Christian churches are seeking to strengthen discursive understandings in modern societies.

2.5.4 *Virtue ethics*

74. Already in antiquity, virtue ethics evolved in comparison with, and partly in contrast to, normative ethics. In the current discussion on ethics, virtue ethics in the tradition of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas is attracting particular attention. Virtue can be understood as a disposition that shapes our actions, but also our thoughts and emotions. Virtue means neither singular actions nor a set of practical rules of conduct, but designates lasting stances and inclinations (fundamental attitudes), which are reflected in a good lifestyle and give the actor a »moral face«. Virtues are mostly named in the plural, e.g. the cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance, justice). When referring to virtue in the singular, it indicates in particular the free and easy decision for good, which is then expressed in the individual virtues. Just like human thoughts and actions, virtues are also related to historical situations, in which their sense is recognisable. For Aristotle magnanimity was an ethical virtue, but today it is almost forgotten. The virtue of humility, the restraint of one's own person, was for Aristotle as worthless as self-overestimation and pomposity. In the Middle Ages, under the influence of Christianity, humility became a

major virtue; nowadays it has almost vanished and seems to epitomise a negative, resignative attitude. On the other hand, the virtue of fairness, which is highly esteemed today, was unknown to Aristotle. Virtues fluctuate strongly.

75. The question as to the significance of individual virtues for moral action must be distinguished from the question as to the possibility of virtue ethics in contrast to normative ethics of a deontological or teleological nature. The ethics and moral theology of recent years were strongly marked by the problem of norms and have thus promoted a form of ethics and moral theology which aims at expectations and obligations. The intention of virtue ethics is less towards what should be done, but rather towards motivation and developing what can be done, leading – in the case of success – to what is good. Above all, virtue ethics reckons with the importance of affectivity and motivation in moral actions.

76. Nevertheless, the efficiency of virtue ethics is limited. It does not contain a complete answer to the question what should or must be done. Someone seeking advice may feel rather helpless when simply encouraged to be courageous: Do what a good friend would do! Moreover, virtue ethics cannot directly assess the occasional (and inevitable) tragic effects of human action, since its conceptual scheme is rooted in the notion of human good. Virtues are essential factors of moral life, but they cannot replace criteria for the judgment of particular actions.

77. Even if, in the history of theology, Catholic morals were more inclined towards a doctrine of virtue than Protestant ethics, no fundamental difference can be established today. For

some years now, Protestant ethics has taken up questions of virtue ethics in order to focus on the human behavioural dispositions and inner convictions connected with virtues. Both sides advocate complementarity in the sense that virtue ethics should be a supplement to normative ethics.

2.5.5 *Ethics of goods*

78. According to Aristotle, a good thing is the aim to which everyone strives. Something good is the universal purpose. Starting here, Aristotle undertakes to describe his ethics, according to which there is one highest aim for humans, which they are by their nature ordained to achieve. Aristotle calls this aim *eudaimonia* (happiness). Happiness is the ultimate goal of all human actions. In the ethical tradition, the concept of good has been principally connected with the question of happiness. But this idea by no means exhausts the significance of moral orientation. Those goods are considered important that are necessary to ensure successful human life and coexistence, e.g. health, freedom, peace, security of property. Particularly for the question of human rights, such an ethics of goods is of outstanding importance.

79. Within Protestant theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher is regarded as one of the most distinguished representatives of an ethics of goods, although his ideal concept consisted in a combination of the doctrine of goodness, virtue and duty. It is typical for an ethics of goods that it describes the actions of human beings with respect to the aims they pursue, whether ultimate or specific and intermediate. The highest good is defined by Schleiermacher as a unity of reason and nature. It is humanity's

destiny to penetrate nature by means of reason in order to unite the two. Since this can be done in different ways, there are preliminary fields of action that describe concrete »goods«: science, religion, politics, etc. Thus the human being is defined as oriented towards the future, whilst at the same time responsive in a concrete way to the formation of the world and his or her person.

80. It is precisely the close connection between happiness and the good in this ethical conception which leads to a serious problem down to the present day. It is undeniable that one should aim for the good for its own sake. The difficulty arises when defining what is good altogether. Supposing the answer to this question were to be »what is good for me«, then this ethical topic threatens to become dangerously perverted. By linking the question of good to the quest for private happiness, a deep paradox becomes visible concerning every search for the good for its own sake. In view of this dilemma, Immanuel Kant argued in favour of differentiating between the highest and the ultimate good. In such a hierarchy of goods, conflicting goals cannot be avoided, but the focus on questionable and more or less temporal goods can be better controlled and corrected. Wanting good for its own sake is a fundamental motive of any ethics.

2.6 Individual and institutionalised forms of ethical decision-making

2.6.1 Conscience and synodal processes

81. For Protestant and Catholic Christians, personal conscience is the reference point when taking ethical decisions. Conscience is formed in the church community and in dialogue.

82. »In Protestant tradition, a distinction is made between the official mandate of the church to supervise doctrine and the individual's conscientious decision in Christian life, taken by faith, whereby no division between doctrine and ethics is intended.«³⁷ It is not only the pastors (in cooperation with theological teachers who are not ordained to the ministry) who are responsible for proper doctrine, but »the synods made up of lay and ordained persons as well as the local parishes also bear responsibility for the proper apostolic doctrine.«³⁸

83. According to Protestant understanding, the congregations themselves have the final responsibility for judging questions of doctrine and life. They pass on this commission to the synod to make statements on questions of doctrine. The democratic discourse and elections at the synods establish a consensus within the church on issues of order, doctrine and life, whereby the theological faculties are indispensable for providing the appropriate theological competence.

»Conciliarity is the term [...] for the special form in which the Christian church deals with disputes about the truth and its consequences. [...] The church as the communion of differences requires a form of life in which unity can be repeatedly found within plurality.«³⁹

³⁷ KWS, No. 76.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ W. Huber, Synode und Konziliarität. Überlegungen zur Theologie der Synode, in: G. Rau/H.-R. Reuter/K. Schlaich (eds.), *Das Recht der Kirche*, Bd. 3, *Zur Praxis des Kirchenrechts*, Gütersloh 1994, pp. 319–348, here p. 340.

Synodal decisions are »open to future revisions«, because they are taken by trust in the Spirit and in the awareness of the historicity of human knowledge of truth.⁴⁰ The normative point of orientation in all questions of doctrine, life and order is always Scripture and confession in form and the doctrine of justification in substance.

84. The consensus reached in the synods by public debate has to be further distinguished from the *magnus consensus*.⁴¹ This kind of agreement is not reached or produced by majority vote, but is rather already existent or »occurs unsought and beyond human disposal«, by »the inaccessible working of the Spirit«; humans are only able to »ascertain« it.⁴² In this case as well, the reference to Scripture and confession remain valid as further criteria. »The object of the ›magnus consensus‹ is all that constitutes the church and is thus withdrawn from its disposal.«⁴³

85. The synodal decisions are intended to provide orientation for individual believers. But these believers cannot delegate their personal responsibility to synods, nor to bishops or university professors. This is a question of conscience that no one can answer on their behalf. Admittedly, believers cannot see their consciences in isolation from the church as a whole and its binding doctrine. An individual can only find the truth

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 345.

⁴¹ Cf. CA 1.

⁴² *Magnus consensus*, Texte aus der VELKD, Nr. 166, Hannover 2013, p. 4.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 7.

as a member of the community of believers, listening to the brothers and sisters. At the same time, conscience remains the ultimate formal instance for the individual. Synodal decisions only lay claim to final binding force in proclaiming the situation of *status confessionis*.

86. Catholic dogma also sees conscience as the decisive instance for the moral judgment and action of the believers. It is also characteristic that the magisterium does not make isolated decisions on its own behalf, but testifies to the faith of the whole Church. Synods and councils, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, are of essential significance for the development of doctrine in the Catholic Church. Because Catholic teaching emphasises the collegiality of the bishops and regards the sense of faith of the people of God as a source of theological knowledge, it has a theological basis for an appreciation of the practice in Protestant synods. However, regarding the practice of doctrinal decisions by the synods, Catholic theology is confronted by the question of who is involved in processes of judgment formation, of the way in which they are equipped with competence and authority, and of the theological status of the decisions taken. Moreover, from the Catholic point of view clarification is required on the significance of *sola scriptura* for the Evangelical-Lutheran side and the value they attach to the testimonies of tradition.

87. Despite all these differences, there are many ecumenical commonalities in view of the challenges of ethical discourse in society today. Many challenges must be considered jointly in this context. How strong is the influence of public media on the way the baptised believers form an opinion on ethical is-

sues? How would it be possible, for example, to encourage families to discuss ethical topics in an open discussion? How could one manage to raise awareness for Christian orientation in ethical questions?

2.6.2 Conscience and teaching authority

88. According to Catholic tradition, it is the eminent duty of the bishops, the authentic teachers of the faith under the Word of God, to preach the gospel individually, in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome, as true witnesses to the teaching of the Church.⁴⁴ The proclamation of the message of faith also extends to the moral life of the believers. These are required to follow the instructions of the doctrinal authority and to take them into account in their decisions of conscience. It is not the intention of the magisterium to impose a theological or philosophical system on the faithful, but to faithfully interpret and preserve the Word of God. Precisely in ethical and moral-theological questions, it is not the magisterium's duty to present the faithful with a complete catalogue of commandments or prohibitions, but to point out in certain cases and under consideration of certain circumstances incompatibilities between certain theological or philosophical opinions and the truth of God's revelation. In this respect, the magisterium carries out a work of discernment, admonition and ethical teaching.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ LG 25.

⁴⁵ Encyclical *Veritatis splendor* from Pope John Paul II to all Bishops of the Catholic Church (6 August 1993), No. 29.

89. From the Catholic point of view, conscience is to be seen as the inner space of discernment in connection with an action. It makes a judgment with the firm intention to do what is good and to avoid evil. In this respect, conscience follows the law of nature. But the judgment of conscience is a practical judgment which makes known what a person must do or not do. Conscience is the application of the law to a particular case, so that it becomes an inner dictate for the individual. Conscience is the proximate norm of personal morality.⁴⁶ Conscience is irrevocable as personal moral verdict. Nonetheless, the judgment of conscience is not exempt from the possibility of error. Christians find a great help for the formation of conscience in the Church and its magisterium.⁴⁷

90. The Lutheran confessions also contain expositions on the function of teaching in connection with the preaching and faithful acceptance of the gospel. In the Smalcald Articles it says: »The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel.«⁴⁸ This statement could lead to the erroneous assumption that the Lutheran churches reject all doctrinal authority and, both in ethical matters as well as in the proclamation and acceptance of the gospel, attach importance solely to the individual's freedom of conscience bound to the Word of God. Lutheran theology does not recognise the authority of any teaching office that guarantees and affirms the right interpretation of Scripture and its directives; indeed, it rejects such an authority entirely. For Lutherans, it is rather the

⁴⁶ Ibid., No. 60.

⁴⁷ Ibid., No. 64.

⁴⁸ ASm II.2.

case that Scripture interprets itself in an extremely differentiated process, in which all who are baptised take part in equal measure; this procedure allows the truth of the divine story of Jesus Christ to unfold of its own accord. The ecclesiastical leadership is freed from the obligation and concern of safeguarding the Scriptures and their authoritative interpretation, also in ethical questions.

91. So although the Lutheran confessions do not recognise a teaching authority equivalent to that of Catholic doctrine, they do charge the church's leadership and teaching authority with a decisive task when it comes to the process of self-interpretation of Holy Scripture: namely to verify doctrine, to reject any doctrine that contradicts the gospel, to work towards an ecclesiastical consensus on the right doctrine and also to describe it. This must, however, always take place in accordance with the primacy of the Word of God: »The teaching office of the church has no doctrinal authority of its own alongside or even ahead of Holy Scripture, but only has to assert the teaching authority of the Word of God. In this analogous way, God has conferred the teaching authority to the whole church, both ministry and congregation.«⁴⁹ The main seat of this process of doctrinal interpretation is the congregation of believers, »for which ministers are properly called and ordained to teach publicly and administer the sacraments (Augsburg Confession, Art. 14)«.⁵⁰ In addition

⁴⁹ Lehrordnung der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands of 16 June 1956 in the version of 3 January 1983, in: W. Härle/H. Leipold (eds.), *Lehrfreiheit und Lehrbeanstandung*, Bd. 2, *Kirchenrechtliche Dokumente*, Gütersloh 1985, pp. 147-153, here p. 148.

to the duly appointed parish minister and the witness ministry of all believers, the episcopal ministry of supervision as well as the synods and teachers at the institutions for theological training also participate in this interpretation community. The believers' freedom of conscience is formed and honed in and by participation in the interpretation community.

92. Despite different ways of shaping doctrinal authority, Lutherans and Catholics can establish jointly »that the church must designate members to serve the transmission of the gospel, which is necessary for saving faith. Were a teaching office not present and functioning in specific ways on the levels of both the local congregations and for regions of several or many congregations, the church would be defective.«⁵¹ At the same time, Lutherans and Catholics have repeatedly stated together »that binding teaching is subject to the norm of the gospel«.⁵²

2.7 Summary and outlook

93. Given this wide range of diverse topics and questions, in particular the varying types of ethical reflection, the influence of non-theological sciences and differing opinions on the rela-

⁵⁰ The Apostolicity of the Church. Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, 2006 (hereafter abbreviated to AC): www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2019/documents/lwf_apostolicity_of_the_church_complete_book_english.pdf, here No. 450.

⁵¹ AC, No. 453.

⁵² E.g. CS, No. 61.

tionship between Scripture and tradition, one may well gain the impression of an irritating plurality of ethical approaches and thought patterns. For this reason further reflection is necessary, both for Lutherans and Catholics. When describing and explaining these different types, characteristic denominational profiles are revealed. On closer inspection they raise open questions, but most certainly do not leave the impression of insurmountable dissent and mutually exclusive contradictions. Problems in communication can often be traced back to misunderstandings or different accentuations. In the classical controversies on theological questions, one had already been able to see how opinions previously held to be immutable could be clarified in the light of joint consideration. This effect now proves its worth in questions of ethics. Differentiations in ethical profiles are in no way a hindrance to understanding; on the contrary, they enrich the knowledge of the whole spectrum of ethical argumentation. Nowadays, no one is in a position to comprehend all the scientific, social and economic issues in their entirety. Ecumenical dialogues help to increase awareness for the complexity of the issues at stake and to deepen understanding for differing points of view.

3 Perspectives of Theological Anthropology in the Light of Biblical Testimony

94. Having described the task to be solved by this study in Chapter 1, and after discussing in Chapter 2 the various methods employed by the Protestant and Catholic sides regarding ethical issues, it is the Christian view of humanity which is to be presented in Chapter 3. The heart of the matter here is to explain from a Christian perspective the relationship between faith in God and the conviction of the unconditional dignity of humans. The unity of love for God and love for one's neighbour (Mk 12:28-34 and parallels; cf. Dt 6:4f. and Lv 19:18) is the guideline of Christian life.

95. Theological anthropology is developed in two steps. First, some important aspects of the biblical image of humanity are outlined (3.1). This is followed by systematic-theological reflections on human dignity in the Christian understanding (3.2). These two aspects may not be seen in isolation from each other, because Christian theology is guided by biblical testimony in a contemporary situation, and the interpretation of the Bible is always concerned with its current relevance for present-day problems. Where there is controversy, this connection is clarified. It is programmatic to take the Bible as a starting point, because Christian faith is nourished by the abundance of biblical insights, images, experiences and stories. This abundance reveals the original, historical testimony of faith.

96. In ecumenical accord, both the Catholic and the Evangelical-Lutheran churches can depict both the image of humanity to be found in the Bible and the theological systematics of anthropology. It is indeed possible to identify characteristic differences between Evangelical-Lutheran and Catholic theology when it comes to important questions of scriptural understanding and interpretation, of the image of God in humans and of their justification and salvation. This text intends to demonstrate, however, on the grounds of the »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification«, that such differences no longer have a church-dividing character today. The biblical section (3.1) indicates approaches to the controversies, while the systematic section (3.2) discusses them in detail. In this way the dynamics of Catholic-Lutheran understandings come to be expressed, showing that conflicts can be reappraised, contradictions overcome and differences made fruitful for a deeper understanding of Holy Scripture and the Christian image of humanity.

97. In many non-theological sciences, questions of anthropology and ethics are attracting great attention today. Nowadays, not everything which is apparently feasible is also ethically correct and beneficial in a longer-term perspective. Interdisciplinary discussions are conducted controversially, making it clear that there is a difference between those options that focus exclusively on the well-being of an individual and others that focus on the universal common good.

3.1 Baselines of biblical anthropology

98. For Protestant and Catholic Christians, the biblical image of humankind is fundamental. This is why the common recognition of what the biblical texts say about human existence is closely connected with a dialogue which determines what this scriptural testimony means today.

99. The Bible has no patent remedies for solving detailed ethical questions. But the Bible is essential for the formation of theological judgment on the importance of such questions and the real guidance given by those answers which make faith, love and hope tangible. When it comes to the evaluation of history and to facing the challenges of the present, Sacred Scripture is the basis for finding a theological orientation on human dignity; it forms a yardstick for measuring specific decisions; and it is a powerful source of motivation to put humanity into practice.

100. The image of humanity in the Bible is multifaceted. There are also manifold methods of reading and understanding the Bible. In the current debate about God and human dignity, some core texts and leitmotifs of the Old and New Testaments are of particular importance. First the image of God in humankind is described (3.1.1); then humankind is depicted in its guilt and need (3.1.2); finally the hope of human salvation is portrayed (3.1.3). At the end of the chapter, there are brief references to the approaches which the Bible offers for example cases covered in this study: the beginning and end of life (3.1.4) and the option for the poor (3.1.5). The end of the study, in Chapter 5, takes up the conclusions from this section and expands them.

3.1.1 Humans in the image of God

101. The Bible begins with God: He is the creator of heaven and earth (Gn 1:1). He is also the creator of humankind. The sixth day is described in Genesis thus: »Then God said, »Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.« So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them« (Gn 1:26-27). This part of the creation story contains the basic statement about the image of humankind in the Bible. It is impossible to speak more highly of humans. The likeness to God is the biblical foundation of what is now referred to as human dignity. In Gn 9:6 the prohibition of killing is justified by this likeness to God (cf. Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17).

102. For Protestant and Catholic theology it is obvious that Genesis offers no alternative to the scientific explanation of the world and humankind. Rather, the Bible expresses this one theological truth: humans did not create themselves, they were created. They are not just animals, but creatures like all the other creatures. They belong in the world that God has created; but their position in the world is unique. The human being is not God; but God is his or her creator. Through the relationship with God, people come to experience who they are: created and loved, with a likeness to God, called to communion with him and with other people in God's creation.

103. The biblical story of creation connects God's creative power with the likeness of God in each individual human being (Gn 1:26 f.). Analogies exist in the neighbouring cultures. Many myths about rulers and warriors, men of outstanding mental strength, physical courage and political skill, say that they are like gods. Some individual sources suggest that all human beings are equal to God. Most myths say that the gods created humans to serve them, because they were in need of such servants. Many myths describe fights between gods which are emulated by conflicts between humans. These myths have their own truth; they do not merely represent a great cultural treasure; they can also open people's eyes to important aspects of life. But they are clearly distinct from the image of God and humankind in the Bible, because Genesis makes a clear distinction between creator and creation, leading to a close bond. Because of this faith in God, the Bible sees God's image in every human being, regardless of gender and nation, age and education, religion and morals, strength and weakness. All human beings are God's image without exception, and this is because there is only one God who created them all. For the same reason, God is not dependent on the support of human beings; he created them by himself, out of pure love. Therefore, creation does not contain the threat of perpetual war, but the promise of peace, which is symbolised in the creation narrative by the Sabbath (Gn 2:1-4a).

104. Still today, the story of creation with its anthropology of the likeness to God, which characterises the whole Bible, has lost nothing of its significance. As racism and xenophobia gain the upper hand, as people experience discrimination on the grounds of gender, origin, age, of physical or mental handicaps,

certain kinds of behaviour or religious belief, we need to remember what the first page of the Bible says of humankind: each person is made in the image of God. There is no classification, no limitation, no reservation. Because dignity comes from God, it is inviolable. No one can deny it to another person, no one may ignore it.

105. There has been repeated theological and philosophical discussion as to the nature of the image of God in humankind. The Bible does not only refer to certain human attributes, such as appearance, reason, education, heart, religiosity or morality. Nor does it reduce a person to their skills in technology, art and culture. The biblical texts rather see humans as a whole in their relationship with God as well as in the relationship to other people and to themselves. The original Hebrew text contains the word *zelaem*, which can be translated as »statue« or »ef-figy«. The Greek translation of Genesis contains the word *eikon*, from which the expression »icon« is derived. A human being is God's icon. By looking at a person one can see God, the creator, through them. For the invisible God makes himself visible through humankind, the sign of God in the world. Humanity was created to represent God and to direct attention to him. This vocation, which is common to all people, is fulfilled in their relationship with other people, in their mission to preserve creation, and in their worship (cf. Gn 2:1-4).

106. Genesis particularly emphasises that God created humankind male and female (Gn 1:26f.). Bisexuality is linked to the command to multiply (cf. Gn 5:1-3). The sexes have the identical position before God; they have identical dignity. Modern demands for equal rights for men and women correspond to

this biblical understanding after many centuries in which women were treated unequally by law and politics. At the time when the story of creation originated, the equal valuation of man and woman was unusual. This, too, is to be explained by the common relationship to the one God. There are indeed many other statements in the Bible and in the history of its interpretation that are patriarchal. But they must be measured against the principle of creation theology. Therefore they are to be criticised theologically, so that they may be overcome practically.

107. The fact that humankind is God's »image« is the reason for the commission to have dominion over the created world, including the animals (Gn 1:26,28). This order is not a *carte blanche* for exploitation. On the contrary, it is the assignment of great responsibility. As the image of God, humans may not destroy the natural foundations of life. They are rather called to preserve them. They can use them creatively. But they are themselves a part of creation. When it says in Gn 9:2 that they should lay »fear and dread« on animals, that does not mean that cruelty to animals is justified, but paves the way for permission to use animals for food as well as plants (Gn 9:3 f.).

108. The biblical conception of humankind's likeness to God does not detract from the fact of their need, fragility and guilt. But no matter how great a human's misery may be, he or she remains a child of God. In Ps 8 the question is asked: »When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?« (Ps 8:3-4). The Psalm does not simply answer this question, but looks deeper into people's astonishment at God's wisdom and

their own position in God's creation: »You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!« (Ps 8:7-10).

109. In the New Testament, Psalm 8 is seen as a reference to Jesus (Heb 2:6-8). The Son of God is the true human. He »had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect« (Heb 2:17). He led the life of a human and died the death of a human. In his life and in his death he united the life and death of all people to God once and for all. »For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all - this was attested at the right time« (1 Tm 2:5-6).

110. Paul proclaims the resurrected Christ Jesus as the »image of God« (2 Cor 4:4). He reveals the glory of God; the light of God shines in anyone who looks to Christ (2 Cor 4:5f.). The great hope offered by the apostle is that God will conform those whom he saves »to the image of his Son« (Rom 8:29), so that they may be glorified as brothers and sisters of Jesus, the Son of God. »In Christ«, through justification, the believers will become a »new creation« (2 Cor 5:17). Although they have »fallen short of the glory of God« (Rom 3:22), they regain it in the Holy Spirit by justification through faith, having been adopted as God's children and thus participating in the Son's relationship to the Father (Gal 4:4ff.; Rom 8:10-17). Seen in isolation, 1 Cor 11:7 might give the impression that for Paul a woman's God-likeness is dependent on that of the man; but

that would be a mistake. However, in the context of the Genesis exegesis of his time, which deduced from Genesis 2 that women had been created subordinate to men, Paul sees the necessity of arguing in such a way that the equality celebrated in baptism (Gal 3:26ff.) did not destroy the order of creation, but transcended it. Therefore, in 1 Cor 11:11f. he pursues the line of thought in such a way that the essential existence of man and woman with and towards one another is captured in the sense of Gn 1:26f.

111. According to Colossians, Jesus is »the image of the invisible God« (Col 1:15). He does not abolish God's invisibility, but depicts it. »In him«, »through him and for him« all things have been created (Col 1:16). »In him« and »through him« all things have been reconciled (Col 1:19-20). Through Jesus Christ, the pre-existent Son of God, who became man and was raised from the dead, the mystery of humanity is founded in the mystery of God himself – for all time and eternity. Humankind is created »according to« the image of God revealed in Jesus Christ; therefore the believers can and must now already live their renewed lives (Col 3:9-10). This new life is an expression of their love for God and for Jesus Christ; it is a full, mature, grown-up, responsible life that can serve as a model for others (Eph 4:7-16).

112. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus is the »Son« who reveals the »Father«. On parting he said to his disciples according to Jn 14:9: »Whoever has seen me has seen the Father« (cf. Jn 12:45). Jesus is the perfect icon, the true image of God. According to John's passion narrative, Jesus, having been tortured and mocked, was to be publicly humiliated with the

crown of thorns as »King of the Jews«. In Jn 19:5 Pilate says, »Here is the man!« (Latin: *Ecce homo*). Despite inhuman conditions, Jesus remains human because he remains with God. He stands up for the dignity of all who are exposed to public shame because they have been deprived of their honour. What is more, he identifies with them, thereby revealing the dishonoured, humiliated, mocked man as the image of God. Through his death and resurrection he makes the path clear for salvation. After his resurrection, he bears the stigmata of his crucifixion (Jn 20:20,24-27) by which Thomas recognises who Jesus is: »My Lord and my God« (Jn 20:28).

113. The issue of God and humankind, which occupied the writers of the Old Testament, is today more topical than ever. In the face of scientific findings about the age and extent of the universe and biological teaching on the evolution of the human species, many people are sceptical whether it is true that humans are made in the image of God, as the Bible says. In fact, modern science has shown that the dimensions of microcosm and macrocosm, the age and size of the universe, are completely different from what people could have imagined in biblical times. Biological research into evolution, medical findings on physique and psyche, and pharmaceutical insights into the effects of drugs and environmental influences - these all open up new aspects of the nature of human beings and pose new ethical questions. But this does not negate the Christian image of humankind found in the Bible. On the contrary, the crucial point is made even clearer: every human being must die, everyone is affected by guilt, misery and suffering. But because they are God's creatures and because God is at their side, all humans enjoy a significance which is far greater than their ori-

gins and plans, successes and failures, achievements and temptations. They are and remain images of God.

114. The Bible sees the dignity and rights of human beings in a universal perspective. The arch spans from the creation of humanity (Gn 1-2) to the completion of the world in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rv 21-22). In the intervening pages there is the story of Abraham, in which God promises to bless »all the families of the earth« (Gn 12:3), which is fulfilled according to the New Testament by Abraham's »offspring«, the Messiah (Gal 3:16 with indirect reference to Gn 22:18). This is the background to the election of Israel. The New Testament proclaims Jesus as the »son of David, son of Abraham« (Mt 1:1) who fulfils God's universal promise of blessing by giving his life as Messiah.

115. The biblical texts do not conceal the difficulties people have in recognising and respecting the dignity and rights of other people. The Old and New Testaments also depict the temptation to invoke God when denying true humanity to others. But the Bible as a whole sides with those whose rights are being trampled upon. It tells how people go beyond their natural limits with the help of the Holy Spirit and recognise the likeness to God in people of different nations and religions. Peter is one example in the New Testament. According to the Acts of the Apostles, he found it very difficult to take the gospel to the so-called Gentiles. But the Holy Spirit helps him to realise: »I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him« (Acts 10:34f.; cf. 10:28).

116. The testimony of the human likeness to God in the Old and New Testaments contains a noticeable tension. The focus is directed not only towards creation, but also to redemption. This tension reflects the drama of humans who are unfaithful to their divine calling, but are nonetheless not abandoned by God. There is a traditional dispute between Protestant and Catholic theology concerning the way human sin affects the God-likeness. The traditional Protestant position is that humankind has lost the God-likeness after being driven out of paradise by God, while the traditional Catholic interpretation only sees it as having been wounded. In Chapter 3.2 it is shown that both of these positions are too one-sided and do not correspond to the biblical witness or the differentiated confessional traditions; this traditional contradiction has been overcome in modern ecumenical dialogue.⁵³ What is decisive is the common witness to the dignity of every human being, which cannot be lost or violated because of God's love to all people.

3.1.2 Humans in their guilt and need

117. There is a second story of creation in the Bible (Gn 2:4b-25). It throws light on a different aspect of human being. Here there is reference to »Adam« and »Eve«. »Adam« means »man«. In the language of the Bible it is a descriptive name; for it is derived from the Hebrew word for »earth«, *adamah*: »Then the Lord God formed man [*adam*] from the dust of the ground [*adamah*], and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being« (Gen 2:7). The human is filled with God's breath, his breath of life; he has a »soul«. But he was

⁵³ JDDJ, Nos. 25-27.

taken from the earth. Both belong together; both belong to the essence of humankind.

118. According to the biblical narrative, the woman is taken from the man's »side« – often translated problematically as the »rib«. In this way man and woman are made (Gen 2:22–24), for »it is not good that the man should be alone« (Gen 2:18). Later in the biblical story it says that »Adam« called the woman »Eve«, »because she was the mother of all who live« (Gen 3:20). In the past, this narrative was often interpreted to mean that the man was created first, and then the woman (for example in 1 Cor 11:8f.). However, the scriptural text is not so explicit. If it is read in the light of Genesis 1, it simply clarifies the equal humanity of man and woman from another standpoint (cf. 1 Cor 11:11f.). A further anthropological dimension is that both man and woman are »flesh« (Gn 2:23) and therefore also become »one flesh« in sexual union (Gn 2:24). Sexuality belongs to human nature. In biblical anthropology, being »flesh« means having a body, being born, having to die, being capable of enduring suffering, dependent on other people and living together with them – these are not superficial aspects of humans, they are part of their identity.

119. The story of Adam and Eve includes the story of the Fall (Gn 3). The great seduction takes place as the snake appears (Gn 3:1–4,13–14). Humankind succumbs to the temptation of wanting to be »like God« (Gn 3:5), neither respecting God's glory nor affirming human dignity. By disobeying God's commandment, they deny his godliness and their own humanity. This transgression has serious consequences. Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise. The story confronts them with

the bitter reality of a life outside Eden (Gn 3:23), whose toil and trouble, pain and strife are the consequence of sin, namely a distorted relationship to God. According to the primeval narrative in the Bible, God tells the woman that she will give birth in pain and be ruled over by the man (Gn 3:16). To the man he says in the same context: »By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, [...] you are dust, and to dust you shall return« (Gn 3:19).

120. With its stories as well as its prayers and devotional texts, the Bible lays bare the fact that in human life on earth there is not only love, but also hatred and violence. It is good that people are born; but everyone has to die. People murder each other, but people also lavish kindness and compassion on one another. Life is sometimes brightened by moments of profound happiness, but terrible tragedy and deep sadness can cast dark shadows. People cry for justice, but no one is free of guilt. God is faithful, but humans are also unfaithful.

121. The Old Testament always refers back to the history of humanity's creation and fall. Psalm 8, the song of the son of man of whom God is mindful, is reiterated in the wisdom literature of Israel. Job, who suffers although innocent, laments before God: »He has stripped my glory from me, and taken the crown from my head« (Jb 19:9). Job has to go a long way before discovering what he believes despite everything: »I know that my Redeemer lives« (Jb 19:25).

122. The stories of people's life and death, which the Old Testament relates and comments upon, show the open and hidden forms of sin which are committed by people inside and

outside Israel and only cause their need to increase. The fact that the story of Cain's fratricide of Abel follows immediately on the expulsion from paradise (Gn 4) opens our eyes to the murderous brutality of sin and its far-reaching consequences weighing down on human life. Sin appears in the Old Testament as a violation of the law, the divine commandment issued by God to order people's lives (Gn 9:1-6; Ex 20; Dt 26). But it also appears as a harmful force reaching far beyond the moral failure of individuals. It is not only the victims who suffer from the injustice done to them; sin also falls back on the perpetrators, even if they appear to triumph. The wisdom literature of Israel has thrown a strong light on the connection between what one does and how one feels; the Bible warns against reversing the argument and believing that suffering is the consequence of one's own guilt (cf. Jn 9:2f.), but trusts in God's righteousness and holds fast to this: »Be assured, the wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will escape« (Prv 11:21).

123. In a penitential psalm it says: »For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgement. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me« (Ps 51:3-5). In this hopeless situation only one request can bring help: »Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me« (Ps 51:10-11). It is the hope of those who pray, whether in Israel or in the church, that this request will be answered by God.

124. Israel's prophets give voice before God on behalf of those who are denied justice by kings and priests. The prophet Amos is particularly prominent in bringing accusations against the mighty in order to defend the weak (Am 4:1-3; 5:7). All the prophets call not only for help in individual cases, but also for structural righteousness – within the framework of their time. They all recognise an inseparable connection between the glory of God and the human rights of the poor. The prophets' message of judgment underlines the appeal for justice, because God will put matters right – by means of his righteous sentence.

125. The New Testament shares the realism of the Old Testament in its description of human and inhumane realities and in its prophetic message, which seeks to protect human rights. It begins with the call to repentance (Mk 1:4 and parallel texts) and John the Baptist's message of judgment: »You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, »We have Abraham as our ancestor«; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham« (Mt 3:7-9; cf. Lk 3:7-8). John knows that he is not himself the Saviour; but he proclaims »a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins« (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3; cf. Mt 3:11); he heralds the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16).

126. Jesus called to repentance and faith in the good news because the kingdom of God had come near (Mk 1:15). He himself warned against the deadly power of sin and called for repentance (Luke 13:1-9). He also revealed how sin was pre-

sent where the law was ostensibly fulfilled: he criticised religious hypocrisy in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:1–18), religious arrogance in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9–14), and religious hardness of heart and narrow-mindedness in the Woes of the Pharisees, which are also directed towards his followers (Mt 23). But Jesus' perspective is always the promise of forgiveness. In his parables he connects the life that people lead in this world with the kingdom of God, which has »come near« (Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17; cf. Mt 10:7; Lk 10:9,11). Jesus opens our eyes to the presence of God in the midst of joy and suffering, in hardship and happiness, in the guilt and goodness of human beings. Jesus offers the hope that all guilt and adversity will be overcome when the kingdom of God is realised. He himself comes as a saviour.

127. Moved by the depth of grace, Paul also investigated the grievance of sin in his letters. He analyses the sinner's inextricable entanglement in misery for which he is himself to blame, but which he cannot ward off by his own efforts. The apostle puts himself in the position of a sinful man who can only cry out: »Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?« (Rom 7:24). Paul also detected the connection between the suffering of humans and the suffering of all creatures, attributing it to the power of sin, which only God can overcome (Rom 8:20–27).

128. Paul describes the depths of human guilt and need from the perspective of hope. There is a reason for this hope: Jesus Christ. He is the »second« Adam who overcomes the first Adam's disobedience by his own obedience (Rom 5:12–21). He shares people's life and death in order to grant them eternal

life. Paul quotes from the book of Genesis to proclaim the gospel of the resurrection: »The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit« (1 Cor 15:45). Therefore it is possible to give all people hope without glossing over present sufferings: »What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power« (1 Cor 15:42–43).

129. As with the topic of God-likeness, Protestant and Catholic theology have a common biblical basis, but different interpretations of sin and salvation in certain important aspects. On the basis of the »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« we will show in Chapter 3.2 that the different interpretations shed light on various aspects of biblical soteriology, but do not indicate any dissent in anthropology. In a new ecumenical study on the biblical doctrine of justification, this approach is deepened and linked to the struggle for righteousness: »The healing power of God’s promise of forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal also touches people today at the heart of their existence. The social dimension of the doctrine of justification, its clear rejection of any idolisation of success, greed or power, and its clear repudiation of all attempts to judge people on the basis of their usefulness, will lead us to find new ways of living, teaching and proclaiming the message of justification as the deepest expression of the liberating gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ.«⁵⁴

⁵⁴ W. Klaiber, *Biblische Grundlagen* (see footnote 12); Translation: Williamson.

3.1.3 *The redemption of humans*

130. The biblical image of humankind does not only regard its creation, but also its redemption and perfection. While guilt and suffering are by no means relativised, the hope of forgiveness and redemption is strongly emphasised. There is a promise of eternal life, a glimpse of which believers can already catch here and now, even in need and suffering. Faith in the presence of salvation and hope in the future of its completion are characteristic of the confession of God, who calls all people to ultimate fellowship with himself out of love.

131. A long tradition of interpretation sees the hope of salvation already written into the story of the expulsion from paradise. According to Gn 3:15, God says to the serpent, the symbol of evil: »I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.« Eve, whom Christian theology later understood to be a counterpart of Mary, is not on the side of evil, but on the side of God. Through Eve's offspring, to which Jesus belongs in Christian theology, evil is conquered – even beyond death.

132. In Old Testament prophecy there is a growing promise that God will not cause his people to perish, even though they have sinned against him, but will open up the future for them (Jer 29:11). In the course of time, a hope of resurrection emerges, driven by the experience of innocent suffering and the question of God's righteousness. This hope does not deny the harsh reality of death. But it trusts God to create a new heaven and a new earth (Is 65:17; 66:22 – 2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1).

Already in the Old Testament there is the testimony of a resurrection from the dead, granting eternal life to the righteous (Dn 12:1-3).

133. According to the testimony of the New Testament, Jesus is free from sin (Heb 4:15). But he did not keep away from sinners, but came close to them. He was criticised as being a »friend of sinners« (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34), but he brought God closer to them. Jesus does not shy away from the presence of sinners, not even from those who were unclean, leprous and defiled, because he radiates the blessing, grace and holiness of God.

134. Jesus preached the gospel of God to »give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death« (Lk 1:79). The New Testament sees the connection between sin and death that is established by Israel's law, reflected by Israel's wisdom and hammered home by Israel's prophecy: Sin brings sickness; and it brings death, because it destroys life (Rom 6:23). But according to Lk 13:1-9 and Jn 9:2f. Jesus criticises the reverse conclusion that a person's suffering is an indication of their sinfulness and the need for atonement for their own or another person's guilt. Throughout his life, Jesus sought out people who were considered by themselves or others to be unloved and unwanted, so that he could give them the promise of God's closeness (Lk 15). Whether guilty or innocent, they are and remain God's creatures; God has called them to participate in his love.

135. Jesus brings God's righteousness to sinners as abundant grace. He enters the house of the chief tax collector Zacchaeus, a notorious sinner, in order to be his guest. There he

says, »Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost« (Lk 19:9-10). All the gospels tell of the many signs and words which Jesus employed to heal sickness, relieve need and forgive sins. He protects the adulteress from impending death: »Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her« (Jn 8:7). To the sinful woman who anoints his hair and feet, he says: »Your faith has saved you« (Lk 7:36-50).

136. Jesus' ministry of salvation during his life finds its fulfillment in his death: »The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many« (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45). The New Testament uses a great range of terms and images, motifs and phrases to express the salvific significance of Jesus' death. In essence, it says that Jesus died »for« the people: *for their good*, so that they might have life; *in their place*, because they are not able to save themselves; *on their behalf*, because they have burdened themselves with guilt. Jesus frees us from the power of death by taking it upon himself: for all people, who have to die. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus appears as the Good Shepherd who »lays down his life for the sheep« (Jn 10:11). According to the gospel of Matthew, Jesus said at the Last Supper: »This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins« (Mt 26:28; cf. Mk 14:24). In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Jesus' salvific sacrifice on the cross becomes present.

137. The saving death of Jesus is inseparably connected with his resurrection. Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans: »[He] was handed over to death for our trespasses and was

raised for our justification« (Rom 4:25). The resurrection of Jesus takes place in the course of the exaltation of Christ »who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us« (Rom 8:34). He himself continues his ministry of salvation, which he completed by his death on the cross. This is why Paul can describe the common faith as a source of great joy and confidence: »For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord« (Rom 8:38-39).

138. The resurrection of Jesus justifies the hope for the resurrection of the dead. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus promises his disciples, who are mourning his death and are afraid of being left alone in the world, »I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you« (Jn 16:22). Paul connects the confession of faith with the hope of perfection: »Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. [...] So we will be with the Lord for ever« (1 Thes 4:13-18). Communion with God through communion with the risen Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit is the epitome of perfection. This communion is for believers the source of hope that God will give communion of all people with one another.

139. The hope of present and future salvation follows from faith. But it is not restricted to those who believe. Rather, it belongs to faith that one prays for the salvation of all people and hopes for God's grace for all. It is true for all people that good works do not lead to perfect salvation in the present and the fu-

ture, but God's love grants eternal life to humankind. Regarding this hope, the »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« recalls the words of the apostle Paul: »Christ's »act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all« (Rom 5:18).«⁵⁵

140. Baptism is a celebration of the present justification and the perfection to come. It is the sign of membership in the Church, which is one body with many members (1 Cor 12:12-27). It is the one baptism for Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, male and female (Gal 3:26 ff.). It bestows citizenship on the people of God. It means participation in Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom 6:3 f.). It confers the Holy Spirit, the first instalment of perfection (2 Cor 1:22).

3.1.4 Beginning and end of life

141. The Bible is a book of faith that carries the traces of the time when it was written. The findings of modern medicine were not available. Biblical statements about life's beginning and end were formulated in the context of their time and are only to be understood within those conditions. They need to be translated creatively into the present. Proposals for this kind of translation are made in the following sections. At this juncture, we recall some basic statements of the Bible about birth and death which still provide orientation today.

142. Even if in biblical times the present-day understanding of the origin of human life did not exist, it was clear that every human being was already a child of God from the start, »in the

⁵⁵ JDDJ, No. 12.

womb« (Jb 10:8-11; 31:15; Ps 139:13-16; Wis 7:1; Is 49:1; Jer 1:5). God's story with humankind even begins before birth. »On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God« (Ps 22:10). According to the Bible, human life begins with procreation (Mt 1:1-17) or conception (Ps 51:7; Is 7:14; Hos 9:11; Mt 1:23; Lk 1:31.36; 2:21). Children are given a name; this was also the case with Jesus (Lk 2:21). The »name« stands for individuality, the human person, as one may say in philosophical terms. People who have a name can address God personally, because he knows them individually: »I have called you by name, you are mine« (Is 43:1) – what God says through the mouth of the prophet applies figuratively to all people.

143. In the Bible, conception, pregnancy and childbirth are seen as great good fortune, as blessings and grace. They are grounds for joy and gratitude (1 Sam 2:1-11). If a woman who wanted to have children was barren, she could utter the great sadness she feels, like Hannah (1 Sam 1). The Bible deals with the fact that childlessness was regarded as a disgrace (Gn 16:5; 30:23; Is 54:4; Lk 1:25) and even as God's punishment (cf. Jer 15:7; Is 49:21 – metaphorically applied to Israel). In fact, the prophets of judgment threaten Israel with childlessness to reflect God's wrath (Hos 9:14). But the Bible sides with the women who are humiliated and suspected. It tells of unexpected births after long periods of disappointment, bringing great happiness not only to the mothers and fathers, but also to all Israel (Gn 11:30; 18:1-19; Jgs 13; Lk 1:7,36; Rom 4:19; Heb 11:11). Prophecy points to the promise of the greatest joy for the barren (Is 54:1). Jesus does not assess women on the grounds of their child-bearing, but he encounters women and

men as people who are loved by God, each one on his or her individual path. He does not lay down specific roles for women or men.

144. »Be fruitful and multiply« (Gen 1:28) is an encouragement to life, but not a commandment that must be followed by every human being. Children are »a heritage from the Lord« (Ps 127:3), but the sense of life does not depend on having children. Jeremiah led a celibate life as a sign that he belonged to the people of God going into exile (Jer 16:1-9). Jesus (Mt 19:12) and Paul (1 Cor 7:7) remained celibate for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. In Isaiah we find the promise that all those who have no children will live in a large family when perfection comes (Is 54:1; cf. Gal 4:27 and Is 62:4).

145. The position of the early church on abortion was derived from creation theology, even if there was no precise gynaecological knowledge about the course of pregnancy at that time. Abortion is not mentioned directly in the Bible. In the surrounding areas abortions had repeatedly taken place, and children were also abandoned, especially girls and babies with physical handicaps; to be sure, such practices were also criticised. One of the biblically founded convictions of early Christianity⁵⁶ was that abortion is against the will of God, because a child is already a child of God in the womb.

⁵⁶ Cf. Didache 2:2; Epistle of Barnabas 19:5; Epistle to Diognetus 5:5; Tertullian, Apology 9:8 (all in www.earlychristianwritings.com).

146. Although the Bible was written in times of great crisis, poverty, domestic violence and slavery, of war, flight and banishment, it has a thoroughly positive attitude to life. There is great joy when a person is born and can lead his life (Tob 10:13). This joy is founded in the love of the creator, who provides the happiness of a human life (Eccl 2:24), even if it is in the shadow of death (Eccl 4:1-3; 6:3-5). After birth, humans begin to take the first steps on their own path through life. They need the help, upbringing and love of their parents and the whole family. They need other people who take responsibility for them if the next of kin cannot or will not help them. They need friends. The future belongs to them; they should reach adulthood.

147. Children are particularly important in the Bible. They are fully human because they are children of God. However, girls and boys are often not appreciated and treated in an equal fashion in the biblical texts. But these distinctions do not indicate the genuine position of biblical creation theology and soteriology, but rather how the Bible is bound to its historical era. Thankfully there are strong examples going in the other direction. In Ps 8 there is no differentiation between girls and boys when it says: »Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself« (Ps 8:2, as quoted in Mt 21:16). Jesus' blessing of children sets a clear sign. Here too, both boys and girls are brought to Jesus and declared by him to be examples for people who want to enter the kingdom of God (Mt 19:13-15; Mk 10:13-16; Lk 18:15-17; cf. Mt 18:3-5; Mk 9:36-37; Lk 9:47-48). Jesus himself placed a child in the midst of his disciples to show what true human greatness is like (Mt 18:1-5; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48).

148. Human life terminates in death. The Bible is aware that it is best to die »old and full of days« (Gen 25:8; 35:29). But it also acknowledges that things are often different in real life: »The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away« (Ps 90:10). The Bible knows that death can come all too early; it can be agonising or long desired. The Bible does not relativise grief and sorrow. But even in dying, a person remains a child of God. It is tempting to try to ignore the certainty of death. Thus we pray: »So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart« (Ps 90:12).

149. When a child dies, whether by violence or in an accident, through illness or war, it is a bitter calamity and the cause of great grief. It is soon the question, how God could have allowed this death to happen. When parents are heartbroken about the death of a child, they should not be persuaded to overlook their grief, which in biblical understanding definitely belongs to human life. »Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more« – this unspeakable suffering, depicted in the book of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:15), is vividly recalled in the New Testament too, where Matthew repeats the lament in his story of the massacre of the children in Bethlehem (Mt 2:18). The Bible is confident that God will give an answer to dry all tears (Jer 31:15–22). The Bible speaks of God in such a way that he shares in people's suffering and is close by their side. This is no answer to the question of why God allows suffering and death to happen. People who believe find that they can live with such open questions with the help of their faith, because they can bring their sorrows to God.

150. Some texts of the Old Testament bring an insight into the hope of resurrection. This hope is fundamental in the New Testament because of Jesus' preaching (Mk 12:18-27 and parallel texts) and his own resurrection from the dead (1 Thes 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15; Rom 8). The hope of resurrection does not relativise earthly life, but is certain that God will transform all that is earthly into eternal life (1 Cor 15:15-55 with Hos 13:14). Without the hope of resurrection from the dead, the gospel would be in vain (1 Cor 15:14; cf. 20:28, 43-49); with this hope, it contains the great promise of the fulfilment of life in the presence of God.

3.1.5 Option for the poor

151. According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus begins his public proclamation in the synagogue of Nazareth by quoting from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

»The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.« (Lk 4:18-19; Is 61:1-2)

This option for the poor is the programme of Jesus' life. In the course of his public proclamation he enriched the poor by healing the sick, freeing those possessed from their evil spirits, feeding the hungry. He shared in the poverty of the poor (Lk 9:58). In his parables he told stories about day-labourers who were exploited, widows who were cheated and sinners who were humiliated, in order to establish the close connec-

tion between them and God and his kingdom. He admonished the rich to have a heart for the poor. The exemplary story of the rich glutton and poor Lazarus (Lk 16:19–31) throws Jesus' position into sharp focus. The Beatitude addressed to the poor (Lk 6:20f.; cf. Mt 5:3–12) does not console them with the hope of a better afterlife, but already transforms their misery by granting them God's blessing.

152. Jesus' option for the poor is also in the tradition of the prophets of Israel. Not only the book of Isaiah is absolutely unequivocal here (cf. Is 3:14f.; 10:2, etc.). Jeremiah criticises corrupt judges (Jer 5:28) and relies on God to ensure justice to the poor (Jer 20:13; 22:16). Amos denounces the greed of rich people, who exploit the poor (Am 2:6; 4:1–3; 8:4–14) and discriminate against them (Am 5:12). Zechariah admonishes the powerful: »Do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another« (Zec 7:10). The Psalms express the hope that God will come to the aid of the poor (Ps 9–10; 35:10; 68:11; 69:34; 72, etc.); but the poor themselves are also given a voice: they are not merely the recipients of support and solidarity, but subjects of a confident faith which is exemplary for all people, because it places all its hope in God and is not disappointed (Ps 22:22–27; 40:18; 86; 140). The Torah has its own laws protecting the rights of the poor – certainly not at the level of today's welfare states, but with remarkable clarity, pointing the way forward for future generations. Particular attention is paid to widows and orphans, because their social situation was particularly difficult (Dt 10:18; 14:29; 24:17–22, etc.).

153. In Early Christianity, the Old Testament ethos of the poor lives on, based on God's own will to salvation. The early church organised a highly effective charitable sharing of goods in order to make sure that the poor did not starve (Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-37). As it became difficult to provide for the widows, a solution was found that led to the establishment of sustainable care for the poor (Acts 6:1-7). At the Apostolic Council, it was agreed that the newly founded churches should take a collection for Jerusalem (Gal 2:10). For Paul it is utterly condemnable to neglect the poor when celebrating the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34). The Letter of James is a sharp reminder to the rich to prove their faith by their behaviour, especially by recognising and supporting the poor (Jas 2:1-13; 5:1-6). All these social activities remained small-scale, because the early Christian congregations were only a small, persecuted minority, unable to pursue social policy. But in this way the early Christians pointed out the direction which was to be taken by Christian social groups at later times and in other contexts.

154. In a letter which he wrote to the Corinthians to finalise the collection they had taken for the poor in Jerusalem, the apostle Paul explains the most fundamental reason for the option for the poor: God himself sympathises with the poverty of the people, and this makes them infinitely rich. With reference to Jesus, the crucified and risen Christ, Paul writes: »Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich« (2 Cor 8:9). The option for the poor is not only an ethical obligation; it is also a recognition of one's own poverty and an expression of hope in the richness of God's grace that ends all poverty.

3.2 Human dignity as a basic concept of contemporary theological anthropology

155. In the previous section the biblical testimony to the human dignity founded in God was examined jointly and ecumenically. Now this testimony should be considered from the perspective of systematic theology, once again in ecumenical cooperation. For this reason, the starting point is a description of the Christian image of humanity against the background of church traditions and current discussions; then the theological significance of the concept of human dignity will be presented. This is preceded by a recapitulation of the history of the concept of human dignity.

3.2.1 *The history of the concept of human dignity*

156. The concept of human dignity has a long tradition. In Roman antiquity the term *dignitas* was used to describe the prominent position of single individuals in a society. »Dignity« in that case meant the special honour bestowed on individual people socially on the basis of their origins, their offices or their publicly acclaimed achievements. At the same time, the term indicated the primacy of the human being over animals. Cicero already spoke of a general human dignity based on the capability of reason common to all human beings. Ancient Christian theology soon developed the idea that the dignity of all human beings is derived from their likeness to God, which is above all apparent in human reason and free will.

157. Nevertheless, for various reasons the concept of dignity never came to play a significant role in the society of Christian antiquity and the Middle Ages. For at the same time Christian theology was conscious that a human is also a being formed from dust (Adam), whose days are like grass. From a theological point of view, humans are also sinners. Given this strong conviction that humans had forfeited their rights before God, it seemed impossible to assume that human dignity was inviolable, resulting in inalienable rights. Over and above that, the distinction between Christians and Gentiles seemed to prohibit the recognition that all human beings were entitled to equal dignity. Only Christians were apparently endowed with dignity, because they saw themselves as children of God.

158. In Renaissance philosophy, the dignity of all human beings was emphasised anew: it was connected with the God-likeness, which consisted of mankind's self-determination in freedom as »his own creator«. Contradicting the notion that only Christians possessed human dignity, the late Spanish scholasticism saw the grounds for such dignity in human sociability, which in turn was a consequence of creation. This sociability is also found among the heathen. Therefore the heathens also possessed dignity and were endowed with the same rights as Christians.

159. The concept of human dignity received greater ethical and legal relevance in the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers no longer justified dignity with the »image of God«, but with human reason and autonomy. According to Immanuel Kant, a human enjoys dignity as a moral rational being, making its own law for its actions and demanding to be treated accord-

ingly. A human being is never simply a means to an end, but must always be regarded as an »end unto itself«. This is the difference between a person and a thing. Kant says that things have a »relative value« or »price«, but people have an »unconditional value« or »dignity«: »Everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity.«⁵⁷ In the wake of Kant, numerous justifications of human dignity have been developed in philosophy, proceeding from basic anthropological conditions and omitting any reference to God. At present, other philosophical conceptions refer in their justification of human dignity to the role of dignity negation in history; the experience of the violation of human dignity makes it clear what human dignity is. Jewish philosophers and thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Lévinas and Avishai Margalit have made essential contributions to the understanding of human dignity and human rights. With regard to the problem of stateless refugees, Hannah Arendt has shown that, in order to be effective, human rights must include the right to citizenship, thus ensuring the entitlement to rights guaranteed by a nation state. For Emmanuel Lévinas it is of central importance that human dignity means perceiving and respecting the »otherness of the other«. Avishai Margalit has drawn attention to the connection between human dignity, self-respect and renunciation of humiliation; he asks how society would look if both institutions and subjects were to abstain

⁵⁷ I. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. Lewis White Beck, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1969, p. 53.

from humiliating others. He has raised awareness for the many forms of humiliation that people experience. For the current debate about human dignity, the aspect of equality – all human beings have equal human dignity and thus the right to rights – and the aspect of individuality – every human being possesses dignity as an individual and in his individuality – belong together.

160. Human dignity has a normative content which states that no human being may be exchanged for other goods, not even for another human being. This prohibition of instrumentalisation, which goes back to Kant, states that no human being may experience the negation of his or her intrinsic value by being exploited for the sake of other people's well-being. The value of a human being cannot be offset by anything or anyone. If human rights are derived from human dignity, the normative content of human dignity is made explicit, and it is possible to define the specific ways in which human dignity prohibits or forbids certain actions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN in 1948 includes not only civil liberties, but also social and cultural rights, such as the right to education and the right to work.

161. There are two ways of understanding the concept of human dignity. One way comprehends human dignity as something that a human has always possessed and which is therefore independent of recognition by others. The other position is that human dignity is seen to be something that can be damaged and infringed upon.⁵⁸ In the first case, dignity is not

⁵⁸ Cf. the analysis in Ch. Horn, *Die verletzbare und die unverletz-*

conditional upon being conferred by other people or upon their respect. Accordingly, it cannot be lost. It does, however, give rise to the unconditional claim on others that they respect this dignity and recognise the inherent rights of the person with such dignity. That is the meaning of the phrase »Human dignity shall be inviolable«. In the second case, too, the term »human dignity« has a normative claim. But more emphasis is placed on the fact that a person's dignity can be damaged by their own or others' degrading behaviour. Understood in this way, it can be damaged to a greater or lesser extent, or even destroyed. This is where it is appropriate to speak of the necessary protection of human dignity and of a dignified life.

162. However, this second position can lead to a problematic misunderstanding. For example, in the context of illnesses, it is sometimes alleged that a certain complaint makes a dignified life impossible. Then it appears that sickness can deprive a person of their dignity, making it worthless to continue living. To counter this, it is possible to invoke the first definition of human dignity, which emphasises that it cannot be lost. Even if a person has to endure extreme suffering, their dignity is not lost, but upheld. This dignity requires other people to treat them as a dignified being at all times and in all circumstances. The same is true in the opposite case: no matter how seriously people disregard the dignity of others, their terrible deeds never annihilate a person's claim to recognition of their dignity. It is the duty of the human community to prevent

bare Würde des Menschen – eine Klärung, in: *Information Philosophie*, Heft 3 (2011), pp. 30-41.

such disregard for human dignity as far as possible and to assist people in every way to achieve recognition of their unlosable human dignity.

163. Our following considerations use dignity in the sense of the dignity that cannot be lost, to which humans are always entitled. However, we pay regard to the arguments of the second position wherever the debate concerns the importance of behaving in accordance with one's own dignity or of respecting the dignity of others by one's actions.

164. Even though most ethical conceptions ascribe dignity to every human being, there are approaches which postulate varying degrees of protection of human dignity. They maintain that all human beings possess dignity, but that this dignity demands different types of protection, depending on the degree of development and outward circumstances. However, this amounts to a weakening of the normative, orienting power of the concept of dignity, which is ultimately undermined. Therefore such conceptions are to be rejected; they contradict biblical anthropology and do harm to the struggle for the enforcement of human rights.

3.2.2 Who is the human being? – Basic elements of theological anthropology

165. Every concept of human dignity is based on an understanding of being human. Correspondingly, the Christian understanding of human dignity depends on the Christian point of view regarding humans. In the following section this will be sketched out using the findings of the biblical basis (Section 3.1).

166. In recent years, reference to a »Christian image of humanity« in connection with human dignity has been criticised frequently and for various reasons. On the one hand, it is maintained that it is incorrect to speak of a Christian image of humanity. Using this expression, it is possible to criticise or claim very different things depending on the situation at the time. The critics allege that the churches are not immune from enforcing or concealing their own institutional interests by making reference to the Christian image of humanity. The way to counter such criticism is for the churches to question their own practice permanently and self-critically in their commitment to human dignity, introducing their position into social debates and inviting discussion. On the other hand, there is criticism of the phrase the »Christian image of humanity« because it overlooks the individual human being in a specific situation of need, preferring to use a normative term in ethical problem constellations that has nothing to do with the actual life story of human beings. The »Christian image of humanity« is an abstract category that does not lead to sensitivity in dealing with the real-life human being. Our text intends to demonstrate that this allegation is not true, but that reflection on the »Christian image of humanity« is exactly what is needed to open up awareness for the individuality of a person's life and experience.

Humans as both creation and image of God

167. The human being is God's creature. It did not come to life by itself, it was created from outside. Like all other creatures, the human owes its existence to the love of God. In common with all other creatures, its existence is preserved by God, who is the origin and source of its life force.

168. The human being is made in the image of God. In a special way that distinguishes them from other creatures, humans are God's counterpart, called to communion with God. They should live their lives in accordance with God's love to them and also express this love in their relationships to other people. Being the image of God is not something that people have to achieve first. It is the nature of every human being, simply because God created them to relate to him. The fact that humans are God's image does not mean that their deeds in this world are divine. Creation by God does not contradict the natural processes of procreation and conception or the evolutionary development of the human race; on the contrary, these natural processes are exactly typical for creatures. Bringing them into relationship with God ensures that people are not seen simply as products of their genes, but as individual personalities with genuine dignity. More than that, it implies that people are supposed to behave towards the world in a way that is in accordance with God's relationship to the world. As free beings, humans serve to live up to their responsibility in and for the world. They must not destroy the natural foundations of life, but should preserve them. This includes respect for the God-likeness, freedom and responsibility of other people and careful treatment of all other creatures. They should not only look after their contemporaries, but present-day people should also take subsequent generations into consideration and remember with honesty the actions and sufferings of previous generations. This includes, in particular, remembrance of those people whose dignity was violated and of those who stood up for the dignity of others. In Germany, it is and remains a duty to commemorate those people whose human dignity was systematically disregarded by National Socialism and who were murdered. This particular

recollection makes us sensitive and alert to violations of human rights currently taking place in many ways.

169. All people are created in the image of God. At the same time, every human being also bears the likeness of God in his or her individuality and inimitable personality. God calls each individual by name. This twofold dimension of the human being as the member of a species and as an individual leads to a tension that shows up in ethical questions when a distinction is made between a basic universal standard and the individual case. In many concrete ethical questions, it proves difficult to find a common solution between the individual situation and the orientation towards the well-being of all human beings.

Humans in their guilt and need

170. God speaks to a person in his or her entirety. From a Christian point of view, every aspect of a person's humanity, soul, body and mind, is God's gift. Everything serves to lead a life pleasing to God. Theological anthropology rejects any attempt to reduce a person to their soul alone, or to their mind or body. From a Christian point of view, all human experiences, whether happiness or suffering, health or sickness, joy or sadness, hope or despair, belong to human existence. They occur within the horizon of God's reality. This becomes clear in the existence of Jesus Christ, who became like us »in every respect« (Heb 2:17). Painful experiences such as suffering or despair, however, are not of particular value; the biblical texts promise an end to suffering and an overcoming of despair.

171. Human beings live as sinners. From a Christian point of view, they lead a life separated from God and seeking their own well-being. They often use God and other creatures to their own advantage. Sin »is the selfish desire of the old person and the lack of trust and love toward God«.⁵⁹ Thus people ignore that they have not been created by themselves, but by God, and that other human beings are made in the image of God, just like them, and the other living beings are fellow creatures. The concept of the »sinner« is intended to express that this fundamentally false orientation is part of a human's very essence. It is fulfilled in each person's actions, whereby this takes on very different concrete forms, so that one speaks of individual guilt. At the same time, humans are subject to the power of sin and cannot escape from it. This does not absolve them of their misconduct, but shows the fate which they cannot remove.

The redemption of humans

172. Despite their sinfulness, God does not abandon humans. This can be seen in Jesus, whose actions were marked by the promise of forgiveness. His behaviour, his words and his suffering indicate clearly that in spite of their sin people never lose their calling to be in communion with God. By his action in Jesus Christ, God has shown sinners that he will not abandon them, but rather redeem them, calling them by grace alone to live in communion with God again.

⁵⁹ JDDJ, OCS Annex, No. 2.B.

173. God opens the future to people: in this life by the forgiveness of sins and by a new life worked by the Holy Spirit, in which a person does good works out of gratitude for the grace received; and later in the life of perfection, in which a person will enjoy untroubled communion with God, redeemed from sin, guilt and suffering.

174. The »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« has shown that typically Evangelical-Lutheran or typically Catholic traditions speak of sin and the sinner differently before and after baptism, but these differences do not have a church-dividing character. The basis of ecumenical consensus is a common understanding of the biblical doctrine of justification.

»The justified live by faith that comes from the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17) and is active through love (Gal 5:6), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22 f.). But since the justified are assailed from within and without by powers and desires (Rom 8:35-39; Gal 5:16-21) and fall into sin (1 Jn 1:8,10), they must constantly hear God's promises anew, confess their sins (1 Jn 1:9), participate in Christ's body and blood, and be exhorted to live righteously in accord with the will of God.«⁶⁰

175. The liberation from guilt liberates humans at the same time to a new life in gratitude to and in correspondence with God. To say that a human's freedom is »freedom *from*« would fall too short theologically. It always means being freed *for* others. In this respect Christian freedom is put into practice in so-

⁶⁰ JDDJ, No. 12.

cial coexistence. It is also necessary to concede to others such life in »freedom for«, which implies the right to life and integrity of the body, because otherwise life and body cannot be freely used for others. It implies the right to self-determination, which is fulfilled in one's own self-determination for the good of others. And it implies freedom of faith and conscience, inasmuch as everyone must be able to live out the consequences of his or her own experience of liberation by implementing this »freedom for«.

3.2.3 The theological foundation of human dignity

176. The concept of human dignity is indeterminately justified, and can only serve as orientation in individual ethical questions if it is backed up by certain religious, ideological or philosophical arguments. »Indeterminate justification« does not mean an absence of justification, but that justification is necessary and can be provided from different ideological perspectives. A reason must be given for the dignity of a human being; and this reason can be derived from different positions. This corresponds to the situation in a plural society, in which the various arguments must be debated in order to assess the adequacy of the reasoning. Each reason in favour of human dignity gives the concept a specific form and develops an image of the way this dignity works. Only when it is given this specific shape can the concept of human dignity help to solve the problem of the kind of behaviour that corresponds to human dignity. A Christian understanding of human dignity is one such specific shape. There are many other arguments leading to justification, stemming for example from theories of subjectivity, of discourse or contractual agreement. They must be placed argu-

mentatively in relation to the Christian image of humanity. In this study we concentrate on the Christian approaches, which we have defined more accurately in ecumenical dialogue, enabling a better discourse with other patterns of justification. This discourse can, however, not be achieved within the bounds of this study.

177. The indeterminate justification of human dignity also means that the concept of human dignity does not already possess inherent concrete normative content; one cannot derive definite guidelines for action from it. A constructive dispute about the understanding of humanity and human dignity must first take place before this concept can gain a profile within a society. The emergence of particular normative orientation depends on the way in which human dignity is justified and filled with content. By participating in this discussion, the churches contribute to the social debate on the formation and regulation of coexistence. Discussions within the churches and between theologians also make a constructive contribution to this social debate. The church academies were and are an important place for such discussions.

178. In current Christian thinking, human dignity is justified by creation theology, Christology, the doctrine of justification and eschatology. All four aspects deal with the relationship between human beings and God. However, each one emphasises different dimensions of being human in the face of God. Thus, the concept of human dignity reveals different argumentative power in different contexts. Some points can be named straightaway. Creation theology states clearly that every human being without exception possesses this dignity.

Christology emphasises the dignity of those who are suffering and disadvantaged. According to the doctrine of justification, there is also dignity for weak or guilty persons. Finally, the eschatological approach ascribes dignity to humans in their restrictions and imperfections, given their broken biographies and incomplete life plans. The four approaches are not mutually incompatible, but rather present a common conclusion: from a Christian point of view, humans possess dignity in all situations of life.

The dignity of the image of God/Reasoning of creation theology

179. Creation theology refers to the fact that humankind is made in the image of God in order to justify human dignity. This means that humans are not endowed with dignity on the basis of certain qualities, but rather described in their special relationship to God and their special task of representing God in creation. A human being is an icon of God precisely for these reasons. Humans are to have dominion over this world in accordance with God's will. God-likeness consists in this mission entrusted to each human being with his or her individual gifts, the source of human dignity.

180. Against the background of such reasoning on the basis of creation theology, we also encounter patterns of argumentation from natural law. They are not limited to the area of Catholicism alone. Luther also made recourse to the concepts of natural law when describing successful human existence in the »worldly kingdom«. God rules not only in the »heavenly kingdom«, but also in the »worldly kingdom« by means of a predetermined order and laws which he has placed in people's

hearts. They show what kind of behaviour corresponds to the dignity of humans. However, nowadays it is maintained that this order and these laws are not eternal, but are subject to changes in the course of history.

181. The particular strength of the justification of human dignity on the basis of creation theology is that it undeniably applies to all human beings. It is understood to have universal validity. Everyone who was created as a human being is endowed with this dignity, from the beginning to the end of their existence. This reasoning reveals its argumentative power when it is a matter of the dignity of certain people whose human qualities are not, not yet, or no longer ascertainable. Even people who are sick and demented, physically and mentally handicapped, are images of God. Moreover, the justification by creation theology is complementary to other religious justifications of the dignity of humans based on their existence as created beings. Moreover, the strong image of likeness to God intuitively makes sense to people who have no religious ties. However, when the justification is derived purely from creation theology there is a danger that humanity's rejection of its calling is insufficiently reflected.

182. In the past, Protestant anthropology often claimed that humankind had lost its likeness to God through the Fall and had only attained it again through faith. Catholic anthropology, on the other hand, typically says that in the Fall the likeness of humans to God was not lost, but wounded, and that it is healed by Jesus Christ. Some see an irresolvable contradiction in this difference, but that is not the case. The Bible itself says neither one thing nor the other. So the question is simply

which aspects of the biblical image of humans are revealed by one interpretation or the other. The Protestant side emphasises the seriousness of sin, but does not wish to imply that the sinner is no longer a human being in the eyes of God; on the contrary: »Even as a sinner a person is a person and not a tortoise.«⁶¹ The Catholic side emphasises that humans remain responsible towards God, but does not wish to imply that human sin should not be taken seriously because the God-likeness is not lost; on the contrary, a person has to account for his or her deeds and misdeeds. Therefore, the Catholic side can agree with the Protestants who intend to emphasise the grace of the new creation, while the Protestant side can agree with the Catholics who intend to emphasise the moral responsibility of every human being, regardless of whether or not they believe. Catholic and Protestant churches can therefore join in saying that God has bestowed his image irrevocably and unlosably upon every human being.

The dignity of the true human/Christological reasoning

183. Christological justifications of human dignity are based on the Christian conviction that God became man in Jesus Christ. According to this point of view, this is the reason for human dignity. In Jesus Christ, God has accepted humans in all that constitutes their being and their life. From this point on, nothing can separate humans from God. In Christ, God has also identified himself with those who are outcast, suffering and dying. That is why, for Christian anthropology, there is dig-

⁶¹ K. Barth, *Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner*, in: *Theologische Existenz heute* 14 (1934), p. 16.

nity for all people, even if they are vulnerable and weak, outcast and mocked. The person who is suffering and condemned is not separated from God, but is completely human: »Ecce homo - here is the man!« (Jn 19:5).

184. The Christological justification of human dignity reveals particular argumentative power where the dignity of the outcast, the suffering and the dying is at stake. Jesus Christ's death testifies to the dignity of all who are exposed to public disgrace. Human guilt certainly plays a role in Christological reasoning, given that Christ in his passion was made to be sin by God, although he knew no sin (2 Cor 5:21). But the fact that not only those who suffer possess dignity, but also those who are guilty, meaning those who have inflicted suffering, is elaborated in a special way in justification theology.

The dignity of those called to be justified/Reasoning of justification theology

185. When giving a reason for the concept of human dignity, justification theology asserts that persons who are »incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, or of attaining salvation by their own abilities«⁶² are nonetheless accepted by God.

»When Catholics say that persons »cooperate« in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an ef-

⁶² JDDJ, No. 19.

fect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities.«⁶³

Thus Catholics do not deny that human dignity is granted soteriologically by God's grace and acceptance alone. A person is justified by God irrespective of works and in spite of all guilt, by Christ alone. »All people are called by God to salvation in Christ. Through Christ alone are we justified, when we receive this salvation in faith.«⁶⁴ God's justification is given to humans »by grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work«⁶⁵, which is trust »in God's gracious promise«.⁶⁶

»When Lutherans emphasize that the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness, their intention is above all to insist that the sinner is granted righteousness before God in Christ through the declaration of forgiveness and that only in union with Christ is one's life renewed. [But] they do not thereby deny the renewal of the Christian's life.«⁶⁷

Justification therefore does not negate the necessity of good works for Christian life, for »such a faith is active in love«.⁶⁸ But such good works are »the basis of justification«⁶⁹ but their consequence: »We confess together that good works – a Christian

⁶³ Ibid., No. 20.

⁶⁴ Ibid., No. 16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., No. 15.

⁶⁶ Ibid., No. 25.

⁶⁷ Ibid., No. 23.

⁶⁸ Ibid., No. 25.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

life lived in faith, hope and love-follow justification and are its fruits.«⁷⁰

186. This acceptance of humans described in the doctrine of justification is not a general anthropological principle which simply needs to be elucidated. It is founded on God's historical saving action in Jesus Christ. But when justification theology provides the reason for human dignity, what follows from the fact that not all people believe in this Jesus Christ? Paul does indeed limit justification to believers: a person is justified by faith (Rom 3:28). Nevertheless, it does not necessarily follow that non-believers are excluded from the dignity argued by justification theology. It is rather so that all people are called by God to conform to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Believers have fulfilled the purpose to which all people are invited. Since God's justifying work is aimed at all humankind, the dignity of all human beings can be deduced from the fact that all are called to believe in God's justifying action in Christ.

187. It is mostly the Evangelical-Lutherans who base their arguments for human dignity on justification theology, but this approach can be shared by both confessions. Its strength lies in highlighting clearly humanity's failure to fulfil its mission and its dependence on God's grace. It reveals its argumentative power in the context of people's failure and guilt, emphasising that they, too, possess dignity, and inviting reconciliation. At the same time, there is the inherent problem that it makes use of a specifically Christian characteristic and is thus more diffi-

⁷⁰ Ibid., No. 37.

cult to communicate generally. The misunderstanding can arise that the reasoning is exclusivistic, as if only the believers and the justified had dignity.

*The dignity of those destined for perfection/
Eschatological justification*

188. From the eschatological point of view, human dignity can be justified by the fact that Christ will bring humankind with their world and their history to final fulfilment by an act of salvation still to come. The eschatological message speaks of the parousia, which will be accompanied by the perfection of humanity and the world, and of the fact that it has already begun. Given this goal, in which the »new human« will be born in perfection, present-day people see themselves as still hidden from themselves, as not yet mature, but called to perfection. This calling already transforms their lives; they already find consolation in the midst of suffering, forgiveness in spite of guilt. This means that human dignity also exists in the face of human imperfection and finiteness. People who are prevented by violence and the circumstances of life from developing their gifts are also in God's hands and have the same dignity as people who can cultivate their talents and be seen to use them. A human is also a sufferer, weighed down by sickness, injustice and death. The path of life is lined as much by violence and tears as by joy and gratitude. Many children die of hunger and violence before they are able to take their lives into their own hands. People's lives are suddenly overturned by war or persecution, and they have to flee, leaving their familiar surroundings behind. Practically everyone knows what it means to fail one's own ideals and dreams. That is all part of human life, but

not the last word. It belongs to human existence that God opens up the future.

189. The eschatological justification of human dignity reveals its argumentative power in the face of the imperfection of human life and its need of salvation. A human being is entitled to dignity in spite of fragility, vulnerability and imperfection. Precisely when faced with the disadvantaged, the suffering and the sick, people can learn to understand more deeply that dignity in the Christian sense is in no way dependent on success, beauty and health. That brings consolation in life and death. When people are confronted with their limitations, they can all get to recognise themselves as beings who are wanted and supported by God and who will one day find salvation.

190. For a long time in the history of Protestant and Catholic theology there were strong restrictions on the hope of salvation. Some of them can still be felt today. But they can be overcome by the common interpretation of Holy Scripture. On the Catholic side, the basic principle *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* was often understood to mean that only the members of the Church were saved, but all others were condemned. But in the light of Scripture, the sense of this principle is to be found in the fact that the Church, in the discipleship of Jesus, stands for the proclamation and mediation of the salvation which God has prepared for all people, and that there is room for all these people in church worship, witness, the service of salvation and charitable work. On the Lutheran side, the principle *sola fide* has often been interpreted as if only those could be saved who had already explicitly testified their faith in God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But in the light of Holy Scripture, the

sense of this principle is to be found in the fact that only those who believe can now already recognise and confess God's grace in Jesus Christ. In this belief that through Jesus Christ God »was reconciling the world to himself« (2 Cor 5:19), they dare to hope that in the end »God may be all in all« (1 Cor 15:28).

191. What is common to all four ways of justifying human dignity theologically is that they do not connect this dignity with certain qualities in humans (such as their capabilities), but with God's relationship and devotion to them. From a theological point of view, people cannot earn their own dignity; it is always dignity granted by God. It corresponds to this dignity that a person is able to determine his or her own life, as long as this does not interfere with other people's self-determination or right to life. People's dignity is not, however, constituted by their being able to determine their own lives and carrying out acts of self-determination. To identify human dignity with the capability and implementation of self-determination is inadequate from a Christian point of view. In the reverse case, dignity is also not jeopardised when someone loses the capability of self-determination. However, it is true that human beings, with their physical and mental vulnerability, but also with their creativity and striving for justice, are dependent on the recognition and acknowledgment of their human dignity by others.

192. The dignity of human beings can be ignored and disregarded, but it cannot be taken away from them. Because it is founded in God, human dignity cannot be lost. All humans are equally created by God, accepted in Christ and needful of jus-

tification and redemption. Human dignity is irrevocable. That is why all people are endowed with dignity in the same way. From a theological point of view, there are and can be no degrees. Its validity is absolute.

193. Christians hope that all people will one day live with God. This is the hope which nourishes the mission of Christians to this world. They want to shape this world in such a way that all people can already live in accordance with their dignity. The Old Testament prophets did not explicitly use the category of human dignity. But in their social criticism, their advocacy for those oppressed and deprived of their rights, they sketched out a society in which it would be possible for all people to live a just life corresponding to their dignity.

194. It is not possible to derive specific guidelines for action directly from the image of humankind developed here. But in discussing it, one is encouraged to rediscover again and again the kind of action and behaviour which would correspond to biblical tradition in relation to empirical facts that are highly complex and inherently ambiguous. It is possible to conduct this discussion by retelling the biblical stories, but also by reasoned debate of the principles appearing within them.

3.3 Summary and outlook

195. Both the joint study of Holy Scripture and the joint systematic reflection of the different traditions of interpretation have verified the thesis that between Lutherans and Catholics there is a differentiated consensus in anthropology. The »Joint

Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« has thrown light on the soteriological dimensions. In this study the dimensions of anthropology in creation theology, Christology and eschatology have been so far investigated that a differentiated overall picture emerges, allowing a substantial answer to the question of the relationship between God and human dignity.

196. Within and between the denominations' various methods, categories and principles are applied not only in the interpretation of Scripture, but also in the development of theological traditions and the formation of theological concepts. This diversity is no hindrance to gaining common positions on humanity's likeness to God or to Christ, on justification and salvation; on the contrary, it shows that theological plurality increases the intensity of reflection as long as the conditions and perspectives of the various approaches have been made transparent.

197. A constituent of this differentiated consensus is not just a stable common basis, which is given in anthropology by the common conviction that humans were created in the image of God, called to communion with Christ, justified by faith and destined to eschatological perfection. It is equally important to define in a qualified fashion those differences which are typical for the denominations as well as the dynamic theological developments in the denominations, initiated not least by ecumenism. This chapter described the existence of such differences in the themes of God-likeness and the Fall, faith in Christ and justification, ethical responsibility and the hope of perfection; but it also demonstrated that they are not only not church-dividing, but can also be recognised and mutually ac-

cepted as differing, but in each case proper interpretations of the gospel.

198. This intermediate result forms the precondition for what follows in Chapter 4: a more precise determination of the differentiated consensus in anthropology with a view to its significance for the formation of moral judgment and the ethical action of the churches, placed in relation to existing differences in some specific questions of applied ethics.

4 Ecumenical Approaches to Convergences and Divergences in Ethics

199. In chapter 4 conclusions will be drawn from the statements on the principles of the formation of theological judgment (chapter 2) and the perspectives of theological anthropology (chapter 3). Firstly, it will be shown what comprises the differentiated consensus in theological anthropology (4.1); then it will deal with the three case studies mentioned in the introduction (in 1.3) – stem cell research, child poverty and education, and euthanasia – in order to show where and to what extent one may speak of a limited dissent and how one may deal with it ecumenically (4.2).

4.1 The differentiated consensus in theological anthropology

200. In anthropology there is a deeply rooted and broadly based consensus between the Lutheran and Catholic churches. The differences in a few closely limited, albeit important, ethical questions do not undermine this consensus. It is necessary to remind oneself of the far-reaching agreements between the churches so that they can strengthen their common Christian witness to human dignity. This is how the churches want to participate in the struggle for humanity in a world that is familiar with crying injustice, brutal oppression and massive violations of human rights, and in a society that is looking for jus-

tice and freedom, peace and favourable living conditions for all. The churches are committed to a society based on solidarity, devoted to the needy and the refugees.

201. One may speak of a differentiated consensus in spite of clear differences between typically Evangelical-Lutheran argumentation and positions on the one hand and typically Catholic ones on the other, as long as these differences can be tolerated on the basis of a strong commonality and are not church-dividing, because each of them can be recognised by the other side as consistent, albeit specific augmentations of the common approach. This study wishes to go a step further in the hermeneutics of the differentiated consensus by looking at the relative claims of confessionally different positions under the following aspect: how far they can enrich one's own view and admit of justified recognition of the other side from one's own position, including open criticism of weaknesses on both sides.

202. For this reason, the starting point (4.1.1) is a reflection on fundamental similarities, resulting from the common exegesis of Holy Scripture (see 3.1 above) and from the systematic theological reflection of human dignity (see 3.2 above), if the principles of ethical judgment presented in Chapter 2 are observed. After this (4.1.2) these commonalities are differentiated by considerations from justification theology, starting with the »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« and drawing upon it, in the light of the discussion it initiated, in order to clarify the relationship between faith in God and the understanding of human dignity.

4.1.1 Basic agreements in theological anthropology

203. The churches raise their voice in social debates on humanitarian issues and take part in charitable and welfare projects in both local and global contexts. The reason is as simple as it is strong: faith in God is inseparable from the Christian persuasion that humanity possesses dignity. God himself became man in Jesus Christ. Therefore, human dignity has a theological justification for the churches; respect for human dignity is a divine commandment; and the deliverance of those whose dignity is violated is a divine promise.

204. Both Catholic and Protestant Christians confess God who created »heaven and earth« (Gn 1:1). It is this faith in the one God as the creator of all human beings that leads them to the recognition that all human beings are made in the image of God (Gn 1:26f.), regardless of gender and nationality, skin colour and birth, religion and culture, health and sickness, education and achievement, guilt and repentance.

205. Both Protestant and Catholic Christians confess Jesus Christ, in whom »the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared« (Ti 3:4). It is this faith in Jesus Christ that leads to the hope of redemption for all people (2 Cor 5:14), however much they are exposed to the power of sin and death.

206. Both of them confess the Holy Spirit who is »poured out upon us from on high« (Is 32:15). It is this faith in the Holy Spirit that moves people to serve the »righteousness« (Jn 16:10) that must benefit all people, especially those who are suffering under injustice. They are promised righteousness (Mt 5:6).

207. The recognition of the dignity of every human being is a touchstone of faith for Christians. Human dignity has absolute validity. Faith in the one God ensures this absoluteness of human dignity and protects it from all attempts to relativise it for religious, social, legal, medical or biological purposes. The commitment to human rights follows from the double commandment to love God and one's neighbour, as preached by Jesus (Mk 12:28-34 and parallel texts) and illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37).

208. The essential commonalities between Catholic and Protestant theology regarding the image of humanity are founded in Holy Scripture, which believers of both denominations read and hear in worship - in different forms, but with the same goal of recognising the original witness of faith in its formative power for human life and of putting into practice today.

209. The agreements in the understanding of human dignity have been deepened by the ecumenical movement. It has taught the churches to better understand the language, intentions, thought processes, anxieties and discoveries of other traditions. This movement has ensured that the characteristic differences between the churches have not been relativised, but interpreted. These differences are not simply problems seeking a solution, but offer above all opportunities to recognise more comprehensively the unity of love for God and one's neighbour and the depth of the Christian faith. The dialogue with others enriches one's own interpretations, even in spite of possible conflicts, as long as the talks are held patiently and honestly. This enables people to understand and clarify different forms of Christian expression and language. Christians of different

confessions learn from and with one another in order to live their faith in even greater abundance.

4.1.2 Characteristic profiles of theological anthropology and their ecumenical significance

210. In order to be able to elaborate on the characteristic profiles of both Lutheran and Catholic theology in basic anthropological issues and to present their relationship to one another critically and constructively, we have selected out of the multitude of relevant themes two pairs related to human dignity in order to discuss them in two converging passages: firstly the power of grace and the misery of sin, and then the responsibility of man and obedience to God's commandment. Traditionally, the first two themes are regarded as special concerns of Lutheran, the second two as special concerns of Catholic theology. In this study they are interpreted on the basis of the »Joint Declaration« and related to the question of the theological justification of human dignity. The stable basis is formed by the fundamental agreements presented in 4.1.1; afterwards, in 4.1.3, the common goal is sketched out, namely service in and to the world, to which the theological commonalities and differences must be related. The middle section shows paradigmatically the effect of ecumenical dialogue which does not shy away from controversies but strives for consensus. Such dialogue does not cover up the differences but helps to sharpen the contours of Christian anthropology, thus stimulating the churches' commitment to the respect of human dignity in a social environment with a number of allies, but also some opponents.

211. The »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« states: »In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God.«⁷¹ Therefore it is a joint conviction that justification takes place by faith alone and by grace alone.⁷² For this reason, the Catholic side is on the one hand able to recognise the intention of the Lutheran *sola fide*,⁷³ while on the other hand the Lutheran side accepts the Catholic position that in justification »the righteous receive from Christ faith, hope, and love«.⁷⁴ For the Lutheran side declares, »the renewal of life [...] comes forth from the love of God imparted to the person in justification«;⁷⁵ while the Catholic side says that »this renewal in faith, hope, and love is always dependent on God's unfathomable grace«, which is why a person »contributes nothing to justification«.⁷⁶

212. In ecumenism it is positively acknowledged that in all anthropological questions Lutheran theology endeavours to accentuate uncompromisingly God's power of grace, to which people owe everything: their life, their faith, their justification and their hope. However great their struggle, their good intentions or impressive successes, it is impossible for someone to earn, secure or add to God's grace. Martin Luther pointed to-

⁷¹ JDDJ, No. 15.

⁷² Ibid., Nos. 25–27; cf. also JDDJ, OCS Annex, No. 2.C.

⁷³ Ibid., No. 26.

⁷⁴ Ibid., No. 27.

⁷⁵ Ibid., No. 26.

⁷⁶ Ibid., No. 27.

wards this theology of grace by his exegesis of Holy Scripture, his theology, and not least with his sermons and pamphlets.

213. Ecumenism has also overcome the former Catholic suspicion that this theology of grace releases people from their ethical responsibility. In fact, the characteristic witness of Protestant theology has always understood that God's grace affects humans in such a way that a person who is not justified by religious »works«, but only by faith, is filled with the Holy Spirit and renewed to a life in the service of righteousness. However, the constructive participation in the ecumenical discussion has also led Lutheran theology to reconsider misleading expressions and to give added emphasis to the ethical dimension of the doctrine of justification.

214. Conversely, Catholic theology can do more than simply appreciate the intention of Lutheran grace theology. More than that, it can also acknowledge that the Lutheran emphasis on God's power of grace represents a powerful criticism of any attempt to relativise human dignity by utilitarian considerations, by cultural conditioning or scientific relativisations. In ecumenical dialogue, the Catholic side has also learned to appreciate the constructive power of Lutheran theology which seeks the dignity of human beings precisely in those cases in which guilt and failure threaten to hide it.

215. Both sides can therefore agree that the emphasis on God's power of grace does not diminish human dignity as if it were not inherent to humans, but merely assigned to them indirectly. On the contrary, it justifies and strengthens it, because it provides the unassailable and inviolable foundation of

humanity's God-likeness. It is the specific task of the churches to introduce God into the social discourse on human dignity and human rights as the one who sides unconditionally with humans and therefore guarantees their dignity and their rights independently of considerations of social utility or ideological conditions.

The misery of sin

216. The »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« states the shared ecumenical conviction that »because we are sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts.«⁷⁷ For this reason the declaration has paved the way to an ecumenical approach to the typically Lutheran expression *simul justus et peccator*.⁷⁸ For, on the one hand, the Lutheran side has declared that sin is no longer »a sin that ›rules‹ the Christian for it is itself ›ruled‹ by Christ«. ⁷⁹ On the other hand, the Catholic side has declared that the »inclination« to sin, which is to be distinguished from sin itself, comes from sin and presses towards sin,⁸⁰ is »objectively in contradiction to God and remains one's enemy in lifelong struggle«. ⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid., No. 17.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Nos. 28–30; cf. also JDDJ, OCS Annex, No. 2. A.

⁷⁹ JDDJ, No. 29.

⁸⁰ JDDJ, OCS Annex, No. 2.B.

⁸¹ JDDJ, No. 30. This approach is taken up and further developed in a study by the Working Group of Protestant and Catholic theologians: Th. Schneider/G. Wenz (eds.), *Gerecht und Sünder zugleich? Ökumenische Klärungen, Dialog der Kirchen*, Bd. 11, Freiburg i. Br./Göttingen 2001.

217. In ecumenism it is positively acknowledged that Lutheran theology with its theology of grace endeavours to uncover and combat the devastating power of sin, especially wherever it is concealed. This is of greatest importance where sin cloaks itself as piety. Here criticism of »righteousness of works« reaches its apex. Lutheran theology focuses on the basic understanding of sin, that a human being, as the Bible relates in the story of Adam and Eve, desires to be »like God« (Gn 3:5). It sees this desire as a denial of being human and argues that it is precisely by recognising God that humans conform to their humanity. For a long time, Lutheran theology tried to avoid attenuating the catastrophe of sin by repeatedly teaching that humankind had lost their likeness to God after their expulsion from paradise because of their sin. This study has shown, however, this is not to be understood as a denial of human dignity, but as an indication that humans are in need of redemption and regain their humanity by God's grace. As indicated, there is now also a possibility that a common understanding of the Fall might be discussed.

218. Ecumenism has also overcome the former Catholic suspicion that Lutheran theology is on the one hand fixated on sin, whilst on the other hand relativising concrete manifestations of sin in the form of the transgression of divine commandments as testified by Scripture and tradition. However, Lutheran hamartiology actually seeks to examine in depth the dimensions of trespasses against God's commandments. It intends to highlight the difference between God's word and human ordinances, even if these appear to be covered by the authority of the church. Admittedly, constructive participation in the ecumenical discussion has led Lutheran theology to specify its own

position on the theological status of ethical doctrinal statements and on the significance of law in the church.

219. Conversely, Catholic theology can do more than simply appreciate Lutheran hamartiology. It can also recognize that it has the critical power to expose obvious and subtle forms of hypocrisy, to uncover the deadly threat of the power of sin, and to question claims to power asserted in the name of God. Likewise the Catholic side can acknowledge that Protestant hamartiology has the constructive power to uncover ideological conspiracies against humanity, also in its own history, and to promote the struggle for justice wherever it is being obstructed with resort to holy traditions.

220. Both sides can therefore agree that when the misery of sin is revealed it is necessary to analyse and root out the mechanisms of evil that disregard human dignity. They can also agree jointly that the dignity of those people is also to be respected and protected who have incurred severe guilt or are held by others to be inhuman, for whatever reason. It is the specific duty of the churches to introduce God into the social discourse on human dignity and human rights as the one who brings light into the depths of inhuman conditions and raises the hope of salvation, recognition and reconciliation even in the areas where human possibilities are exhausted.

Human responsibility

221. The »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« establishes the common ecumenical conviction that the Holy Spirit »leads believers into that renewal of life which God will

bring to completion in eternal life«. ⁸² Using this approach, the declaration lays an ecumenical pathway to the typically Catholic doctrine that »persons «cooperate« in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action«⁸³ and that in this context »good works« should be brought forth.⁸⁴ For on the one hand the Catholic side has declared that it sees »such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities«⁸⁵ and that it does not »contest the character of those works as gifts«. ⁸⁶ On the other hand, the Evangelical-Lutheran side has declared that with *mere passive* justification they mean to »exclude any possibility of contributing to one's own justification, but do not deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is effected by God's Word«⁸⁷ and that it does not only hold to »the concept of a preservation of grace and a growth in grace and faith«, but also understands »eternal life according to the New Testament as an undeserved »reward« in the sense of the fulfilment of God's promise to believers«. ⁸⁸ It is »the responsibility of the justified not to waste this grace but to live in it«. ⁸⁹

222. In ecumenism it is positively acknowledged that in all anthropological questions Catholic theology endeavours to accentuate the moral responsibility which God has entrusted to

⁸² JDDJ, No. 16.

⁸³ Ibid., No. 20; cf. *ibid.*, No. 24.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Nos. 37–39.

⁸⁵ Ibid., No. 20.

⁸⁶ Ibid., No. 38.

⁸⁷ Ibid., No. 21.

⁸⁸ Ibid., No. 39.

⁸⁹ JDDJ, OCS Annex, No. 2.D.

humans and which he has enabled them to perceive. The decisive point is that talk of »cooperation« is not intended to describe an additive, but rather an integrative relationship: God bestows his grace on human beings in such a way that in their freedom they themselves both do their works and are justified by God. Arguing along these lines, Catholic theology has made it plain in ecumenical dialogue that the reference to »merits« has no other meaning than that of the biblical promise of a reward in heaven.⁹⁰ In bestowing grace God is in no way dependent on the morality or amorality of human beings, and in bestowing righteousness eschatologically he rewards in every way all that human beings have done and intended in thought, words and works.

223. Ecumenism has also overcome the former Lutheran suspicion that Catholic theology wants to make divine grace dependent on previous human works, indulging in a moralism that favours rigour and discipline. However, Catholic anthropology actually seeks to emphasise the creative power of grace, which is not effective in human beings without it, and to assert the ethical consequences of the justifying faith »working through love« (Gal 5:6). Admittedly, constructive participation in the ecumenical discussion has led Catholic theology to reconsider misleading expressions and to anchor Christian ethics clearly in the grace of justification.

224. Conversely, Lutheran theology can do more than simply appreciate the intention behind the Catholic emphasis on human responsibility and cooperation. Rather, it can also ac-

⁹⁰ JDDJ, No. 38.

knowledge that in its doctrine of salvation Catholic theology has the critical power to combat any evasion of the ethical claims of the gospel. Likewise the Lutheran side can recognise that Catholic theology has the constructive power to recognise from the faith perspective that people are free before God, in particular wherever they are deprived of freedom and denied responsibility, not least in the church itself.

225. Both sides can therefore agree that responsibility for the respect of human dignity and the recognition of human rights is a consequence of justifying faith. Christians know that they must account to God for what they did or did not do to the least of their brothers and sisters (Mt 25:31–46). It is the specific duty of the churches to introduce God into the social discourse on human dignity and human rights as the one who anchors ethical responsibility in the God-likeness of humankind itself and at the same time justifies the hope of eternal life, the fulfilment of human destiny.

Obedience to God's commandment

226. The »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification« establishes the common ecumenical conviction that it is the »common listening« to the »good news proclaimed in Holy Scripture« that contributes to the justifying faith and the shared understanding of the doctrine of justification.⁹¹ For this reason the relationship between law and gospel (as shown above in 2.3.2) can be defined jointly.⁹² For both sides confess

⁹¹ Ibid., No. 14.

⁹² Ibid., Nos. 31–33.

»that God's commandments retain their validity for the justified and that Christ has by his teaching and example expressed God's will, which is a standard for the conduct of the justified also«. ⁹³

227. In ecumenism it is positively acknowledged that Catholic theology endeavours to inculcate the validity of God's commandments. It does not understand the law as a heavy burden, but as a signpost pointing to the realm of freedom, as a warning against misconduct and as the Magna Carta of the people of God. That is why obedience to the commandments is inculcated as an essential dimension of faith. But since the law is always dependent on up-to-date interpretation, it is not only the Torah scriptures and the traditional teachings of Jesus and the apostles which are inculcated as binding, but also the church's commandments and laws, even though these can be, and often have been, reformed. The major concern behind this is that people should not fail to find the purpose of their lives.

228. Ecumenism has also overcome the former Lutheran suspicion that Catholic theology promotes a legalism which measures faith by outward appearances and leads to the temptation of asserting rights before God. The opposite is true, for the Catholic theology of law actually strives to specify the rule that God exercises and wishes to gain in people's lives in order to lead them to salvation. However, constructive deliberations on Lutheran criticism have led Catholic theology to ward off the danger of rigourism, to avoid appearing to despise people

⁹³ Ibid., No. 31.

whose life forms are morally condemnable and contradict Catholic doctrine, and to define more exactly and distinguish more clearly what it identifies as *iure divino* or as *iure modo humano*.

229. Conversely, Lutheran theology can do more than simply appreciate the intention of Catholics to emphasise divine commandments. Rather, it can also acknowledge that the Catholic doctrine of commandments has the critical power to combat any consolation ideology and any erosion of the law. It can also recognise that it has the constructive power to set clear ethical and legal standards, whereby it must first measure up to such standards itself.

230. Both sides can therefore agree that the reference to God's commandments does not weaken the commitment to respect human dignity, but rather strengthens it. Because this divine commandment is founded in God's own action, respect for human rights cannot be considered as one factor in the context of ethical competitors. It results far more in an indissoluble connection with the philosophical justification that no human being may be instrumentalised, but that every person has an equal, innate and absolute dignity. In faith, God's commandment does not appear to be an alien force demanding submission; it rather feels as though it is written on the heart (cf. Jer 31:31-34), expressing precisely what corresponds to humanity and brings it beyond the bounds set by good will and human deeds. God's commandment is summed up in the double commandment of love.

4.1.3 *Common service*

231. The fundamental agreement in the understanding of justification, which is not relativised but given concrete form by the characteristic profiles of Evangelical-Lutheran and Catholic theology, proves its worth in the joint efforts of the Lutheran and Catholic churches for the recognition of human dignity particularly where it is refused or threatened. Together the churches stand up for the unconditional protection of human life from beginning to end. Together they resist any attempt to question people's freedom and responsibility by deterministic constructions. Catholic and Lutheran Christians stand together as critical contemporaries when human dignity is made out to be ideology or supposed to be dependent on certain qualities or abilities such as self-confidence, adulthood or usefulness. Christians see themselves as part of numerous initiatives to give binding form to the inviolable dignity of all human beings, whether by fighting poverty, promoting education and inclusion, or the recognition of the rule of law.

232. In the following section the viability of the differentiated consensus in theological anthropology will be demonstrated by a discussion of paradigmatic ethical concretions. Here we also reflect on current conflicts in areas that were described in the introduction. These examples should serve to make it clear why it is justifiable to speak of a differentiated consensus and a limited dissent in questions of applied ethics and to name the consequences.

4.2 Differentiated consensus and limited dissent in ethics

233. The Lutheran and Catholic Churches work together to see that the dignity of every human being is respected and protected in all circumstances. As has been shown in the preceding sections, it is their common faith in the triune God in his creative, redeeming and reconciling action that empowers, moves and compels them. At present this is more necessary than ever (as shown in Chapter 1). Scientific progress poses new ethical problems. The debate on human dignity is undergoing change in politics, jurisprudence and philosophy, but also in theology. Despite all the progress made in the area of human rights, people's dignity and rights are still being trampled on in many areas. In this situation the churches are called anew to work for human dignity and human rights. The clearer they speak with a common voice, the better their voice will be heard.

234. Admittedly, theology has to account for the fact that at the moment the differentiated consensus in anthropology does not manage to let Lutheran and Catholic churches represent identical positions on every ethical topic. This situation can be described as limited dissent, because the cases concerned are comparatively few and narrowly defined, and they result from differing evaluations of individual ethical aspects in extremely complex issues. These questions are also judged in various ways within the churches and the confessional theologies. In what follows it will be shown that these limited disagreements do not amount to a basic dissent; on the contrary, they represent various differentiations of the fundamental agreements in theological anthropology, which are admittedly weighted individually.

235. Firstly, there are considerations regarding the relationship between the differentiated consensus and the limited dissent in ethical matters (4.2.1). The next section then deals once again with the current issues exemplarily addressed in Chapter 1: stem cell research, child poverty and euthanasia. This will show how the strong similarities offer the basis for a common advocacy of human dignity (4.2.2).

4.2.1 The relationship between differentiated consensus and limited dissent in ethics

236. What Pope John XXIII said about questions of belief also applies in the field of ethics: »What unites us is much greater than what divides us.« The best proof is the work carried out every day in Protestant and Catholic hospitals, social stations, hospices, youth centres, day-care centres and educational institutions. The work of church relief organisations – for example on the Catholic side Caritas, Adveniat, Misereor, Misio and Renovabis, on the Protestant side Diakonie and Brot für die Welt – is specific engagement for human rights and for the recognition of human dignity. As the social statement »Common Responsibility for a Just Society« published in 2014 by the Evangelical Church in Germany and the German Bishops' Conference shows, there is a strong and broad foundation of commonalities in the decisive questions of social and economic policy; the decisive orientation is found in the biblical image of humanity. There can be no doubt that in the field of ethics there is a deeply rooted and broad consensus between the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ One example is the »Christian Patient Decree« (see footnote 1),

237. It cannot be overlooked, however, that the Protestant and Catholic sides represent different positions on several ethical issues that attract great public attention. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suggest that earlier dogmatic disagreements which have been transformed into a differentiated consensus, not least through the »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification«, are now being replaced by ethical disagreements. This study has shown how faith and action belong together. This is important because ecumenism always has to deal with the practical consequences of theology. Those who are in need of the churches' voice would be left in the lurch if the churches were to concentrate on their limited confessional differences rather than on their concrete commitment to human dignity.

238. Ethical dissent between, and partly within, the denominational traditions is narrowly limited. It is restricted to some few problems which are also highly controversial in public debate and in scientific discussion. As shown, this dissent is neither derived from fundamental differences in the methods of ethical judgment nor by denominational contradictions in anthropology. The decisive reason is rather that applied ethics always requires judgments influenced by numerous factors, and that these can be assessed differently. The more concrete the questions become, the greater the number of doubts arising, of possible courses of action to be considered and risks to be assessed. Due to the complexity of the problems, such assessments may turn out differently. In the case of doubt, the Catholic side tends more to be guided by ethical principles in

which makes a slight distinction in the case of permanent vegetative state, but otherwise represents common positions.

order to prevent harmful developments from taking root and to protect the weak, while the Protestant side tends to hold back with its ethical evaluation in order to allow for personal decisions of conscience and necessary practical measures. It is important to ensure that the decisive reasons and processes leading to judgment are clearly defined and mutually explained.

239. The Protestant point of view emphasises that the formation and decision of an individual's conscience in ethical questions comes as a result of a differentiated process of interpretation of Holy Scripture, and the decision is not finally guaranteed by a teaching authority to be true and correct. But this does not mean that material Protestant ethics would be impossible, bringing forward theological and other arguments for a certain ethical position. But this is not determined once and for all with doctrinal authority. When the Protestant churches express themselves on questions of material norms, they are aware that they are contributing to the ethical debate among Christians and non-Christians, so that they cannot demand obedience, but offer orientation for the formation of judgments.

240. The Catholic point of view emphasises that the genuine competence of the magisterium also applies to questions of morality. But this does not mean that a theological verification would not be admissible or that the »sense of faith of the people of God« consists only in obedience to the magisterium and is not also a separate source of theological insight. Above all, even according to Catholic doctrine, a person's conscience is binding, even if it is mistaken. When Catholic theology comments on questions of material norms, it does not claim teaching authority, but is helping to enrich the ethical debate.

241. Nowadays, Catholic moral theology and Protestant ethics share their orientation to Holy Scripture. However, this orientation does not eliminate the need to pay attention to current scientific research and political considerations when forming judgments. Many ethical problems have to be re-examined because of new developments in medicine, in the human and social sciences, in society and politics, which could not have been foreseen in the Bible. Orientation to Scripture serves to bring those basic principles of Christian anthropology to mind which shape the ethical judgments of the churches.

242. The following examples show that also in controversial specific ethical issues it is justifiable to speak of a differentiated consensus and merely limited dissent between the Catholic Church and the Evangelical-Lutheran churches, which does not cast doubt on the basic consensus. For this reason, joint statements on ethical issues are still possible. The following considerations apply to the three individual examples – stem cell research, child poverty and education, euthanasia. It is possible to act on the same lines for other individual ethical questions.

4.2.2 Differentiated consensus and limited dissent in the discussion of ethical and legal problems – selected problems

243. Chapter 1 showed to what extent stem cell research, child poverty and education, and euthanasia affect human dignity and how they are controversially discussed by society from this perspective. These topics were also dealt with in the section on biblical background. In this section, the churches'

statements are described and reflected with respect to their similarities and differences. The plurality of positions within and between the denominations was also represented in the working group. As stated in the introduction, the aim of this section is not to issue a joint statement, but to use these examples to show the relationship between differentiated consensus and limited dissent.

At the beginning of life: research with embryonic stem cells

244. The Protestant churches and the Catholic Church share the conviction that even before the birth of a human being God's story with him or her has begun. From the very beginning, every human being has been created as a counterpart of God, in his own image, and has his or her own God-given value, which does not depend on acceptance by other people. Every ethical decision concerning embryos demands special responsibility, precisely because an embryo is in particular need of protection. In contrast to the tendency to understand embryos as »cell clusters« and »things«, the churches jointly plead for the dignity of human life from the very beginning and in all its stages of development. For this reason, they are committed to the protection of unborn life, which may not be exploited or sacrificed for the interests of others. Together the churches oppose the cloning of human beings and the manipulation of the human germline.

245. Nevertheless, there is a limited dissent between the Protestant churches and the Catholic Church on the question of approving embryonic stem cell research. The Catholic Church fundamentally rejects research with embryonic stem cells and

knows no exception. It argues that with the fusion of semen and ovum a human being comes into existence; therefore, the fertilised ovum has to be protected even before implantation. However high the goal of medical research, it does not legitimise the instrumentalisation of humans by »using up« stem cells of an embryo for research. In the Protestant churches, on the other hand, there are different attitudes to such activities. Many Protestant Christians are equally categorical in their rejection of research with embryonic stem cells; in 2008, when the decision was pending in the German parliament, they vigorously opposed a postponement of the deadline before which the stem cell lines imported from abroad for research had to have been produced. Other Protestant Christians, on the other hand, reject the procurement of embryonic stem cells, because this destroys embryos, but agree to research with stem cell lines that already exist; in 2008 these Christians were in favour of a deadline postponement in order to enable medical research with stem cells for the benefit of humans.

246. Thus it is not that dissent exists simply between Catholic and Protestant ethics. It is also visible within Protestant theology, and can be seen on the Catholic side in the personal opinions of ethicists who do not agree with the magisterium and the great majority of Catholic moral theology. The question concerns the status of the embryos from which embryonic stem cells are procured. For the Catholic Church, with the fusion of egg cells and sperm cells a human being comes into existence who is entitled to all the rights of a human.⁹⁵ All

⁹⁵ Cf. *Donum vitae*, »Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation« by the Congregation for

further developments of the embryo are therefore developments »as a human«, so that the embryo possesses the same dignity as a human being after birth, as well as the same right to protection of that dignity. This view is shared by a number of Protestant ethicists. On the other hand, there are other Protestant ethicists who believe that the embryo is not to be regarded as a human being from the very beginning, but rather that it develops »into a human«. The implantation in the uterus is essential for this development, which is why the question of its status cannot be separated from the embryo's capability of implantation. They also speak of the dignity of the embryo, but make a distinction to the comprehensive dignity of a human being who has been born. Accordingly, they plead for different degrees of the worthiness of protection and consider it justifiable to use embryonic stem cells to do research that is aimed at improving the chances of healing, given the ethical responsibility towards the sick. At the same time, however, they oppose the production of embryos for research purposes, emphasising that embryos must not be treated like commodities or arbitrarily instrumentalised. Even if there are degrees of worthiness of protection, that does not mean that researchers can deal irresponsibly and wilfully with human embryos.

247. Protestant theologians appreciate the clarity of the Catholic position and the consistent rejection of any research that uses up embryos. The Protestant side recognises in this unambiguity the justified objection that reference to a graded

the Doctrine of the Faith (10. März 1987), www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html.

worthiness of protection might well prove meaningless. It is aware of the problem that up to now no convincing argument has been found for allowing work with embryos imported from abroad, but not with »surplus« embryos from this country. A number of Protestant ethicists, however, do not accept that the Catholic Church justifies the comprehensive prohibition of research by natural law and regard it as inhuman rigourism. They plead for theological legitimisation of plurality in ethical questions such as research with embryonic stem cells.

248. Catholic theologians highly appreciate the fact that many statements by Protestants come to a conclusion similar to their own, prohibiting research with embryonic stem cells – albeit partly using different arguments. They cannot share the arguments of those Protestant ethicists who – under certain conditions – want to permit research on embryonic stem cells by law. They also firmly reject the criticism occasionally voiced by the Protestant side that they are subject to a metaphysically enhanced naturalism; on the contrary, they invoke the latest medical findings on the origins of human life as a reason for increased caution. But they do not misjudge the fact that it is the ethics of responsibility which motivates divergent positions on the ethical issue. They acknowledge that those ethicists, too, are far from seeing embryos as test material for medical research. They understand that according to this opinion only »orphaned« embryos, which in all probability can never be implanted again, should be used, and only for high-ranking research purposes. They do not doubt that the Protestant insistence on high-ranking research goals serves the high ethical aim of curing the most serious diseases. In this respect, they see themselves in an opposition to more than a few Protestant

ethicists that only applies to a narrowly limited field, however.

249. The churches know that science and society are also holding a controversial debate because there is disagreement on the status of human life. The churches are jointly committed to the responsible treatment of embryos and demand in particular that those who wish to carry out research on embryonic stem cells declare their economic interests. They demand that the protagonists of stem cell research formulate realistic goals and provide honest information about risks and side effects. Together they are focusing on the advances in medical research, in order that research with embryonic stem cells will not be continued, but that progress is made in research with adult stem cells, which is ethically far less problematic. The churches declare that they will not be deterred from seeking for common ethical positions because they have not succeeded in taking up a common position on the question of research with embryonic stem cells. The ethical consensus of the Catholic side on this question has to stand the test in Christian and social pluralism by the power of argument. Despite its internal pluralism, the Protestant side has to adopt a position in public and make the different opinions debated within Protestantism clearer. Pluralism, like consensus, is not an end in itself, but has to prove its worth in the struggle for the benefit of humanity.

250. On the central issues of child poverty and education there is no dissent between the Protestant churches and the Catholic Church, but on the contrary a deeply founded and comprehensive consensus. The churches are engaged in the struggle against child poverty and in enabling education for all. On a national level, their large social institutions (Diakonie, Caritas, etc.) are open to people of all ages, religions and backgrounds to help them find a way out of poverty and to broaden their opportunities in life through education. Their international organisations (including Misereor, Adveniat, LWF World Service, Missio, Renovabis, Brot für die Welt) work all over the world to fight child poverty, hunger and disease and to empower people to improve their lives through education. They are convinced that »the fight against poor education is also an important instrument when it comes to overcoming poverty in general.«⁹⁶ The charitable institutions of both churches often work together. They understand diaconal commitment as an essential expression of the Christian faith.

251. Fighting child poverty is not just about helping people who are poor today. The unjust structures that lead to child poverty must also be named and changed. Even if it is sometimes disputed what these exactly are and how they are to be changed, the churches are united in uncovering and naming such structures. Fair distribution is for them part of a comprehensive concept of just participation. Based on the theology of

⁹⁶ Common Responsibility for a Just Society (see footnote 1), p. 37.

justification they assume that *every human being* possesses dignity – irrespective of whether they are themselves responsible for their present situation or not – and therefore demand general conditions for everyone in accordance with this dignity. In case of need, the state must provide the necessary means for all people to participate in social life. In their educational work and institutions the churches help both children and adults to see themselves as people who are granted this dignity by God and who can stand up for their own rights and those of other people.

252. In their common social statement, the Council of the EKD and the German Bishops' Conference have committed themselves to making it possible for all people to live in accordance with their dignity.

»Fundamentally, this is about the participation of all our country's people in the widest range of areas of life. It is part of a person's dignity that his or her particular individual gifts are supported as well as possible. Lifelong learning plays a particularly salient role in this regard.«⁹⁷

»Only that which improves the situation of those in a weaker position deserves to endure. All the basic decisions must take account of the situation of the poor, weak and disadvantaged. They have a right to run their own lives, to participate in the life and opportunities of society and to enjoy living conditions that respect and protect their dignity.«⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

⁹⁸ For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice (see footnote 1), No. 41.

253. The Catholic and Evangelical-Lutheran churches have a basic consensus on euthanasia issues. They agree that all human beings possess unlimited dignity until the end of their lives. Until his or her last breath, every human being is an image of God. No suffering and no disfigurement can deprive them of that dignity. For in Jesus Christ God has identified himself particularly with the suffering and dying human being. This insight should be reflected by worthy conditions for the dying, which respect their wishes in a special way. That is why the churches are looking to further progress in palliative medicine. There should be no medical compulsion to prolong life artificially, but there must be comprehensive medical care. Within this framework everything should be done to allow people to die in dignity by alleviating pain and giving comfort. This is the doctors' responsibility. Were the ban on killing to be lifted or weakened, that would not only violate the ethics of the profession, but also cause great uncertainty as to whether the medical profession can be trusted to heal people and to relieve their pain, as required by the Hippocratic oath. Patients can expect doctors to act for them as »Samaritans« (cf. Lk 10:25-35); doctors may not be given the option of ending life with legal legitimacy and provision, even if the advocates of a medically assisted suicide affirm that they want to set narrow limits.

254. The churches understand life as a gift which may not be placed at the arbitrary disposal of humans. They are convinced that it corresponds to human dignity that one is able to determine for oneself the way one shapes this life gift. However, they rule out the possibility that such self-determination

also extends to suicide. Both churches are convinced that only God – and no human being – is Lord over life and death. This religious knowledge results in a high ethical responsibility. Doctors, nurses and caregivers often find themselves fighting for the life of a person with all their might and medical competence. They deserve grateful recognition for this, even should their efforts be unsuccessful. But it is not the doctors' task to postpone death by all possible means. When the time has come, people must be allowed to die. But killing people is forbidden according to God's will; particular importance is attached to the doctors' ban on killing. All churches therefore reject preserving life at all costs and against the will of the patient, just as they reject active euthanasia and assisted suicide (especially in its professional and commercial form). They firmly resist the possible emergence of an everyday consciousness that regards it as a kind of ethical obligation for sick and old people to stop being a burden to others by choosing to die prematurely, either by their own hand or with the help of others. »We may not deal with human suffering (pain, loneliness and despair) by killing, but by human affection and care. We want to alleviate suffering and not to dispose of those who are suffering.«⁹⁹

255. Attentive end-of-life care, such as is provided by the hospice movement, for example, can counteract the worry of having to die under unworthy conditions. The loving accompaniment of relatives takes away the fear of becoming an unreasonable burden for others.

⁹⁹ Einführung, in: *Sterbebegleitung statt aktiver Sterbehilfe. Eine Sammlung kirchlicher Texte*, Bonn/Hannover 2011², p. 15.

»The aim of participating in the sickness and suffering of a dying person is to join with them in finding out what makes their life worth living and meaningful in spite of all the restrictions imposed upon them in the remaining life span.«¹⁰⁰

The churches advocate the further development of palliative medicine, also in medical training, and encourage people to draw up a patient decree.

256. On principle, the Catholic and Evangelical-Lutheran churches oppose assisted suicide as a lawfully legitimised option at the end of life. At the same time, there is a limited disagreement between the two churches with regard to individual cases. The Lutheran churches assume that there are borderline situations, such as unbearable, long-lasting and undoubtedly terminal suffering, in which people in a moral conflict ask for assistance to suicide, while others see their plight and feel themselves bound by conscience to help them to commit suicide. Here it has to be acknowledged that human conscience is binding; from the Lutheran point of view, no one is entitled to make a moral judgment about someone who decides one way or the other in such a conflict.¹⁰¹ The Catholic Church rejects the decision to commit or to assist suicide on principle, because it violates in any case God's commandment not to kill. »The beginning and end of life are removed from human disposal.«¹⁰² But it is far from condemning people who take their

¹⁰⁰ Gott ist ein Freund des Lebens (see footnote 1), p. 109 f.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Press release at the declaration of the Council of the EKD on the debate on suicide assistance, 19 November 2012: Jede Form organisierter Suizidbeihilfe ist abzulehnen!

own lives, committing them to the grace of God.¹⁰³ The Catholic Church does not condemn the intention of wanting to help, but it cannot justify aiding suicide, because life is a gift from God and the commandment »You shall not kill« applies to the very last breath.

257. The Catholic side is aware that the position of the Lutheran churches leaves room for the individual to make a decision of conscience. It also knows, however, that this does not maintain that people are free to dispose of their lives. For in the view of Lutherans, too, such an (assisted) suicide is an act which brings guilt upon the person who kills, because it is contrary to the commandment not to kill. By assuming this responsibility the person becomes guilty. Conversely, the Lutheran side is aware that when it comes to legislation and society's basic attitude towards assisted suicide, an uncompromising, non-negotiable attitude provides a basis for orientation. By arguing here on principle, the Catholic side gives a reminder that even ethics oriented to individual conscience cannot ignore orientation to a norm.

258. The foundation of the churches' position on dealing with those terminally ill and dying is the hope of the resurrection of the dead. The nature of a human being is not decided at the end of earthly life. There is an eschatological dimension to the dignity and identity of every human. The person dying is a

¹⁰² German Bishops' Conference, *Sterben in Würde – Worum geht es eigentlich?* (Flyer), Bonn 2014, p. 2.

¹⁰³ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2283.

person to whom God opens the future. People can trust that their guilt will one day be forgiven, their wounds healed and their identity perfected.

4.3 Summary and outlook

259. Public debate within the churches as well as in politics and society sees the differences between Catholic and Protestant positions which have been adopted in some contentious ethical issues. We have analysed and reflected on the reasons for this in more detail. The result is a critical differentiation. The ethical similarities are far stronger than the differences. The patterns of reasoning in moral theology and ethics in Protestant as well as in Catholic theology do not assume a basic dissent. There is no dispute on the essential elements of a common theological anthropology; today the confessional differences can be mutually valued and appreciated as enrichment in this field. The differences refer to narrowly limited topics; they often result from factors that are independent of theology, but can be taken up by theology. Common ethical statements of the churches are still possible and necessary. However, they must develop a qualified relationship to a well-founded plurality of ethical positions.

260. The study by the Bilateral Working Group states that the differences that can be seen exemplarily in the question of the postponement of the deadline for research on embryonic stem cells and in the ethical evaluation of assisted suicide are neither the result of different and basically incompatible patterns of reasoning in processes of ethical judgment, nor of inex-

plicable dissent regarding the image of humanity itself. In Chapter 2 it was shown that both in the Catholic Church and in the Protestant churches the principal methods of justifying the formation of ethical judgment have gained great momentum by academic discourse and ecumenical debate; this means that today the patterns of argumentation in one's own church and in the others are not only analysed dispassionately with regard to their efficacy, but can also be passed on and explained to one another. Chapter 3 has shown that the common reading of Scripture allows a theological anthropology to develop which takes up characteristically Lutheran and characteristically Catholic perspectives in order to relate them to each other. In Section 4.1, this led to the conclusion that even in traditionally controversial, ethically virulent points, fundamental commonalities can be identified which do not overlook denominational differences but relate them constructively to the commonalities. This applies to the power of grace, which does not obstruct the freedom of humanity, and the misery of sin, which in concrete misdeeds reveals deep problems of the relationship to God and self-perception; but it also applies to human responsibility as a consequence of faith, and to obedience to God's commandment, which does not mean determination from outside, but rather self-determination by virtue of the Spirit.

261. When it comes to discussing ethical differences and developing joint ethical statements, these positions, which may be seen as representative examples, form a stable base so that conflicts cannot just be tolerated, but also settled in the interests of better understanding. Joint actions and positions in the field of social ethics – child poverty and educational work were named here as examples – demonstrate how stable the founda-

tion is and how far it is possible to put into practice the will to come to common positions.

262. However, the analysis of the limited dissent in certain fields of applied ethics also shows that one cannot derive unambiguous relationships between anthropological and ethical principles on the one hand and concrete conclusions in ethical questions on the other. Where strong principles are missing, pure pragmatism prevails, so that in the worst case the law of the jungle applies. But it is not sufficient to refer to principles. The churches must focus their attention more closely than before on the problems of mediation, on the conditions under which political decisions are made, the risks and side-effects of ethical judgments and moral actions. Beyond the bounds of previous statements (and also of this study), the ethical significance of such mediation should be considered more precisely.

263. Ecumenism in the field of ethics does not serve to play down the differences between Protestant and Catholic ethics, but to place them in a constructive relationship to one another and enrich ethical discourse. What is required is the ability to recognise the relative justification of a divergent position with regard to its respective preconditions, and to take this into consideration critically when presenting one's own arguments, even if no agreement can be reached on the result. This is one of the starting points for future developments in ecumenical theology.

264. In the field of ethics, the hermeneutics of differentiated consensus has proven its worth. It does not aim at uniformity, but at communicative plurality that does not disparage

commonalities and places differences in relationship to them. As has already happened in the fields of soteriology and ecclesiology, hermeneutics must also be further developed in the field of ethics in such a way that differences are not only seen as problems to be solved, but as possible solutions that might stimulate critical questioning of the positions on both sides and thus generate alternatives. In the field of ethics, however, it is also evident that ecumenical hermeneutics must be further developed in such a way that a qualified relationship to remaining disagreements emerges. It is necessary to determine precisely their extent and importance and to help them to be understood within the respective denominational plurality.

265. In the case of research with embryonic stem cells, as in the case of assisted suicide, it is not the case that Catholic and Protestant theology simply contradict one another, possibly even fundamentally. On the contrary, there are clear differences on the Protestant side, where some people agree with the Catholic position while others reject it decisively. But on the Catholic side, too, there is not just one single opinion held by theology and believers alike, just as the magisterium also develops new positions on important ethical questions. These differences must be openly addressed and theologically evaluated. In this way the churches remain ecumenically capable of judgment and action, even if their positions are not congruent in every respect. In stem cell research, the progress of medicine opens up new possibilities for medical healing, but also new dangers for humans. On the question of death in dignity, the churches must direct their joint efforts towards further expansion of palliative medicine; at the same time, in the public discourse on the ethos of the medical profession and the

image of humanity in society, they must represent a position that does not give absolute priority to the striving for health and does not cause the will to self-determination to exercise unbearable pressure on those who are suffering and on their relatives.

266. The churches can recognise their priorities for action by studying Holy Scripture and being sensitively aware of present-day circumstances. In the previous chapters it was mostly theological arguments which were employed in order to cast light on ethical principles. In conclusion, we wish to use a different style of language to exemplify what the churches wish to advocate. It is the question of »options for humanity« which can be evolved from the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. It is not our aim to develop a detailed exegesis, but to open our eyes to decisive impulses, encouraging efforts in favour of human dignity and in the name of the God who is a friend of humankind. It is also intended to reveal the meaningful contribution to a joint Christian commitment which can be made by describing differentiated consensus and limited dissent.

5 Options for Humanity: the Testimony of the Sermon on the Mount

267. The image of human beings in the Bible is the basis for an ethos of humanity. This ethos applies to all people. It is based on the unity of love for God and love for one's neighbour (Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:29-34; Lk 10:25-37) and extends love of one's neighbour to love of one's enemy (Mt 5:38-48; Lk 6:27-36). But it consists of more than just commandments and laws. It stretches from the incarnation of the Word of God (Jn 1:14) to communion with God by participating in the love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit (Jn 17). The Christian ethos is inspired by the goodness of God himself, who »makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous« (Mt 5:45). Therefore believers are committed to improving the situation of people for the better. At the same time they are aware of the limits of human capabilities and testify to the living God in suffering as well, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

268. The biblical ethos is the basis of options for humanity, an obligation for people; the gospel reminds people of their own guilt, for which they must ask forgiveness from God and from all their brothers and sisters; but it also encourages them to seek new ways to make the unity of love for God and one's neighbour tangible. Some of these options are: compassion for the suffering, forgiveness of guilt, commitment to human

rights for all, promotion of justice and work for peace. They are inspired by the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount.

»Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven« (Mt 5:3)

269. The Beatitude of the poor indicates that poverty leads to a disregard for human dignity. God has prepared his kingdom for the poor. The struggle against poverty is a struggle for the enforcement of human rights and for the recognition of the human dignity of the poor.

270. Jesus himself shared poverty with the poor. He is realistic enough to say that you will »always have the poor with you« (Mk 14:7) – not because it is God’s will, but because it is the result of human culpability in living together. According to the parable of the Judgment of the Nations, Jesus identified himself with the least (Mt 25:31–46). He contradicted the notion that in their wretchedness they were worth less in the eyes of God. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus opens our eyes to the injustice of the world and God’s love for the poor (Lk 16:19–31). Here Jesus follows absolutely in the tradition of the prophets of Israel. He indicts injustice, but inspires hope in the abundant riches of God’s perfect reign. In this commitment of Jesus to the poor, Paul discovers the mystery of the entire redemption: »Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich« (2 Cor 8:9).

271. For the early church, poverty was an everyday experience, but also a cause for welfare work. We are told how the original community alleviated poverty by a culture of sharing,

first of all within its own ranks, because the resources were not adequate for more (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37; 6:1–7). The experience of being generously blessed by God motivated the first believers, who saw themselves obliged not to hoard the gifts they had received, but to give them to the poor.

272. For the churches today, the Beatitude of the poor leads them in the first instance to confess how much they have themselves increased poverty in the world, whether by speaking out or keeping silent, by acting or failing to act. The Beatitude calls on the churches to act as much as they are able, in order to combat poverty worldwide and in every form.

273. The Beatitude opens our eyes to seeing Christ in the poor and motivates us to stand alongside them. But it also gives hope going beyond what humans can do to reduce poverty and what they can achieve in the midst of their own poverty. In the words of the Old Testament psalm: »For the needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor perish for ever« (Ps 9:18).

*»Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted«
(Mt 5:4)*

274. The Beatitude of those who mourn is a strong and silent protest against disregard of human rights and a strong and silent testimony to that dignity of which no human being can be deprived. The Beatitude applies to all those who are not prepared to accept the misery of this world, the need and injustice, but are suffering from the failure of their attempts to bring about change. God will comfort those who mourn.

275. Jesus himself mourned (Jn 11:34-36). And he consoled those who were mourning (Jn 11:17-27). According to the parable of the Judgment of the Nations he identified himself with the least (Mt 25:31-46). In those who suffer from their own guilt or that of others, who are poor and sick, abandoned and imprisoned, one can recognise Jesus Christ himself in his poverty and suffering, his abandonment and imprisonment. Taking care of those who mourn means helping to change the situation. Throughout his life and even in his Passion, Jesus sought to be close to the suffering, to help and comfort them. It was compassion which drove him to take care of the weak. Jesus personifies the suffering servant of God, who was despised by all, but brought to all the life of God (Is 53).

276. For the early church this ethos was a reason for gratitude and mission: the disciples were comforted in their grief at the death of Jesus; they gained the courage to hope for the victory of love over death. Believing in the resurrection, they did not repress their grief, but found a place for it in their prayers of lamentation, intercession and praise of God.

277. For the churches today, the Beatitude of those who mourn is motivation and obligation to proclaim the Good News to those whose sorrow has robbed them of their hope in God, but also of their hope for themselves and their loved ones. The churches have to correct the misunderstanding that the suffering are abandoned or punished by God. They also have to defend themselves against the accusation that consolation in the name of Jesus is cold comfort. They can only achieve these two aims if they are themselves willing to grieve, to pity and to sympathise, and consequentially to take up the fight against

injustice. The ethos of compassion is grounded in God's closeness to those who suffer. They are made in the image of God, who has called them to share in his love.

278. The Beatitude opens our eyes to see Jesus Christ in those who mourn. It motivates us to offer consolation – in word and deed. But it also gives us reason to hope that God will be able to comfort those who are inconsolable in this world – not because these people had been disappointed, but because God »will wipe away every tear« (Is 25:8; Rv 21:4).

»Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth« (Mt 5:5)

279. The Beatitude of the meek (or those »who do not use violence«, as it can also be translated) speaks to all who do not rely on violence, but on love and humane action. God will open up the whole earth to them. To support meekness and non-violence means profound and sustainable support for the dignity of human beings.

280. At his entry to Jerusalem, Matthew's Gospel describes Jesus himself in the words of the prophet Zechariah (Zec 9:9): »Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey« (Mt 21:5; cf. Jn 12:15). Jesus not only called on people to love their enemies (Mt 5:38–48; Lk 6:27–36). He also practised it throughout his life. On the cross he prays for his executioners: »Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing« (Lk 23:34). The love of God is realised in Jesus' meekness.

281. For the early church, the Beatitude was a promise and a demand. It encouraged the community in its determination not to react to violence with counterviolence. The New Testament Scriptures testify to Jesus' spirit of humility (cf. Phil 2:6-9) and urge believers to imitate it (cf. Phil 2:5).

282. For the churches today, the Beatitude of the meek is an opportunity to confess the guilt incurred by the violence they have exercised, commanded and justified in their history. The Beatitude demands that any form of violence should be renounced, however sublime, and that everything possible should be done to overcome violence in both the private and political spheres and to seek the way of peace.

283. The Beatitude opens our eyes to see Jesus in the meek. The gospel promises that they will be honoured by God. Even if everything seems to speak against this promise, it is nevertheless founded in God himself and gives hope that »love is ... strong as death« (Sg 8:6).

*»Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled« (Mt 5:6)*

284. The Beatitude of those who hunger and thirst connects the issue of righteousness with the real circumstances in which hunger and thirst prevail. It points to the seriousness of the situation of the hungry and thirsty. They are promised that God will still their hunger and quench their thirst. The commitment to righteousness »on earth as it is in heaven« (Mt 6:10) is a commitment to human rights and respect for human dignity.

285. According to the Gospel of Matthew, before his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus himself declared to John the Baptist: »It is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness« (Mt 3:15). This righteousness is God's saving will. People are hungry for earthly righteousness. Jesus encourages them to trust in heavenly righteousness. God will help them to gain their rights, even if they are taken away from them on earth.

286. For the early church, the Beatitude is a confirmation of its own search for righteousness in an unjust world. The fact that heavenly righteousness cannot be achieved on earth does not justify any form of unrighteousness. This is why the church, although at first quite small, considered itself called to exercise righteousness, beginning in its communities and spreading out from them.

287. For the churches today, the Beatitude is a challenge to support all those working for and laying claim to righteousness. It empowers people to exercise their rights themselves and to stand up for others. Christian faith testifies that a person's dignity does not depend on its recognition by others, but that it is founded in God and therefore inviolable. Human dignity is inviolable because it is inherent in humankind. To respect and protect it is an expression of righteousness.

288. The Beatitude indicates that Jesus Christ is recognisable in those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because he gave a direction to people's longing for righteousness by his proclamation of the kingdom of God. Even if on earth hunger and thirst return again and again, the promise remains that by

the will of God it is righteousness, not unrighteousness, which will prevail in the future.

»Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy« (Mt 5:7)

289. The Beatitude of the merciful includes all those who are committed to a humane life. God himself will prove himself merciful. The practice of mercy is a sustainable service to the enforcement of human rights and respect for human dignity. It does not blur the difference between perpetrators and victims, but it does allow those who are burdened with guilt to repent, and grants them God's forgiveness if they do not refuse God's mercy.

290. Jesus proclaimed the mercy of God. Mercy comes from the very heart of God. It comes in particular to those whose hearts are hardened. Jesus proves that truth by sharing the life of those upon whom he has mercy. Quoting an early creed, the apostle Paul states, regarding not only the life of Christ, but also his cross and resurrection: *»For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God« (2 Cor 5:21)*. Faith in God grants the trust to look closely at one's own sin in its destructive dimensions, yet still to hope for forgiveness and redemption. Whoever sins hides his or her own God-likeness or disregards that of others, but the light of God shines in such darkness, and darkness has not overcome it (cf. Jn 1:5).

291. For the early church, the Beatitude is a reminder of its own foundation and an encouragement to exercise mercy. The early church lived on the experience of God's mercy; it knew

the sinners in its own ranks; it was mercilessly persecuted for the sake of its faith. The New Testament tells of the difficulties the first believers had in being guided by the mercy of God – but also how good it is when mercy prevails.

292. For the churches today, the Beatitude shows the way to a culture of compassion, both in their own ranks and in their surroundings. They take to heart the message that the deed is to be distinguished from the person, which dates back to Augustine: sin is to be hated, but sinners are to be loved. Christians have the authority to forgive sins; in their worship, in doctrine and social commitment, they must do all in their power to exercise mercy. This motivates them to expose injustice and to reproach mercilessness.

293. The Beatitude shows that Jesus Christ is recognisable in those who are merciful. It encourages us to trust in God's mercy, even where human possibilities reach their limits. It is alive in the confession of John the Baptist, which is renewed every time the Lord's Supper and Eucharist are celebrated: »Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world« (Jn 1:29).

»Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God« (Mt 5:8)

294. The Beatitude of those who are pure in heart speaks of those people who devote themselves to other people out of the goodness of their heart. God will show himself to them. To have a heart is a biblical expression for human dignity. Cordiality between people is an everyday way to safeguard human dignity, and for that reason essential.

295. According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus read the words of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth and applied them to himself:

»The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.« (Luke 4:18-19 - Is 61:1-2)

He did not define purity according to outward appearances, but sought it in people's hearts (Mt 15:1-20; Mk 7:1-23). He shared the heart's rejoicing that fills all who have an ear for the Word of God (Jn 16:22). Purity of the heart is freedom from evil, openness to God, devotion to one's neighbour, and harmony with oneself. This purity is also threatened among the followers of Jesus, by striving for power and by hypocrisy. But purity of heart can also be found outside the church: in all people of good will.

296. For the early church, the Beatitude of the pure-hearted provided freedom to be on the lookout for all people who were fighting evil and promoting good, in order to join them in partnerships for peace. The purification of hearts is a sign of the gospel itself, which should not be obscured, whether by the externalisation of religion or by believers' hardness of hearts.

297. For the churches today, the Beatitude is a cause of gratitude for all believers who, by the grace of God, have experienced the purification of their hearts. Again and again, it comes as an obligation to open one's heart to the action of the

Holy Spirit and to preach the gospel in such a way that Jesus' heartfelt love can be discovered by all people.

298. The Beatitude opens one's eyes to see in all people with a pure heart Jesus Christ, who has a pure heart and purifies the hearts. It is a renewal of the promise that God will give us a new heart and a new spirit (Ez 36:26), which will be the boundless fulfilment of the wish uttered by King Solomon in the Old Testament: »Wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul« (Prv 2:10).

»Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God« (Mt 5:9)

299. The Beatitude of the peacemakers strengthens all those who stand up for reconciliation and against violence in order to make the earth habitable for human beings and animals. God sees them as his closest relatives. In a world in which violent conflicts are increasing rather than decreasing, peace work denounces the violation of human rights and promotes their enforcement.

300. Jesus himself sent his disciples to bring peace (Mt 10:12-13; Lk 10:5). In the Bible, people are called by God to have peace with him and with one another. It is the great vision of the prophets of Israel that the peace that was lost will return to all creation, because God will establish his kingdom and reconcile people with himself and with one another (Is 11:1-16). The celebration of the Sabbath in Israel is the representation of the original peace (Gn 2:1-4a; Ex 20:11) and the foretaste of the final one (Heb 4:1-13). It is the peace that Jesus gives to his dis-

ciples »not as the world gives«, but as God gives (Jn 14:27). God is not a God of war but of peace; active and courageous commitment to peace is an essential element of faith in God and the discipleship of Jesus – both in private and in politics.

301. For the early church, the Beatitude is a calling to understand the proclamation of the gospel as a mission of peace. The apostle Paul, who turned into an apostle of peace after exercising violence for religious reasons, provides the best example. The peace of God is a gift and a promise, a pledge and a commission. »He is our peace« (Eph 2:14) is therefore a basic confession of faith.

302. For the churches today, the Beatitude is a blessing and an obligation to resist violence at all levels and to serve peace. We are unable to forget the terrible wars that have been waged in the name of God to subjugate people of other religions or to free them from unbelief. They act as a warning and a commitment to honour the »God of peace« (Rom 15:33) in thought, word and deed. Ecumenism itself is an expression of this peace work. But in the political sphere as well, the churches work towards the promotion of a peace which is not based on oppression, but on liberation and justice.

303. The Beatitude shows that Jesus Christ is recognisable in all people who make peace. It motivates them to seek for ways of peace and to resist violence. It also provides hope of eternal peace which will not be disappointed in spite of a world filled with violence. This hope confirms the vision of the prophets that people will »beat their swords into ploughshares« (Is 2:4; Mi 4:3).

*»Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven« (Mt 5:10)*

304. The Beatitude of the persecuted is a clear commitment to all those who victimised by others because they resist injustice. Their stand is meaningful because they are working for righteousness. God himself will grant them their rights in his kingdom. Persecution »for righteousness' sake« is a reality that highlights the risks of personal engagement for the rights and dignity of humans, particularly where they are deprived of such rights and denied their dignity.

305. Jesus himself was persecuted for righteousness' sake. He took the path of suffering. Quoting from the fourth song of the Suffering Servant (Is 53), the First Epistle of Peter says of him: »When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly« (1 Pet 2:23).

306. For the early church, the Beatitude is a signal to remain faithful to the call of Jesus. The early church itself experienced the persecutions that Jesus had prophesied, and it practised the demand of the Sermon on the Mount not to curse their persecutors but to bless them, that is, to commend them to the mercy of God (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28; Rom 12:14).

307. For the churches today, the Beatitude is a warning to face up to their own past in which Christians persecuted other people because of their faith. It also gives grounds to protest loudly against today's persecution of Christians for their faith, but also to denounce unjust persecutions in any form. The

churches must be places offering asylum to persecuted people - within the walls of their church buildings, as well as by their prayers and actions.

308. The Beatitude does not ignore the fact that many are persecuted for righteousness' sake. They make Jesus Christ recognisable, who was persecuted because he proclaimed the righteousness of God in a world filled with injustice. The discipleship of Jesus is the foundation of solidarity with the persecuted. But faith also enjoys the promise that in the end God will not allow injustice to triumph, but will help justice to victory. That is why this prayer will not go unanswered: »I am persecuted without cause; help me!« (Ps 119:86).

Abbreviations

- AC The Apostolicity of the Church. Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity
- ASm Smalcald Articles
- CA Confessio Augustana
- CS Communio Sanctorum - The Church as the Communion of Saints. Official German Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue, Liturgical Press 2004
- DWÜ Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung
- DV Dei verbum - Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Vaticanum II)
- JDDJ Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church)
- GS Gaudium et spes - Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Vaticanum II)
- KWS Kirchengemeinschaft in Wort und Sakrament (Bilateral Working Group I)
- LG Lumen gentium - Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Vaticanum II)
- OCS Official Common Statement confirming the JDDJ (The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church)
- OT Optatam totius - Decree on Priestly Training (Vaticanum II)

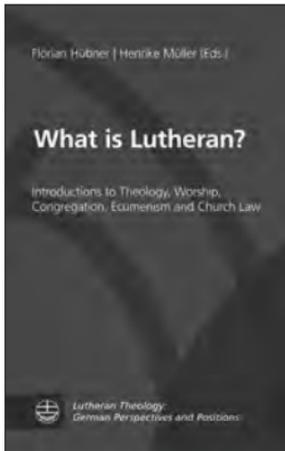
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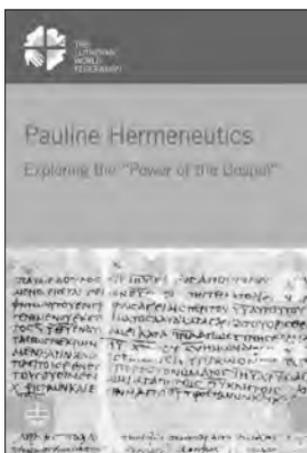
In light of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, eminent theologians and scholars from all parts of the world offer their insights into the interaction between theological thinking, economics and politics in the twenty-first century.



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Eve-Marie Becker (Eds.)
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Exploring the
»Power of the Gospel«

LWF Studies 3/2016

184 pages | paperback
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Paul's letters are of crucial importance for Christian theology and church life. The way in which the apostle Paul critically reflected on the meaning of the gospel message in light of Scripture, the traditions, ethics and Christian faith and hope, has had a significant and lasting impact on the Lutheran tradition.

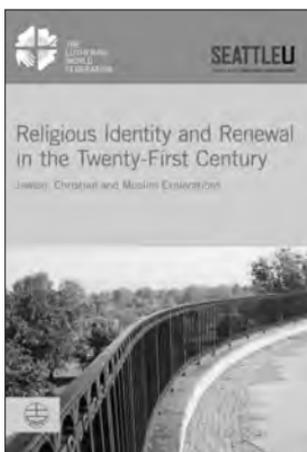
In this publication, the fourth and final in a series of LWF publications on biblical hermeneutics, renowned international scholars from the fields of biblical studies and systematic theology reevaluate to what extent twenty-first-century Lutherans can rediscover the Pauline paradigm of the "power of the Gospel" and hereby overcome ambiguous perceptions of the so-called "Lutheran reading(s)" of Paul.



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Religions carry strong visions of renewal and thereby have the potential to trigger dynamics of change in all spheres of human life. Religions have contributed to societal transformation and processes of renewal spark intensive theological debates. The renewal of religious identity is informed by how religious communities interpret their traditions and past, present, and future challenges to themselves, society and the world at large. How do religious communities understand their own resources and criteria for renewal in the twenty-first century? In this publication, Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars analyze and reflect on the meaning and dynamics of religious renewal and explore the meaning of religious renewal across religious traditions.



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Is it possible for the churches to take a joint stand on human dignity, even though they hold different positions in certain ethical questions? This study paper by the (Roman Catholic) German Bishops' Conference and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, which is available in English for the first time, explores new paths in the ecumenical handling of ethical questions. Using the methodology of »differentiated consensus«, the authors outline the theological similarities of the churches' teaching of anthropology, whilst still doing justice to their differences in the ethical assessment of individual issues of human conduct. In this way, Catholics and Lutherans adopt a common position and make a theologically responsible contribution to ethical judgement.



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