| Man, where are you?

An exploration of the Christian
Democratic portrayal of mankind

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Preface

This study is an exploration of the principal characteristics of the Christian Democratic portrayal of mankind. How can that image of human dignity be translated politically?

The underlying issue of this study, the design of social institutions to human scale, is a new 'social issue'. In a world in which political and economic relations become increasingly global and we, at the same time, are increasingly being thrown back upon ourselves more and more, it is hard to find our correct standard. Which vision on the human scale should determine politics?

In this study we make explicit a number of fundamental ideological and moral ideas which from a Christian Democratic perception offer an insight into humanity. Although these are ideas which are characteristic of the Christian Democratic vision on man and society, they are not exclusively Christian Democratic or Christian. On the contrary, these are ideas which are propagated widely, often with a casualness which suggests that no further explanation and elaboration is necessary. After all who is not in favour of dignity, equality or freedom?

The modern society is based on the fundamental principle of the human dignity of each man as a human being. However it also seems to be problematic that we ourselves have become our only point of reference for that design of dignity. This becomes especially clear in our thinking of equality and individual freedom.

For Christian Democrats the basis for equality does not primarily lie in the appeal which I as an individual can do to the collective, but especially in the appeal of another to me as an individual. It is our thesis that 'we need you' is more liberating than 'you may (and should!) be "as you are"'.

An important research theme for the Centre for European Studies as presented in the plan of activities 2008 is the theme Ethics, Values and Religion. Interreligious communication and interreligious dialogue play an important role in Christian Democratic politics. In 2006, the Research Institute for the CDA published an exploration of the characteristics of the Christian Democratic portrayal of mankind as a basic for Christen Democratic thinking. On request of the CES this version was translated and reworked to a CES publication. For the Dutch version dr. T.O.F. Van Prooijen was responsible as author. For the translation we would like to thank drs. Pesch. Also we would like to thank drs. E.J. van Asselt, deputy director of the Research Institute for the CDA, for the reworking and rewording the English version.

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| Short summary

Short summary

This study is an exploration of the principal characteristics of the Christian Democratic portrayal of mankind with a view to the discussion on the reformation of social institutions. There is a loss of self-evident social, moral and religious 'horizons' which determine the human scale. Modern societies have an fundamental attitude which is determined by a way of thinking which is unilaterally focused on effectiveness and control. The emphasis on use and efficiency results in a unilateral annexation of our creativity and responsibility and our ability to be involved and to cooperate. A politic which remains stuck in an oration of rationality, technology, control and individualism is not suitable to see into today's problems, let alone solve them. We should look for 'more subtle languages' which could connect the ideological perspectives of meaningfulness with our social and economical reality.

The starting point of the dignity of every human being is a standard which we acknowledge and at the same time an ideal which we, in the course of history, gradually give meaning to – *for better and for worse*. We must be fully aware of the ambiguity of the development of our thinking about dignity (the 'generalisation' and 'individualisation' of it), of the resulting dilemmas and thus of the necessity of continuous ideological reflection. The modern perception of human dignity cannot solely be seen as a secular invention

A constitutional fetishism that only wants to anchor our democratic constitutional state with 'neutral' ground rules undermines the vitality of that constitutional state. We must go beyond the rhetorical use of the expression 'human dignity' and ask for the interpretation and foundation of it. The search for a strictly rational legal foundation of human dignity will get stuck in a vicious circle.

The crucial question that forces itself on us is the ancient question from Psalm 8: What is man? The story of the creation typifies man as a creature drawn from clay which receives the royal mission to rule the world and which lives, revives and coexists through his continuous, intimate relation with the Creator and his fellow creatures.

The political translation of this portrayal of mankind demands attention for the *personal responsibility of people* and for the *relations* in which they live. In order not to lapse into one-sided individualism or community thinking, we specifically emphasize that man is 'open' for 'higher things'. The openness towards the 'higher things' determines both man's *grandeur* and his *misery*. The disruption of human relations can only be really understood from man's insatiable longing. The essential political question that results from this, is how we can appeal to the good that comes from that strong human passion. Therefore a vital *civil society* is indispensable.

Intrinsic to the modern conception of dignity is equality. The political discussion on equality takes place between two extremities: the minimal perception of equality, equal right of choice, and the maximal, absolute equality as objective. Equality is not an isolated value, but a *comparative* concept. It is always the question what our (implicit) point of comparison is. The idea of fundamental equality of all people has been developed to bring justice to the world; however, we acknowledge our mutual humanity exactly in our *differences*, not in those aspects in which we, at a very abstract level, are equal. The question for equality should not primarily be answered from the individual and its rights, but from an intrinsic vision of the fair society. In the biblical concept of justice rightfulness and mercy converge.

The welfare doctrine of the self-development is, also politically speaking, still very much alive. That welfare doctrine assumes a *portrayal of mankind* that sees the individual and his development separate from the relations in which people are being tied up.

In our search for our 'unique self', in our tendency to overrate originality, we appear to be children of the Romanticism (much more than of the Enlightenment, which is often stated in politics). We observe different 'Romantic' escapes from reality, retreating movements into a nostalgic past, into an ideal future or into our true self.

Freedom starts with *self-acceptance* and is a *freedom of responsibility*. Although the circumstances in which we live determine who we are, this is also determined by the way in which we deal with those circumstances. The portrayal of mankind as the free and responsible human being, the central thought of the *personalism*, is the starting point of our thinking about the human scale in politics, although we should be careful to avoid the pitfall of a neo-romantic community ideal.

1 | **The Human Standard? A 'social issue'**

1. The Human Standard? A 'social issue'

This study is an exploration of the principal characteristics of the Christian Democratic portrayal of mankind

Our life and our society are changing radically because of social-economic, world-political, demographic and ecological developments. Old borders dissolve because of the 'globalization' of the economy, migration streams and the revolutionary development of new information – and communication technologies, but also because of the threat of terrorism and nuclear conflicts and also climatological changes. Because of these types of developments our lives more and more are being lived at the global stage. We have become world citizens, the inhabitants of the *global village*. At the same time we see an opposite movement. Our own living environment is shrinking. The larger and more complex the outside world becomes, the more we seem inclined to withdraw within the convenient arrangement of the ever decreasing private-world. One of the characters in Ian McEwan's book *Saturday*, the eighteen-year-old guitarist Theo Perowne, phrases this strikingly:

> *When we go on about the big things, the political situation, global warming, world poverty, it all looks really terrible, with nothing getting better, nothing to look forward to. But when I think small, closer in – you know, a girl I've just met, or this song we're going to do with Chas, or snowboarding next month, then it looks great. So this is going to be my motto – think small.*[1]

In general we seem to have a rather negative opinion of world and society, but we also seem to be strikingly content with the quality of our own life ('I am doing fine, we are doing poorly'). This could easily be disposed of as a growing indifference or egoism. However, many people attach great importance to community ideals and values such as solidarity and 'dignity'. Within the decreasing private domain many may look for the acknowledgement and durability which they no longer experience in an outside world on which they gradually lose their grip.

What does this mean politically? Is the 'human scale' of our community relations at stake? Whoever wants to answer this question, should first determine what that 'human scale' actually is. In social and political discussions *implicitly* quite some attention is being paid to it. Who concludes that the social security has become an impersonal governmental colossus, presupposes that the human scale is being characterized by direct, mutual involvement. Who posits that rigid legislation with asylum procedures should not prevail over the human scale, finds a connection between that human scale and mercy. Who fears that human immoderateness

threatens nature and environment, claims that the human scale correlates with moderation, respect and durability. Who concludes that the scaling-up in education has resulted in education factories, associates the human scale with small scale, personal educational communities. Who thinks that modern management strategies in the corporate world too often pass over the human scale, assumes that the human scale is related to long lasting relationships based on trust and on professional ethics. These examples - many others could be added – presuppose certain values, which certainly at first sight may not always be completely clear. In this study we *explicitly* discuss a number of these values which according to many of us it determine the human scale, such as human dignity, equality, freedom, responsibility, mercy and justice. We problematize the political use of these terms and offer a Christian Democratic perspective on the dilemmas which result from it.

It is our starting point that the human scale *has not been defined for once and for all*. Our society is different from our grandparents' and in many aspects we are a different kind of human beings. Just consider to what extent the influence of modern communication means has influenced our daily lives during the last decennia (Internet, e-mail, mobile phones). There are large differences between our current generations. At the secondary school the adolescent has integrated these types of communication means in his daily routines in an entirely different way than people in their thirties or sixties. Through MSN and mobile phones networks of friends and acquaintances get a different character. For social contacts it is often of vital importance to build an extensive network of acquaintances through several Internet communities.

The last couple of years much has been written about the disadvantages and risks of the modern developments: for example about disintegrating neighbourhoods, aggression and 'loutish' behaviour in the street, the shortage of volunteers for voluntary work with 'no personal gain' and the undermined faith in society and politics. Generally speaking, modern developments also offer new opportunities. There are many more opportunities to shape our own course of life to our own view, to maintain contacts with friends and relatives, etc.. In short, the developments are *ambiguous*. In this study we try to justify this ambiguity. This of course does not mean that we could not be critical about modern developments, as if all progress would be good and/or inevitable. On the other hand we should not use the social constellation of the (recent) past, and the human scale it was based on, as today's and tomorrow's criteria (who does so, will only see each development as corruption and decay). Generally speaking this no longer fits modern man. If we want a society based on human scale, then we should consider how modern developments could be decently integrated in our personal life and in our social order.

In its vision of society Christian Democracy has always emphasized the importance the *civil society*. These institutions – e.g. care institutions, trade unions, churches and educational institutions – do not per se exist to keep people in line, or to continuously

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1 | McEwan, Ian, *Saturday*, London 2005, p. 34-35.

'take them by the hand', but to facilitate people to take responsibility for others and for themselves and to give them room to develop into 'good human beings'.

This of course has already presupposed much about what being good as a human being actually means. In Christian Democracy the social order results from the portrayal of mankind. Human beings are *individuals* with their own name, their own talents and their own life stories, which at the same time could not be seen apart from the social and societal context in which they live. If I have to explain who I am, then I can only do so by telling something about the surroundings and relations in which I have grown up and in which I now live. Those relations and coherences however, are not only necessary preconditions for my life as an individual. Many values which determine being a good human being, such as love, friendship, compassion, responsibility and solidarity, can only be achieved in relation with other human beings. Here lies the importance of social coherences and institutions. Later on in this study we will come back to it extensively.

This portrayal of mankind goes back to the Bible and Christian tradition. Biblically speaking, the story of the creation is the central point, in which man is being characterized as image of God (not only king, emperor and pharaoh are the image of God, but every human being – in chapter 4 we will elaborate on it), and e.g. also the way in which the New Testament refers to imitation of Jesus Christ (the act of love for one's fellow-man supersedes the letter of the law; it is not about law-abiding behaviour, but about values such as sincerity, mercy and loyalty - values which cannot be enforced by authority and legislation).

It is our assumption that the decency of our society depends on the question if people can be mobilized, bound and equipped by social institutions. This even introduces a new 'social issue'. We will come to this later on. In the paradoxical development of up- and down-scaling of our social environment those institutions more and more appear to lose meaning and relevance. This very well could indicate that they had been too much tailor-made for yesterday's world. Therefore our question for vital social institutions, that 'breathe along' with de changing spirit of the age, is not a search for the revitalization of the (compartmentalized) yesteryear's civil society, with institutions that were strongly tailored to an industrialized society and meant for the emancipation of groups and individuals; it is the search of how Biblical characteristics of the portrayal of mankind and the guidelines on the basis of which Christian Democracy has interpreted them in its vision of society (freedom and responsibility, fundamental equality, justice and solidarity) nowadays offer critical starting points for the thinking about contemporary vital institutions.[2]

Thus the overall *objective* of this study has been defined: an exploration of the principal characteristics of the Christian Democratic portrayal of mankind with a view to the discussion on the reformation of social institutions. So this study is not about tangible blueprints for a 'revitalized civil society', but about the search for the underlying portrayal of mankind. In this introductory chapter we will further elaborate the issue, so far only been hinted at in a nutshell, further accentuate the objective and indicate the structure of this book.

The underlying issue of this study, the design of social institutions to human scale, is a new 'social issue'

Some refer to that political question for the human scale as '*the social the issue of today*'. Thus a connection is made between our current situation and the second half of the 19th century, the heydays of the Industrial Revolution, when the 'social question' concerned the degrading living conditions of factory workers. In his 1981 encyclical *Rerum novarum* Pope Leo XIII pointed out the enormous injustice of the social relations which had arisen in the rapidly industrialized society of that time. Later that year the anti-revolutionary leader of the Dutch Protestants Abraham Kuyper did the same: in his address to the first Christian Social Congress. While fortunes were piling up with a small number of people, 'the vast majority of proletarians' was almost sentenced to the yoke of bondage: extremely long working days, beastly living – and working conditions and great poverty.[3] Both documents therefore express a 'serious doubt […] about the validity of the social structure in which we live'.

Unlike the other major political movement which originated from the resistance against the social abuse of those days, socialism, Christian Democracy did not choose society as a whole, but the *human individual* as its starting point. Both political movements acknowledged that man is not a separately obtainable individual, but that he has been hallmarked by the social situation in which he lives. Socialism started from the question how, if people are being conditioned by the circumstances, the state could humanize these circumstances by its authority. A sound society will subsequently result in good or at least better human beings. As said before, Christian Democracy started the other way around with the question what the dignity of the individual man consists of and how social institutions and the government (in that order: and it was a deliberate order) could protect and stimulate it.

Human beings are defined and limited by several factors: their physical condition, their talents, their characters, their social circumstances, their relationships, their history. Many of these factors and circumstances cannot be influenced by a human being. Whether your father is a down-to-earth Scotsman or an exuberant Irishman, whether you are blessed with a great intellect or with great athletic abilities, what

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2 | European People Party, *Basic programme*, Adopted by the IXth EPP Congress, Athens, November 1992.

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3 | *Rerum Novarum*, 1891.

colour your hair is – they are all coincidental aspects of life, outside of the influence of man. They are not essential for determining the dignity of the human being. People find their dignity especially in the way they deal with those circumstances and in the extent in which they integrate them in their own lives. After all it is not about the quantity of someone's intellectual powers, whether someone is beautiful or not, whether someone is prosperous or has an average income. What really matters is how people deal with their circumstances. In other words, if they deal with their responsibly. In this respect everybody is equal, ethically speaking.

Responsibly dealing with the circumstances presupposes *the other* who should be dealt with carefully. Man has always been, particularly in his responsibility, a social creature. Moreover, he is a 'social' being. Not because of dire necessity (e.g. because after all we cannot do everything on our own and therefore we need a certain degree of division of labour), but because achieving social values such as justice, solidarity and responsibility are quintessential to our *human-being*.[4] People reach their destiny in community, in the appeal being made to them, in the challenge and invitation to apply their talents socially. Social involvement contributes to a meaningful existence.

In those days the miserable circumstances prevented the 'mass of proletarians' from living a meaningful life, from developing themselves as human beings, in community, responsibility, love, care and spiritual and moral growth. In short, the social relations that arose prevented most people from living the life they were intended to.

The disappearance of small-scale mutual relations of the agricultural society was parried a century ago by the development of a solid civil society of social and ideological institutions. This faith in such a 'civil society' was, from a Christian Democratic point of view, based on the portrayal of mankind which we described in broad outline: one man bearing responsibility for the other one and exactly therein becoming fulfilled and doing justice to him/herself. This is why the testators of the Christian Democracy repudiated centralisation and government interference, as long as people and their relations were still able to take care of - and stand up for each other. Social relations offer people individual-transcending starting points, to bear responsibility and in that way to grow morally, spiritually and emotionally, to grow to maturity and reach their destination. They challenge for moral choices, for an existence that matters. Thus social relations also provide people with a grip on reality. They offer faith in society and in an enduring existence. The institutions of the 'compartmentalized' twentieth century society – school, church, political party, trade union, social life – offered the opportunity to give an interpretation of the social involvement. Ideals for a better society were fed and actually got shape. The social life indeed takes largely place within the boundaries of one's own segment (a

member of Reformed Church felt mainly responsible for the Reformed Church, the Reformed school, the Reformed baker and butcher, etc.), but in the end the perspective still was responsibility for the entire society (if not the whole world). Within the segments people were involved with each other, *for better and for worse*, gained recognition and were called to account for their responsibility.

On many issues the current situation can of course not be compared with the social the issue of yesteryear. Just as with yesteryear's 'social issue' however, today also, in the words of Kuyper, 'all beams and anchors of the social structure' are sliding. Whereas in those days it was about the transition of an agricultural – to capitalistic, urbanized society, it is now about the transition to a 'post-industrial', global 'network society'. '*Disorganisation cultivates demoralisation*', said Kuyper in his days.[5] The hopeless situation of the lumpenproletariat of those days was related, both by Kuyper and by Leo XIII, to the loss of social relations in which people developed themselves. The rapid rise of the industrial, capitalistic society had undermined traditional social structures. Many people no longer lived in the village, but in the slums of the big towns. Employment got a completely different position in people's lives. It is striking that our word 'demoralisation' has a double meaning: the *loss* of *moral meaning* and a *loss* of *hope*.[6] Also now we see how 'disintegration' of trusted social relations result in 'demoralisation' – in this double meaning of the word. Our present day society changes so rapidly that it is important to see to it that people are capable of familiarizing themselves with the new situation, of participating in changes and of finding a good way to live in the changing society. At the moment our personal and also our 'social identity' has already been less defined by self-evident social relations (the neighbourhood, the church or the job-for-life). Participation in the social life has become more dependent on our personal knowledge, qualities and circumstances. It is important that institutions realize this and support people in a contemporary way. It is obvious that yesteryear's 'solution', the old organization of our social-economic and cultural life, no longer fits our flexible, 'globalizing' society.

We experience a 'moral boost' when we feel that we are not totally controlled by others, but that we have a grip on our own life. In social relations that become more impersonal and more abstract this becomes more and more difficult for individual persons. Where to go with your good intentions, how to get into contact with others, where would your involvement be appreciated? Disintegration cultivates demoralisation. *Does 'moralisation' cultivates new 'integration'?* Or do they concur and would a debate on values not be possible without new, contemporarily structured institutions? We think the latter. 'Moralisation' would thus not be an enforced 'unity' of shared standards and values. The morality should be embedded in practices and institutions. Just like over a century ago, social innovation cannot be

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4 | See e.g. Nell-Breuning, Oswald von, *Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit: Grundzüge katholischer Soziallehre*, Vienna [etc.] 1980, pp. 13-40.

5 | Ibid., p. 26.
6 | Sacks, Jonathan, *Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, 2002.

realized without an 'architectonic criticism' on the social shifts, on the renovations of the 'social building' in which we live.[7]

As already said, large social institutions such as social security, health-care, education, tax system, agricultural policy, organisational structure of large enterprises and labour relations often are still based on the old industrially organized society. In the meantime we have already experienced a century of emancipation and increased prosperity which has created a society of largely well educated, confident, independent citizens, who mostly have adequate means to shape their lives according to their own views. 'The reality of the 21st century', according to Herman Wijffels, 'is one of a completed emancipation, which is reflected in an increased level of awareness of the individuality. Above all people let themselves be guided by individual preferences and from that orientation they participate in the group processes. The articulation of that individual preference results in diversity and multiformity of needs. This is at odds with the longing for uniformity by which the classical, industrial model distinguishes itself. This model, in which organizations have been organized '*top-down*' and '*inside-out*', has proved to be of great use in the past, but has now been overtaken by the social reality of today.' In other words, because of their traditional organizational structure – hierarchical and strongly supply-driven – social institutions to an increasing extent lose their function: the equipment of people and offering room to the diversity of human potential, talents and responsibilities. Whereas those institutions once were helpful to communities and after that also to individuals to let them emancipate from a 'substandard' existence, they now seem to slow down both the individuals and society as a whole. Just like in the old days we need to look for new frameworks, for coordinates of a new constitution. For instance no longer pyramidal and hierarchical, but open and egalitarian; not because of peer pressure, but because of a personal awareness and a personal ethical conviction. How, in today's 'globalizing' political and social reality, could the sharing of responsibility between government, citizens and their relations be realized in such a way that justice would be done to care initiatives, to involvement, to the diversity of talents of people, in short, to the human scale?

Accentuating the objective and structure of the study

Concrete institutional answers to that question lie, as stated earlier, beyond the scope of this study. In this study we make *explicit* a number of fundamental ideological and moral ideas which from a Christian Democratic perception offer an insight into humanity. Which vision on the human scale should determine politics? We already stated that the human scale is not fixed for all times. In the times of Leo XIII and Kuyper that standard differed from our present standard. Yesteryear's standard no longer fits us. Also portrayals of mankind are not permanently defined. Such

portrayals never are. It rather is about a combination of quite a number of visions: in the course of time visions silt up and others are swept away. These visions are explicitly being transferred by ideological and religious traditions; often they are embedded in our culture, in our behavioural manners and habits (e.g. Kuyper's ideal of an 'organic society' was strongly influenced by the community ideals of the nineteenth century Romanticism). In this study we want to highlight some of these fundamental ideas, such as human dignity, equality, self-development, justice and compassion. Although these are ideas which are *characteristic* of the Christian Democratic vision on man and society, they are not *exclusively* Christian Democratic or Christian. On the contrary, these are ideas which are propagated widely, often with a casualness which suggests that no further explanation and elaboration is necessary. After all who is *not* in favour of dignity, equality or freedom? It is our intention to start from these general ideas (beginning with 'human dignity'), to problemize its political use and subsequently to 'validate' these ideas from a Christian Democratic, and wider, from the Christian tradition. Above all we will pose the question of the portrayal of mankind: who and what are we, where lie our passion and compassion, our strength and our faults, the sense and the nonsense of our existence? An important foundation for the portrayal of mankind which we will further develop in the course of this study, lies in the so-called 'primordial history' in the book of the Bible Genesis (chapters 1 through 11). Here humankind is created 'in God's own image'. That idea has had a major impact on our thinking of today's man.

On the whole the path we will follow looks like this. In **chapter two** we will discuss the risk of a certain extent of 'immoderateness' in our modern society. This risk is ambiguous. We live in a so-called risk-society, in which uncertainty seems to be the only stable factor, but at the same time it is also a society of chances, in which we are offered chances for development which was not available to previous generations. We will pose the question how ideological values could play a role in not only public life but also in political life. Thus we want to pass over instrumental, procedural politics.

We will start this 're-evaluating' in **chapter 3** with an exploration of the fundamental value of our democratic constitutional state, the '*human dignity of each man*'. We will search for a way passed the rhetoric in which the political discussions on dignity often remains stuck and we will encounter the central issue which determines our modern discussions on dignity. We will typify this as the 'unmakable manipulability of dignity'. Our 'dignity' is, luckily, no longer only determined by our heritage or by our social position in a predefined social and religious order (making it something which mainly belonged to 'dignitaries'). The modern society – the democracy, the welfare state - is based on the fundamental principle of the human dignity of *each* man as a *human being*. However it also seems to be problematic that we ourselves have become our only point of reference for that design of dignity. This becomes especially clear in our thinking of *equality* and *individual freedom*. We will come back to this later, in chapters 5 and 6.

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7 | Kuyper, Abraham, *The Social Question and the Christian Religion*, available in print as A. Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, edited with an introduction by James W. Skillen, 1991.

First we plead, from a historic-cultural perspective, for a renewed interest in the Biblical idea of man as 'God's own image' from Genesis 1. In **chapter** 4 we will start that 're-sourcing' with the classical question from Psalm 8: *'What is man?'* The 'primordial story' in the first chapters of Genesis – which we read as an answer to that question – is the portrayal of mankind as a *narrative*. Man is depicted from his profound relation to God and from his responsibility, his 'cultural mission'. That 'bi-polarity' determines the human dignity, which is a *vulnerable* dignity. It may go horribly wrong, but at the same time the story also pervades the faith that the good in mankind may always be appealed to, irrespective of the circumstances in which he got stuck. Of importance is the thought that the responsibility which characterizes man's dignity is not an appeal to people in general, but an appeal which only obtains shape and content in those concrete situations and relations in which every man lives.

How can that image of human dignity be translated politically? In chapters 5 and 6 we will specifically focus on the ideas which characterize the 'unmakable manipulability of dignity' in our time: equality and justice on the one hand and individual freedom and self-development on the other. **Chapter 5** shows that our idea of 'what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander' has shortcomings. The basis for equality does not primarily lie in the appeal which I as an individual can do to the collective, but especially in the appeal of another to me as an individual. The Biblical *tsedaka* encompasses both *rightfulness* and *compassion*. Everybody is entitled to the elementary possibilities (amongst which also the financial means) to answer to the appeal being made to him/her.

Chapter 6 elaborates on the issue of the freedom of man to develop themselves into authentic persons. The answer is strongly relationally coloured. Still there is absolutely no question of an anti-individualism. There is however some criticism on the concept of freedom and self-development of our culture enclosed. The major objection lies in the fact that our 'real me' is seen as separate from the relations in which we live (they are considered not to be essential for being human). What do you think of *a life that matters*? It is our thesis that 'we need you' is more liberating than 'you may (and should!) be "as you are"'.

In **chapter 7**, finally, we summarize the lines we have drawn and again explicitly highlight the different characteristics of the portrayals of mankind.

2 | **The need for meaningful perspectives**

2. The need for meaningful perspectives

The question for the human scale is a question for our portrayal of mankind. And the question for our portrayal of mankind is a question for the fundamental views and values out of which our vision of mankind has been put together. Thus we stated in the previous chapter. Our liberal Western democracies are often poorly equipped to value such values and views. Questions on our portrayal of mankind are mostly, deliberately or unintentionally, directed to the sidelines of the political arena. Questions that undoubtedly arise, e.g. from integration issues, or regarding the reforming of the welfare state. The political questions concerning e.g. early retirement mostly arise from the conflict between the economical necessity to work longer and the individual's right as an employee to stop working earlier. In that discussion motives such as job satisfaction, compassion or the moral obligation of the individual employee towards society often play a minor role. Not because the liberal democracies are 'soulless', but because they have accepted certain mechanisms in which moral – and ideological arguments in the debate are being marginalized. Politics have become procedural and administrative. Not seldom is the government seen as an organization for mutual benefit. It is no longer self-evidently about realising the common good. After all everybody has his/her own opinion about it. The starting point is an as large as possible free choice, allowing everybody to make their own choices. Politics then safeguards that freedom and defines – legal and financial – boundaries to what we as individual citizens can permit ourselves. Moral – and ideological views such as mercy, respect, modesty, justice and understanding of our own limitations then often remain out of sight.

Of course, politics, also Christian inspired politics, can make no pretension to transform us into happy people or to dry all tears. However, politically speaking 'de-valuation' and 'de-humanization' are a major problem, especially from a Christian Democratic perspective, in which the foundation of the society starts with man's social involvement, as we already saw in chapter 1.

In this chapter we will demonstrate that the above mentioned de-valuation of politics is symptomatic of a dominant way of thinking in our Western culture. We refer to the so-called 'instrumental rationality': what is, in the light of a certain objective, the most economical way to deploy the means which are available to me? Thinking in terms of use and necessity, of control, manipulability and effectiveness, has gradually taken control of all areas of our lives. Also areas where other values should apply. Therefore it seems to become increasingly difficult to deal with moral and meaning - related questions, which anyway keep presenting themselves. Often the traditional answers are being included in absolute opinions on enduring values, to which no concessions may be made. Therefore it is rather difficult to put them into practice and again in their turn they rather result in rigidity and cultural conservatism. We have to look for more 'subtle languages' to include moral and

ideological perspectives in our situation. Also in politics. At that moment of course, the discussion on religion and politics, 'church and state' immediately arises. We will briefly go into it at the end of this chapter.

The loss of self-evident social, moral and religious 'horizons', which traditionally determined the human scale, does not automatically means 'immoderateness'

Have modern societies, somewhere along the way, lost the feeling for the correct human scale? The French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard already compared us to Lemuel Gulliver, the unfortunate explorer from the book by Jonathan Swift: 'Sometimes too big, sometimes too small, but never the right size.'[8]

In the early days that question was much less an issue. Who we were was strongly determined by the social environment we were born in. Many people lived in the small-scaledness of the village life. The standards and values were clear (at least, in retrospect this seems to be the case) and religious belief was present in our lives in a natural manner. Our world was covered by a heavenly cupola (a sacred canopy, as sociologist Peter Berger called it in the sixties[9]). God watched over us and would reward the good and punish the bad.

Those self-evident social, moral and religious 'horizons' have disappeared. Much has been written about the causes. Often the big 'ation-words' such as individualisation, secularisation, technologisation, pluralization and globalisation are pointed out. By that a complex of 'modern' developments is meant, which sometimes already have had their effect for centuries, but indeed have touched on the lives of the majority of us particularly since the sixties. The same time that the compartmentalized society started to crumble.

It is obvious that traditional modes of existence, world views, opinions and moral intuitions have lost their self-evidentness (which does not mean that they have disappeared completely). We should be careful not to imply too soon that in the past, in the good old days, man did live 'to standard'. As a rule modern developments have been accompanied by a nostalgic, romantic longing for yesteryear's neatly arranged world, the world of solidarity, small communities, simplicity and authority. But when all is said and done, who would really want to return to a world of social control and tyrannical institutions, at the expense of 'modern' attainments such as personal freedom, personal development and economical – and technological progress? For many people 'pre-modern' life is and was inferior.

On the other hand at the cradle of the modern world were great ideals such

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8 | Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants,* Paris 1986, *op. cit*. Drenth von Februar, Marjolijn, 'A better life for All!: globalization and human dignity', *Globalisation and human dignity: sources and challenges in catholic social thought*, eds. Marjolijn Drenth von Februar & Wim van de Donk, Budel 2004, pp. 17-71, p. 18.

9 | Berger, Peter L., *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Garden City, 1967.

as equality, freedom, responsibility and solidarity, ideals which definitely did not implicate immoderateness. They presupposed a high-principled moral and an elevated vision on man, for whom high expectations were cherished. After all we now could mould our own life and we were no longer rooted in hierarchical relations or other galling social bonds. We could now assume responsibility for our own destination, live a life with a responsibility to ourselves; 'authentic', honest and true to ourselves.

The developments and attainments of modernity are, in short, ambiguous. They require a valuable embedding: a standardization which meets and fits the original source of attainments. The ideal of progress through economical growth has after all not only led to greater prosperity and thus to for instance better care, but also to world-threatening environmental problems; the ideal of that one humanity to the universal declaration of human rights, but also gradually to tensions between cultures; the ideal of freedom resulted in responsibility and awareness, but sometimes also in noncommittance and indifference; the ideal of self-development of every individual to new forms of solidarity and equality, but not seldom also to hyperindividualism.

The fundamental attitude of modern societies is determined by a way of thinking which is unilaterally focused on effectiveness and control

The loss of self-evident traditional frameworks does not immediately explain the disorientation and lack of human scale. How, for example, could the free space, resulting from the loss of the old self-evident, meaningful entities, sometimes be filled by maximalization of use and lust, as if this were a 'natural' development? Or how could it be that the ideals of freedom, individual autonomy and responsibility sometimes seem to lose the battle against passive consumerism?

Analyses of our culture and spirit of our times do not only attribute this to the loss of self-evident ''normative' 'horizons', but also to a *fundamental attitude* of the Western culture, an 'intrinsic immoderateness' which is typified by catchwords such as growth, progress, manipulability and expansion. Again the comparison with yesteryear's society is easily made. Balance would have been pivotal in it: respecting boundaries and not breaking through them. In principle moderateness definitely was a virtue. Standardization as an implied and more or less self-evident criterion of life has anyhow disappeared.

At this point we should take care not to paint an overly romantic picture of 'pre-modern' cultures, as if man in those days had always and self-evidently been in balance with the things surrounding him. However it seems undeniable that modern societies are being characterized by the dominance of the 'instrumental reason' (an expression by Max Weber). This represents a way of thinking which is unilaterally focused on efficiency and control: what, in the light of a certain objective, is the most efficient way to use the means which are available to me?

The author John M. Coetzee has typified this modern instrumental rationality beautifully by putting himself in the realm of thoughts of the captured anthropoid Sultan, on whom a number of experiments were carried out in the beginning of the 20th century.[10] One day this Sultan finds out that for some reason his food, which used to arrive at regular set times, has stopped coming. With a hungry feeling he watches the man, who used to feed him, now tightening a rope over his cage and hanging a bunch of bananas out of reach. He also drags three wooden crates into the pen. Then he disappears, although Sultan could still smell him.

'Sultan knows: now you should think. That is why those bananas are up there. The bananas should make one think, to exert one's brains to the limit. But what should you think? You think: why is he starving me? You think: what have I done? Why doesn't he love me anymore? You think: why doesn't he want those crates any longer? But none of these are correct thoughts. Even a complex thought – e.g.: what is wrong with him, why does he think it will be easier for me to reach the bananas hanging high up from a wire than picking one up from the floor? – is wrong. The correct thought is: how does one use the crates to reach the bananas?'

The experiments therefore, force Sultan to think in a certain way: how do I use this to achieve that? Other – more complicated and often richer – thoughts are being excluded, because they are not relevant in the light of the target to be reached: the bananas. The following days the experiments become increasingly more complicated.

'You start seeing through the workings of the human mind … As long as Sultan keeps thinking the wrong thoughts he gets no food. This will continue until the pangs of hunger are so intense, so overriding, that he is forced to think the right thoughts, being: how do I reach the bananas? … With each change Sultan is incited to the thinking of less interesting thoughts. From the purity of the speculation (why do human beings behave like this?) he is mercilessly driven to the lower, practical, instrumental reasoning (how do you use this to achieve that?) and so to the acceptation that he himself, before anything else, is an organism with an appetite that needs to be satisfied. While his entire history … poses questions upon him about the justification of the universe and the place of this penal settlement in it, a carefully outlined psychological phased plan drives him away from the ethics and the metaphysics to the humbler regions of the practical reason.'

Although he is not really interested in the problem of the bananas, Sultan is more or less forced to concentrate on it. His questions for justice, suffering, relations,

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10 | Coetzee, John. M., *The lives of animals*, Princeton 2001.

the good life – his questions of sense have been superseded by the 'lower, practical, instrumental reasoning'. This influences the development of his self-image. He starts accepting that before anything else he is an organism with needs that need to be satisfied. However this does not make his deeper questions for the sense of things disappear. They may even emerge stronger than ever before. Because of the one-sidedness of instrumental thinking however, it becomes increasingly difficult to reserve a place for those questions for the sense of things, to link them to the daily activities to which he is forced.

Do we also suffer under the monomaniacal discipline of the banana-man? This may be somewhat too pessimistic and in its turn again one-sided. But that does not imply that it does not contain any warnings. According to a.o. cultural philosopher Charles Taylor, the loss of the reliable 'horizons' of 'giving meaning' has anyhow made way for this type of instrumental thinking.[11] Within yesteryear's religious and moral horizons the things around us were not just things we could freely have at our disposal. The then worldview provided a rudimentary predefined meaning to things and relations within the larger context: their own place within the larger 'circle of life'. Reality was loaded with 'purpose'. As soon as reality started loosing this 'sacral structure, as soon as things were no longer founded in the order of things and/or the will of God, the risk of emptiness became imminent, in the sense that the familiar, intrinsic value of inter-human relations and of social organizations is not seen and we just look upon them with regard to the use they could have for ourselves. The land that belonged to 'nobody' could be claimed by colonists by fencing it and exploiting it for their own profit. Natural materials could endlessly be processed and manipulated by man for private use. Animals are being subjected to an as efficient as possible production of eggs, milk and meat.

Of course, also in the so-called 'pre-modern' societies nature has been exploited. (Although the consequences were less drastic because of less developed techniques).[12] And medieval man did not really have a friendly way of treating his animals. We should not think too schematically. In the course of history actual progress has been made. But each development will always have its drawbacks. The pursuit of for 'control', for example of nature, has undoubtedly led to a higher quality of life and thus to a humanizing of the existence. For instance we no longer spend our entire days fighting the whims of nature and by means of advanced medicines we can fight many disease symptoms and add quality to life, especially with the most vulnerable amongst us. So this is not about cheap criticism of the technological development itself, or for instance of economical regularities, which we cannot avoid taking into consideration, but about the risk that the form of *rationality* which lies behind it, the way of thinking and looking at the world, could take over the control of life. We indeed could more and more look upon the world around us as available and usable material which we could

use as optimally and efficiently as possible for the world that we want to design, make and enjoy ourselves.

This instrumental thinking in terms of control, manipulability of our life and of enjoying it has changed the structures of our society and resulted in very strong mechanisms which push our life in a certain direction. Taylor, and also Max Weber talk about the danger of an 'iron cage' of impersonal mechanisms in which contemporary people are locked up. For instance a manager, even if it is in complete defiance of his own feelings and conscience, is forced to choose a certain maximalization strategy which may be harmful to for instance the environment or the labour relations. A chicken farmer, against the love for his animals, is forced to animal-unfriendly production in order to keep his head above water. The teacher is forced, by all kinds of super-imposed end-terms and competences, to a certain 'efficiency' which make it hard for him/her to actually shape his/her love for the profession and his/her pedagogical competence.

There definitely is a certain attraction to this ideal of manipulability and control fed by the instrumental thinking. The technological control of our life has, as stated earlier, absolutely resulted in a higher quality of life. We have pointed out the medical possibilities. And economical progress has given us the space to shape our life more to our own view. *The problem however, is the fact that the manipulability still remains a limited manipulability.* More progress demands more control, a more complex society in its turn is asking for a still more complex control. Satisfaction of van concrete needs again results in new needs. The pursuit of a fully controllable reality, of full manipulability of happiness, is in principle unlimited. To put it differently: immoderateness may be on the lurk. An immoderateness which goes against the happiness which people ultimately look for. This phenomenon is quite rightly brought under the attention by economists such as Lans Bovenberg, psychologists such as Viktor Frankl (see chapter 6) and social-philosophers such as Charles Taylor. It could be compared to the joke about two men walking alongside the railway track, heading for the point where the two rails intersect. That point is ever shifting further. Until one of them looks over his shoulder and wonders if they have not already passed that point.

The emphasis on use and efficiency results in a unilateral annexation of our creativity and responsibility and our ability to be involved and to cooperate.

The strive for more manipulability and control of our life and society has brought a lot of good. Vulnerabilities have been replaced, suffering has been driven back, some risks have been banished, loss of loved-ones has been prevented. We also observed that such control also brings along risks. The risk of overconfidence, of immoderateness and in particular the risk that human life is being swallowed up by work, by

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11 | Taylor, Charles, *The ethics of authenticity*, Cambridge, Mass 1991, pp. 4-8.
12 | See e.g. Krech, Shepard, *The ecological Indian: Myth and history*, New York etc. 1999.

instrumental acting, by functional rationality. Pressure is put on time for mutual attention, for deepening of relations. Questions regarding the giving of meaning still appeal to the margin of the existence, but only emerge when a crack appears in our self-evident existence. Inevitably we are still confronted with our finiteness, with setbacks, with sickness and death, with the uncontrollability of life, with powerlessness to 'shape' our relations. At that point we are confronted with questions that do not really ask for a 'solution', but for sense, interpretation, acknowledgement and acceptance. An attitude to life which banishes the uncertain, the vulnerable and the uncontrollable, strives for control of life, avoids what is not controllable and results in man shutting themselves off from experiences which are 'meaningful': experiences of intimacy, emotion, solidarity, loyalty. Do people really need a fully manipulable and controllable life, or ultimately a life which is meaningful – a meaningfulness which could not be planned in advance?

The gap, between on the one hand the social structures which push our individual lives more and more in the direction of controllability and purposiveness and on the other hand our deeper existential questions for meaningfulness, seems to have become wider and wider the last couple of years. The American sociologist Richard Sennett aptly shows this with the help of the lives of a father and a son, Enrico and Rico. [13] Enrico is a typical example of the emancipation in a part of the American working-class. During the first decennia after World War II he has torn himself from the desolation of the working-class neighbourhoods by scrubbing lavatory bowls for years and living a thrifty life. The rewards for his hard work lie in the future: a house of his own and a study for his children. His life, wrote Sennett, became meaningful as a *linear story* in which his experiences got a place and in which he himself could grow both materialistically and psychologically. His self-respect he derived from being the author of this. With this story he was the clear moral example for his children. He personified the ideals which he held before his children: work hard, self-discipline, commitment to his family, loyal to his employer, patience and perseverance.

Enrico's story is typically 'modern'. He does not, unlike his ancestors, adjust himself to the predefined circumstances, but he explicitly controls his own life. His long-term perspective was a better life for himself, but especially for his children. His work ethic was based on self-discipline and on the value of – and faith in - the 'postponed reward'. Not all needs needed immediate satisfaction. This ethic ran parallel with institutions that were stable enough and that, in their way, knew how to guarantee that postponed reward. For instance, his job-for-life was secured and protected by the labour union. In that way in the life of Enrico the modern instrumental thinking with its purposiveness and controllability were *interwoven* with the *meaning-giving* values such as loyalty, commitment, respect, authenticity and freedom.

How different today it is with his son Rico. Where Enrico started his working life

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13 | Sennett, Richard, *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*, New York [etc.] 1998, pp. 16, 26v.

in a time of growing economies, strong labour unions and guarantees of the welfare state – in other words with a relative stability – Rico now lives in a world in which 'No long term!' has become the slogan: short-term policy, contract labour, 'episodic' work. His working life is characterized by short-term interests, 'de-bureaucratization', risks, mergers and reorganisations. During the daytime he acts in a world which encourages him to keep moving, being dynamic and above all not to commit himself. At night he has to teach his children values such as faith and commitment. For them these remain completely abstract values, Rico fears , because they do not see them being practised in the everyday life of their parents and because they don't follow on the supra-individual institutions. The attitude required during the daytime at the flexible place - flexibility, teamwork, open discussions – appears to result in tension within a family situation. There, other enduring values are being asked for: faith (which needs time to grow), loyalty, unconditional commitment, authority. Rico finds it hard to find his way in this. He must fall back on values which have been strongly individually determined: stamina in changing situations, perseverance, the ability to face instability and still to structure life. They are important values, but the institutional embedding is lacking which is experienced as a deficiency. It also appears that here lies one of the major challenges for the next decennia: how can we shape a rapidly changing economy and a very dynamic labour market in such a way that institutions (and organizations) offer people starting points for stability, for their own way of living, for personal growth and ultimately for meaningfulness?

Rico's story shows how difficult it is nowadays to incorporate meaningful values into one's life, at least in the social life (and both Enrico and Rico show that the way in which you are able to design your life socially has a strong impact on the personal life). This is a typically American story, but considering the social-economic developments globally certainly it is also applicable to our situation: certainly for a growing group of younger employees who no longer have the guarantee of a job-for-life; for people who postpone the forming of a family because job guarantees disappear and because the stability of a family no longer directly matches the flexible life one enjoys and sometimes consumes during one's study and nights out (the playtime of the course of life, according to Peter Cuyvers[14]).

The growing international economic competition demands technological innovation, in order to enable types of services and political – and governmental measures which facilitate economic development. All these processes have become knowledge-intensive. Therefore they require continuously higher investment in research and development and an increasingly higher level of education of profession-

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14 | Research Institute for the CDA, *Moderns Life Course Support Systems. Christian-democratic perspectives on changes in life course and their consequences for demography, labour markets and generational relations*, The Hague, 2002. For that matter here it is also stipulated that this so-called 'playtime' has the 'fury and intensity of the past and present schoolyard'.

als. Flexible networks arise and innovation-oriented corporate cultures. This developments makes an increasingly larger appeal to the creative ability of more and more employees, to their self-steering, their immunity to stress and willingness to adapt.

Ideals such as social responsibility, self-respect and participation (to use a number of central ideas from the Christian Democratic vision on humanity, work and society) could taste defeat in this process. Especially if excessive return on capital and unlimited maximalization of the share holders value will be predominant. The emphasis on maximalization of production capacity and efficiency will then lead to an overly one-sided incorporation of abilities to be committed, to cooperate and to connect – such a development will then obstruct the personal development of people and the social responsibility.

There is, however, also another side. An employee such as Rico will also have plenty of scope to develop himself. He is challenged to put all his talents in his work, his loyalty and his personal initiative. But an open-end is inevitable: how much control will he have of his course of life? 'Responsibility' was the crucial word in father Enrico's dictionary: 'Take responsibility for yourself!'. And exactly this responsibility put Rico in a difficult situation He feels responsible for developments on which he has no control: for the fact that he has been fired (although as a result from merger processes), for his family having had to move so often (although this being inherent to the flexible society, in particular for his social class). It is no self-reproach, but a longing to be responsible for his life. As soon as a human being has to admit that his life has become a plaything for supra-individual processes of which he has no control – and his own contribution is limited to adapting flexibly – he in fact admits that he does not matter.[15] A human being wants to matter and more or less to control his own destination. This requires institutions with which one may connect. Institutions which equip in order to obtain the ability to provide continuity to one's own life story.

We should look for 'more subtle languages' which could connect the ideological perspectives of meaningfulness with our social and economical reality

As soon as, both in personal and in professional life, manipulability, efficiency, control and practical solution of problems are the central point, then the danger lurks that deeper existential and moral questions and potentials for meaningfulness are being shut off or transformed into technologically solvable problems. Thus inter-human relations may become more business-like and harder. Moral virtues for instance change into ethic codes which prescribe us what to do and our sense of responsibility and our compassion for the people around us are being trapped in legislation – the more that has been recorded, the sooner somebody could sue another. If people want to come to an authentic life and to social involvement, then this control

perspective – and, for that matter, to a certain extent and in some areas absolutely necessary – should at least be complemented with views from ideological and religious traditions and their moral and existential visions on humanity. But how?

Let us just go back to Rico. Sennett finds that Rico is getting trapped between the dynamic attitude demanded by his work and a numbing vision on the good life in which endurable values are central. Rico clings to a cultural conservatism, according to Sennett above all an idealized idea of a community in which endurable values play a role. Rico's dislike of 'social parasites' such as tramps and those entitled to benefits, his hammering away on *law and order*, the belief in draconic standards for common behaviour, the dislike of all sorts of liberal visions which mirrored the relations on the work floor, all that is no more than a last will for the coherences he is missing. On the one hand he is perfectly adapted to the demands of the flexible society; on the other hand he cherishes rather absolute views of endurable values, to which no concessions may be made and because of that they are relatively difficult to practice. He looks for self-confirmation through timeless values which should tell him who he is, for always, permanently and essentially.

What people such as Rico would need, according to Sennett, to live a distinctive, responsible life, is a 'story' which lifts him up above the tension between on the one hand the feeling of being a plaything of the circumstances and on the other hand the desire to stick to static values and relations. Enrico's story, as we already saw, was linear and cumulative. Such a story seems to have become useless in a world of short-term flexibility. People such as Rico experience a disruption which undermines the possibilities to shape responsibility in uninterrupted coherent stories. Humanly speaking this may also be a little bit too much to ask. After all people's stories are always interrupted. However, in case where this happened because of major historical events (e.g. World War II in Enrico's case) and personal dramas, insecurity has now been interwoven in the everyday practices of the economical system. How do you shape endurable values in a 'risk society' in which flexibility, uncertainty and instability have become standard?

This asks for new connections between on the one hand traditional, metaphysical and religious visions of mankind and the world in which for instance values such as mercy, love and justice are central and on the other hand the rationalistic modern world with its emphasis on individual autonomy, the democratic freedoms and the instrumental reason. In the words of Charles Taylor, we should look for 'more subtle languages' to make these perspectives of meaningfulness discussible.[16]

We can also go one step further, which brings us back again to the leitmotiv of this study: the question for the human scale of our social institutions. The social-economical developments which go along with the globalization process are irreversible and only correctable to a limited extent. Someone like Rico seems to be perfectly

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15 | Sennett, Richard, *The corrosion of character: The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*, New York [etc.] 1998.

16 | Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*, Cambridge, Mass. 1989, pp. 391-493; Taylor, Charles, *The ethics of authenticity*, Cambridge, MA [etc.] 1991, pp. 81vv.

adapted to it, but still does not succeed in integrating his life in an all embracing story and thus giving it continuity. For such a story not only a more subtle language would be needed, but also and particularly '*more subtle institutions*' in which those stories take shape. And subtle means: not static but dynamic; not over-regulated, but open for concrete situations; not operating according to a set of precisely defined codes, but with personal responsibility and respect for the individual; not controlled by mistrust, but by trust – with openness for the 'soft' sides of the existence.

Also politically speaking the renewed 'ima(n)gination' is of importance; a politic which remains stuck in an oration of rationality, technology, control and individualism is not suitable to see into today's problems, let alone solve them

Thus the issue we described here gets a political dimension. Since the end of the ideological seventies, in which 'imagination ruled' – especially the ima(n)gination – we have gradually become accustomed pushing ideological visions of humanity behind the scenes. After a while they did not really seem to matter anymore; superfluous attributes on the political stage. We seemed to have found each other in the silent conviction that with a little bit of civilization and decency we could settle things. At least, as long as people were given the chance to develop into civilized and decent people by education, work and a guaranteed level of social services. Visions of life could thus become a private matter, not unimportant for us as individuals, but for the public and politics in particular not essential and even undesirable. In those playfields a limited set of basic rules seemed to suffice: the constitution, a number of fundamental (freedom-) rights and above all a set of procedural rules to arrive at a good and democratic decision making.

Gradually politics became in particular a matter of questions about income segmentation. The government should create the conditions for freedom and these are chiefly material conditions: therefore segmentation questions dominate. Ideological controversies between left and right more and more faded and at the most reverberated in debates on a more or less equal division of prosperity, on the level of public services, etcetera. Debates were increasingly limited to the question how we managed the cash flows. Moral questions, let alone questions of meaningfulness, often remained out of scope. At least in their more explicit meaning. Implicitly they did of course play their part. Although in debates on healthcare it was hardly anymore about the role that the medical company played in our perception of the 'good life', but even in the political debate on which medical interventions should be refundable and how the financial burden of the healthcare could be divided best. Human portrayals of course still played along in the background (e.g. what do you mean by the autonomy of the patient? By self-determination? By freedom of choice? By 'viability'? By 'dignified' living or dying?). No matter what, all that remains is soon a rather technocratic way of doing politics. Society will then be seen as a corporation; what we need is good public management. What cannot be captured in law or legislation does not belong in politics ('after all the government is no moralist'). This pragmatism approached political problems – ranging from healthcare to swine fever – particularly in an economical-technocratic manner.

Politics that remain too much stuck in the instrumental way of thinking, in an exposition of rationality, technology, control and individualism, are unable to see through today's problems, let alone to solve them. As we already stated: politics is not an institution for delivering meaningfulness. No more than politics could be reduced to power or emotion, could political issues simply be reduced to purely ideological questions, to meaningfulness, to questions for the sense and non-sense of our existence, to the why, the where from and the whereto. Problems such as air pollution, the quality of secondary education and the bulging out prisons could be traced back to facts, for instance the emission of dangerous substances by traffic, the struggle of many educational institutions to recruit teachers and the increase of criminal behaviour. However, irrespective of how 'hard' these facts may be, they will always be evaluated. Why do we see the decrease of the quality of air as a problem? Is it because we, due to European regulations, are not allowed to build new roads in certain areas, which is disadvantageous for our economy? Because their are large health risks involved? Because it threatens the future of our children? Because nature suffers from it? And what causes do we indicate for the issues related to the prison system? Just the shortage of prison cells? Or on the contrary just the social-economic disadvantages of certain groups in society, which could cause criminal behaviour? Or more likely cultural backlogs? Or just a lack of standards and values in a spoilt society, in which everything should be immediately available and everybody thinks he/she could participate in 'everything'? In short, in our interpretation of the facts images of man and world are interwoven.

This of course also applies to the solutions that we seek. After all there are big consequences for your choices of policy, whether you see man as a disabled person who, under more human circumstances will bring out the good in him/her, as a calculating citizen who will always have the tendency to cash in on every collective service or as a person who primarily bears the responsibility to turn around the circumstances – however miserable. Or should we approach man as an individual that, with the right amount of freedom, equality and fraternity will come to full self-development, or just as a community person who can only come 'to himself' if traditional relations of life would be reanimated?

Images of man and world affect the signalling and evaluation of problems and the direction in which we look for solutions. Exactly the fact that the evaluation of facts and the vision on possible solutions are connected with an ideological horizon, makes the political discussion awkward. The fact that portrayals of mankind play a role in the discussion on abortion seems evident. But how many facts and how many evaluations are hidden in a difference of opinion on the problems in the housing market? And of which portrayal of mankind are people more positive or more negative of the competitiveness of Europe?

A constitutional fetishism that only wants to anchor our democratic constitutional state with 'neutral' ground rules undermines the vitality of that constitutional state

Therefore, the vision on man is important for the political vision of the organization of society. This is nothing new nor something typically ideological. Visions of man always play a role in politics. Also with politicians who advocate the opposite and claim 'neutrality'. This thesis goes one step further than just stating that it is *inevitable* that portrayals of mankind play a role. It also asks, positively, also for a reconsideration of meaningfulness in ideological traditions. With this plea for meaningful values in politics we open the door for ideological and religious portrayals of mankind.

In this way we thus place ourselves right in the midst of the debate on religion and politics, on the 'separation of church and state'. This could rapidly result in a debate of caricatures and misunderstandings. Although we would want to avoid as many as possible offshoots of that discussion, we cannot completely avoid the central issue.

Democracy demands a certain separation between private opinion and politics. To no extent all 'personal is political', especially not directly. Based on ideological grounds I could be strongly opposed to adultery without immediately demanding a law against it – and by that the legal persecution of any 'adulterer'. There is a difference between personal philosophy of life and political ideology, as well as between political conviction and theory of state. Such difference could even be ideologically founded. This is the case with Christian Democracy. Especially since moral and religion should come from within, if they are to be sincere, it is wrong to give the state a say in this. This is a basic value of our constitutional state. Who wants to give people the responsibility to help building society with their talents, will have to let them free in their vision of life.

Democracy demands continuous reconsideration of the central values that it represents. Democracy is no formal, empty principle. Those values – respect, freedom, equality, dignity, etcetera – result from and are present in several ideological traditions. The democratic tradition as we know it draws from several of these traditions (in particular Jewish, Christian and Humanistic and gradually also Islamic).

From one certain tradition, i.e. liberalism, there is a strong claim in the current debate on democracy and on the constitutional rights it represents.[17] That claim is a claim of neutrality. One's own moral claims are presented in relation to the rational autonomy of the individual and the absolute universal goodness of the liberal democracy as neutral en universal. 'Religion' is primarily considered as a social-cultural phenomenon. Religion may support the universal moral and the universal (freedom) rights but essentially she has nothing to do with the democratic legal order (it sooner forms a threat to it).

So people try to guarantee the democratic principles by stating that they are neutral, rational and universal and thus in a way self-evident. Actually this is wrong. However many good reasons there may be to declare democracy and human rights universal, historically speaking they are, as said earlier, the Western product of the bourgeois society and of Jewish, Christian and Humanistic traditions. Radical and irreversible pluralization puts pressure on this democratic legal order. Just why are we in liberal democracies against polygamy? Because it limits the freedom of the individual woman? Because it is against her right of self-determination? But what if it is the self-conscious decisions of all parties involved, if they consider polygamy as the way to self-development? Or if they do not attach any real importance to that self-development?

The democratic foundations and rights require a personal involvement of citizens. It appears that people do not feel connected to formal and strictly rational principles. Democratic freedoms and rights need a certain 'emotional connotation'. A living democracy becomes dynamic by personal motivation. Law and legislation alone are not enough (we will emphasize that again in the next chapter). Continuous moral and ideological reflection is necessary. What has happened to Socrates and Jesus of Nazareth, testators of the lasting moral reflection on laws and regulation in European history? Both have been legally murdered. Ethics are founded in doubting the codes and rules – the 're-sourcing', adjusting and assessment of ideals that transcend every-day's life, in visions of the humane world, in images of the good life, in promises of the kingdom of God with peace and justice, in 'what no eye has seen and has not occurred in any human heart'. Of course religious tendencies may be observed that undermine democracy. We definitely do not want to trivialize those tendencies here. At the same time however, we cannot do without re-sourcing in those ideological and religious traditions from which the core values of our democratic legal order emanate. It is a form of cultural self-mutilation if a constitutional state falls back on one single cultural source and declares it universal, in spite of the fact that it is historically and systematically evident that the right of freedom has both Jewish, Christian and Humanitarian roots. We will come back to this in the next chapter.

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17 | Thomas, Scott M., *The global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international relations: The struggle for the soul of the twenty-first century*, New York [etc.] 2005, pp. 21v.

3 | **Human Dignity**

3. Human Dignity

Politics based on the human scale are 'valuable' politics. This is what we stated in the previous chapter. The question now is, which values do we enunciate and more in particular how. In this chapter we will concentrate on the 'human dignity', probably the mother of all values. To be perfectly clear, we then mean the dignity of *every* man and of every man *as a human being*. It is on this fundamental starting point that our democratic constitutional state and our social system are based. Other core values such as, 'justice', 'equality', 'mercy' or 'freedom', will be dealt with more explicitly in the next chapters.

We must go beyond the rhetorical use of the expression 'human dignity' and ask for the interpretation and foundation of it

On many of the most basic values we will easily agree. Even more than ever, as studies point out. This applies in particular to 'human dignity'. The expression itself already has a strong appeal. We unite in our objections against 'inhuman' situations. For instance slavery at cocoa plantations or poverty.

But then what? The question for human dignity only becomes really politically exciting when solutions need to be found to solve inhuman conditions. In other words, when concrete choices of policy are being asked for and when many, often conflicting interests count. What consequences should our dislike of the inhuman conditions in the chocolate producing industry have in relation to our international trading relations? Is 'the human dignity' – and the catalogue of human rights which derive from it – more than an obligatory topic of discussion during trade missions? What do we call poverty? When for instance does a certain subsistence level become 'inhuman'? The concrete interpretation of 'human dignity' definitely leads to several choices of policy.

Here we pay for our rather vague everyday use of the expression 'human dignity'. It is often taken for granted with no need for further explanation. Something obvious. If we object against silent poverty then, in the end, a reference to 'the human dignity' seems to be sufficient. After all people should be treated as 'human beings'? But why? Because they are 'human'? In itself this of course is not an answer: 'We should treat *x* as an *x* because it is an *x*.' The argument 'you should treat your clock as a clock because it is a clock' does not stop me from using my clock as a paperweight. Although used improperly, it serves rather well for this purpose.[18] Apparently we perceive this differently for human beings. Does not every human being have an *intrinsic* dignity? Is not every human being a 'purpose-on–his-own' that therefore never should be used as a means?

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18 | The example came from Hill, Thomas E., 'Die Würde der Person. Kant, Probleme und ein Vorschlag', *Menschenwürde: Annäherung an einen Begriff*, ed. Ralf Stoecker, Vienna 2003, 153-173, p. 154.

Because of that presupposed self-evidentness of what we mean by 'human dignity', the political discussion on it could be left in a phase of rhetoric. After all further explanation and argumentation seems unnecessary. Just as we do not expect an answer to a 'rhetorical question', also an appeal to the human dignity does not need for explanation. Although the confusion does remain… Without any hesitation both those in favour of – and those against the current legislation on euthanasia appeal to the human dignity'. Thus a general appeal to the human dignity soon becomes a political bromide that should underline one's own right.

It thus seems that the core value 'human dignity', which we consider to be self-evident and which as a common foundation should par excellence enable communication, rather becomes a '*conversation stopper*'. If we want to go beyond this, then we should think about the *interpretation* and *foundation* of human dignity. How broad or narrow is human dignity? To what values does it cohere? Why, for instance, should politics, in the name of human dignity, be focused on treating all people equally and in fundamental aspects solidarily.

The political the issue of dignity is no *Prinzipienreiterei*; the (political) reality is too stubborn for it

The search for interpretation and foundation of 'human dignity', especially from a political perspective, cannot take place in a vacuum. We have to do with a stubborn reality, in which for instance, there is a shortage of goods. In the end we will always face our financial boundaries and the environment can only be stretched to a certain extent.

The shaping of human dignity always takes place within a context in which ideal and reality do not necessarily go together. Choices have to be made, and irrevocably factors will play a role that, considered from our ideals and our image of mankind, we would much rather have left out. For instance one's physical condition, talents or economic use. Paradoxically speaking the increased prosperity and the revolutionary development of technology and science offer a human existence to a larger group of people than ever before, while at the same time they raise new questions regarding man's dignity. They also demand choices that, humanly speaking, are unbearable. For instance this becomes very clear in health-care. One may argue about the question if, per definition, disease is a corruption of the human dignity. From certain perceptions of individual autonomy and self-determination one is not far away from a functional handling of one's own body in which this seems the case: everything should always work, in order to experience pleasure at my command and to deliver all achievements which I think necessary. But what does this say about humanity and dignity of the weak, of the physically deteriorating human being, of the severely disabled human being? And more of our everyday life: if everybody is entitled to every treatment that is medically possible, how about the affordability? From a financial point of view it appears impossible to perform certain complicated

and expensive operations on each patient concerned. If only for budget reasons a line should be drawn. Do we set aside this dilemma and does it become a matter of 'first come, first served'? or should and must age-limits play a role? Has a 73-year-old less 'right' to such an operation than a 37-year-old?. If this should not be unfair, then where should we draw the line? At 70? At 60? Or should other distinctions play a role? Healthy and less healthy? Rich and poor? Well-insured less well insured? Smoker and non-smoker (for instance in case of in vitro fertilization treatments)? In poorer parts of the world this discussion has been held for a long time; we too will be confronted with it an increasingly more probing way.

Of course these types of question could not be answered just like that. Especially important is making clear that the political reflection on human dignity does not happen in an ideal, perfect world. New dilemmas mean new moments of choice that continuously demand renewed ideological reflection. We need a broader social and political discussion on moral and ideological visions of a human society.

The search for a strictly rational legal foundation of human dignity will get stuck in a vicious circle

Therefore the shaping of dignity is not only a matter of ideals and principles. At the same time these can also not be missed. However, as we have stated earlier, in our times their handling and deployment are problematic. We live in a society (and in a world) that has become radically and irreversibly *plural*. There is no universal moral framework anymore in which it is clear what is good and what is evil and what is human (if such a framework has existed at all). We have no common point of reference anymore by which we quite obviously can measure human dignity (for instance a God whom we all acknowledge). Our moral situation has become 'ethics after Babel'.[19] There are many 'moral languages' and often there is the proverbial tower of Babel. For instance picture the different opinions on the 'dignity' of women.

A road we cut off here is the (liberal) appeal to the assumed neutrality and general validity of a number of basic freedoms and rights (the freedom of speech, for instance, or the right to housing). Of course it is not these rights and freedoms themselves that we ignore. We are however, critical about the suggestion that these are generally valid principles, which derive their universality from the fact that they are 'reasonable' and therefore for every right-minded human being, independent of the cultural context, understandable and acceptable. In short the suggestion is the following: place a random group of people from all over the world at a table, ask them to let go of all cultural en religious prejudice and during the discussion, helped by their common sense, they will arrive at principles such as freedom of speech and the equality of all human beings.[20] However, the mere thought of people completely set-

ting aside their cultural and religious orientation, already is an illusion, let alone the idea that all these stripped off human beings, if they would really use their common sense, would embrace the modern rights and freedoms which are being defended in a liberal constitutional state. It becomes even more complicated if we ask the question if people subsequently would actually use the principles they 'rationally' accept (the equality of man and their equality for the law etc.) as their guideline for their actual behaviour. Why should somebody, who in the abstract comes to the conclusion that honesty is the best policy, not treat somebody else dishonestly in his daily life if this serves him well and there is no risk of discovery? Purely rational debates do not say much about people's motives and their actual willingness to comply with moral principles (to be perfectly clear, of course we do not deny the importance of reasonableness and describing and substantiating moral principles and attitudes to life).

The rationalism we here refer to appeals to certain Enlightenment traditions. According to these traditions the dignity of man lies in the fact that man is a reasonable being that can and should learn again to think on his own (and not have the law dictated to him/her by either the nobility or the clergy). As an *autonomous* and *free individual* he may in all fairness decide what is best for him and to come to agreements on it with other free, autonomous, reasonable human beings, with whom he has agreed on a fictitious 'social contract'.[21] The basic rules of such a social contract have been legally embedded in the constitution and in the declarations on the human rights. The most fundamental one is the human dignity. This should no longer concur with or be derived from someone's social position, colour of the skin, disposition or intellectual faculties. The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* mentions the 'inherent dignity' and thus 'the equal and inalienable rights' of all members of the human family'. The German constitution calls the 'Würde des Menschen' 'unantastbar' (art.1) and derives from it a 'right to live' and a right to 'die freie Entfaltung seiner Persönlichkeit' (art.2). Based on this inherent dignity man – which is every man – is entitled to certain rights (of freedom). Even dictators, accused of crimes against humanity, who will be brought to justice before the international tribunals.

Again, it may be clear that we do not want to devaluate these actual rights and freedoms, on the contrary. We should be thankful that these values have been formulated and that they appeal to individuals, cultures and people in a convincing way (we will come back to this later). What we are talking about is the assumption that reasonability is an exclusive source of humanity, of human rights and the claim of universality. We would love to see that democracy and human rights in particular, would indeed be accepted universally. If they would be dependent on a certain culture and context, then the global culture would after all lose its normative character.

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19 | Stout, Jeffrey, *Ethics after Babel. The languages of morals and their discontents*, Princeton etc. 2001
20 | Rawls, John, *A theory of justice*, Cambridge Mass 2005.

21 | With the expression 'social contract' we refer to a.o Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) and, later in time, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social* (1762).

But phrasing alone is never enough. For a 'rational' definition of human dignity in a pluralistic society to be *truly* generally applicable, could only succeed as long as it remains very formal and procedural. Exactly this has always been the flaw in John Rawls' theory of justice. By starting from a 'veil of ignorance' motives have been narrowed to the self-interest of individuals. Cultural sources and motives disappear from sight, whereas these par excellence incite people to choices, to acting.

Without intrinsic interpretation the formal phrasing will thus remain completely without power of expression. Also unilateral attention for human rights as *rights* – and not as moral opinions – is connected with this.[22] However, if we continue to further interpret the general phrasings, each in our own way, then the universality of rights all at once seems to be much less controversial. For instance a discussion arises on the question what the acknowledgement of everyone's inherent dignity means and to what behaviour it compels us and what political policy it demands. What for instance is freedom of speech? Or freedom of religion? Or more topical: where are the limits? Could we allow certain limitations of the freedom of speech in the name of freedom of religion? And the other way around, could we in the name of freedom of speech say anything about religions and their followers? And who is going to prescribes this? Could you force someone in the name of 'freedom' to propagate certain freedoms which that person does not consider to be freedoms at all (for instance unveiled sexual freedom)? And what is 'equality'? Does it suffice to be just equal before the law? Is equality the starting point or also an objective? By education? By levelling capital? In chapters 5 and 6 we will come to this type of questions. It is clear: the more precise and concrete we become, the more confronted we will be by antinomies between the values which we 'derive' from the core value, human dignity, – and the more the related (political) differences of opinion are being revealed.

A well known and striking example which demonstrates the impossibility of a strictly rational legal approach, is the so-called 'midget-throwing' at fun fairs, which was forbidden by two French mayors in the summer 1995. They found it in violation of the 'respect for the human being' to use an individual as a living projectile. The person involved however, demanded annulment of those decisions. His argumentation: the attraction that was considered to be a violation of his dignity, had, on the contrary, given him back his dignity by rewarding him with the status of an artist and a matching salary. The French Council of State then decided that the local authority could indeed forbid 'an attraction that could affect the dignity of a human being'.

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22 | The Muslim lawyer Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im demands an Islamic (re)formulation of codes of human rights, the political-economist Bas de Gaay Fortman points out the absolute necessity of inculturation and therefore the foundations of the human rights from the perspective of different cultures (African, Confucian, Islamic, Eastern-Orthodox, Latino-native, etc.) and the professor of international law P.J.I.M. de Waart fully emphasizes the necessity of univocal phrasing for the international courts to pass law. Different foundations – from different cultures – will lead to different priorities.

An unclear ruling which brought the issue back to the mayors involved. On what grounds could the verdict 'affecting the human dignity' after all be based? Could a general judgement decide what the individual involved should consider as his 'dignity'? The objective equality and the subjective choice of the person in question (of all people the person most directly involved) thus come into conflict with each other. This while the general idea of human dignity is the starting point for both parties.

For the time being we may at least conclude that in our search for a rational, legal foundation of human dignity we get *stuck in a vicious circle*. We find the different freedoms and attainments that we defend inalienable because they are part of the human dignity. However, that dignity, as soon as we derive it from the law, cannot be formulated differently from the sum of the same freedoms and attainments. As soon as the identification goes deeper than a formal argument, a personal strongly culturally defined interpretation of humanity comes into sight. Without an intrinsic interpretation human dignity remains an axiom without any idealistic, really binding, concrete power of expression.

The starting point of the dignity of every human being is a standard which we acknowledge and at the same time an ideal which we, in the course of history, gradually give meaning to – *for better and for worse*.

But what next? There is no predefined moral tradition anymore which is self-evidently accepted by everyone. If this self-evidence has ever existed; within ideologies there usually are different (sets of) moral systems and not seldom there is internal criticism of those systems, as already became clear from the example of Socrates and Jesus in the previous chapter.

And all that is left are some clashing cultural views? Will the dominant culture then be the result of clashing spiritual movements and will that dominance then merely be a matter of arbitrariness? If we ourselves are the only foundation on which a public moral, and thus a widely shared vision of human dignity, may be constructed, then who are those 'we' and who has the right to speak in 'our' names? We will not come to an answer as long as we ourselves are the only point of reference for our way of thinking of our dignity. Just like the Baron Münchhausen we cannot pull ourselves out of the swamp by our own hair. At the same time we also cannot fall back on a self-evident point of reference outside ourselves. Dignity has inevitably become a 'design'.

Does this mean a relativism and subjectivism, in which each opinion always and everywhere has the same value and in which we time and again need to discuss everything (for instance on the equality of men and women, or the acceptance of homosexuality)? We defend the opinion that a democratic constitutional state must focus on certain core elements as attainments that may not be tampered with. For instance the dignity of each man as a human being, the incompatibility of coercion and faith and ideology, the equality of man for the law, irrespective of gender, sexual

disposition, religion, etcetera.[23] With this we acknowledge a certain *predefinition* of moral, to which our democratic constitutional state is tied. However, in the light of our previous observations, this is not the end to the matter. This predefined dignity, this pre-positive source of right continuously demands reflection and re-interpretation of the sources from which those attainments have originated. If only because of the fact that that dignity continuously needs to be realized by human action. *The starting point of the dignity of every man is a standard which we acknowledge and at the same time an ideal which we, in the course of history, gradually give meaning to – for better and for worse.* But what if people do not acknowledge the predefined dignity? The conclusion must be that insight in that dignity cannot be enforced or sensibly deducted from reality. It is a given fact which imposes itself, but indeed may be denied by individuals and cultures.

Two additional remarks should be made. Remarks on which we will elaborate on later on. Firstly, the Western culture, like other cultures, is not a homogeneous entity, as advocates of the Western culture as a *Leitkultur* have the tendency to suggest. Cultures are moving continuously and are characterized by fault lines and contradictions, by central, coherent ideas and centrifugal forces. They are not rounded totals, but results of interwoven – and sometimes clashing – values, views, habits and traditions, in short a varying 'repertoire' of ways of living and living together. If we define certain attainments of the Western culture as 'core values' normatively – above we presented some of these core values – then this can only be done if we are aware of its *progressing* historical development and of the ambiguities of that development.

Secondly we emphasize – in line with the foregoing – that modern thinking about dignity, with its emphasis on the equality of all human beings and the authenticity of each individual, is no secular victory over religion in general and Christianity in particular. As we already stated in chapter 2, who bars religious inspiration from the political debate, not only cuts off a major motivation for involvement of people in society, but also ignores the sources from which Western attainments have arisen. Those sources are certainly not exclusively Christian; but for instance also ancient Greek philosophy has been of great influence (also by the way, on the development of Christianity itself). However, it is undeniable that the portrayal of humankind from Genesis 1, man as 'image of God', has been cultural-historically speaking an extremely important source for our thinking about dignity (not only the ruler, but every man is 'image of God' and in principle all human beings are equal). Just as – we mentioned this already in chapter 1 – the way the New Testament speaks of Jesus Christ as 'image of God' and of the consequences of 'following' Jesus Christ for our ethics. The service to man, the love, obtains priority over following the letter of the law and moral. Not law-abiding behaviour is central, but sincerity, mercy and

loyalty. This is about authority and legislation which cannot be enforced. Exactly by emphasizing that a check has been put on the scope of governmental influence, to penal law (compare the episode of the adulterous woman in the Gospel of John[24]). Those striking fault lines in history have been decisive for the vision of Western man and society. If the attainments of our culture, also in the light of today's challenges, are to be relevant (and not fossilize into the way in which we used to formulate yesterday and the day before yesterday, or into empty generalities), the continuous interpretation and 're-sourcing' are necessary.

The *first* comment: we must be fully aware of the ambiguity of the development of our thinking about dignity (the 'generalisation' and 'individualisation' of it), of the resulting dilemmas and thus of the necessity of continuous ideological reflection

When the modern world in which we live was born, as the story goes, there were three good fairies that visited the new-born baby. The first wished for individual freedom for the child, the second for social justice and the third for prosperity. Unfortunately, at the end of the day also a fourth, bad fairy dropped by saying that only two out of these three wishes could be fulfilled. Some people, liberals in particular, choose individual freedom and prosperity; others, socialists for instance, choose for social justice and prosperity.[25]

   This story represents the fundamental tension between the core values of modern culture. Everyone wants prosperity. And every modern democratic political party stands for values such as equality and individual freedom. However, in everyday's life priorities must be defined and choices made. Here the differences become evident. At this moment we are not interested in elaborating on them. We will shortly typify the development of the modern culture in relation to the thinking about dignity, especially the '*generalisation'* and '*individualisation'* of our perception of dignity.The time-specific element and historical development of our perception of dignity becomes clear when we compare 'the' medieval man with 'the' modern Westerner For medieval man dignity mainly had to do with *honour* to be paid and with the *duty* that was related to one's dignity. Dignity particularly referred to the status of dignitaries. The foundation of the 'honour' that was paid to a man, lay in the social stratification and the essentially related social inequality (based on position, property, status and/or birth).[26] One man received more honour than another, not because of actual merits, but because of social position and ancestry. The honour that fell to a king was based on this fundamental inequality. An example we find in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. King Lear, who abdicates from his throne in favour of his

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23 | See Research Institute for the CDA, *Investing in Integration: Reflections on Diversity and Commonality,* The Hague 2003, pp. 38-48.

24 | John 8: 1-11.
25 | See for this story Moltmann, Jürgen, *God for a secular society: The public relevance of theology*, London 1999, p. 2.
26 | Cp. Taylor, Charles, *The ethics of authenticity*, Cambridge, Mass 1991, p. 45.

daughters, continuously feels injured in his honour, because his daughters cut down on the last remnant of his royal status: his retinue of knights. To treat him apart from class (as merely 'a human being'), as one of many, is to treat him unworthily.[27] The medieval culture in which Lear (and Shakespeare) lived consisted of ranks and classes, an order largely legitimized by the church. For God everyone was equal, but on the other hand God had given each human being its own place in the social order.

There is a big difference between modern man and man from the time of King Lear. Of course, the former also still understands the concept of 'honour' that is based on inequality. The decoration on his lapel would become completely meaningless if the queen would send a decoration by mail to every Dutchman tomorrow. Give credit where credit is due. But if his 'dignity' is at stake, in most cases he will insist on being treated as 'human' and point out the fundamental rights he, as a human being, is entitled to: freedom, equality, right to shelter, etcetera. This is, in short, what we here mean by the *generalisation* of dignity. Dignity is connected with all people as human beings, irrespective of ancestry, rank or class. Not all differences have been erased, but the point of reference has fundamentally changed.

For medieval man also applied that his own 'dignity' was directly in line with his relations to the other one in the total of predefined relations. The honour and dignity of a knight were embedded in his loyalty to his liege and his relatives. The Knight Roland – of the well-known medieval Song of Roland – sings: 'All my relatives I shall support. No mortal will keep me from it. I would much rather die than being blamed of such an act.' Sense of honour – the adequate characterization of Roland. But this sense of honour is the sense of honour belonging to his class, not of the free, autonomous self-developing 'individual' Roland. In other words, the dignity of the knight Roland still is personal (he was entitled to the honour, not his squire), but who (or more appropriately: what) he was a 'person' was, was embedded in his social position and in the matching rules. Thus there was not much room for self-interpretation of his dignity as a human being (and to be honest, people hardly missed it). So also a strong individualisation of dignity has taken place.

This is not the place to describe extensively those developments of the previous centuries. However, it becomes clear that this 'modernization' of dignity has been a painful process, that has been characterized by geographical, political, social, and religious confrontations. For instance the rise of the modern citizenry during the late Middle Ages brought along a 'generalization' of dignity, the development of the Republic of the United Provinces asked for tolerance and freedom, people in Europe re-discovered that the Gospel asks for free commitment and not for slavish, forced piety and the Enlightenment saw the realization that human dignity does not depend on accidental circumstances, but on a reasonableness coinciding with morality. The 'discovery' of other people ultimately underlined the view that every man, irrespec-

tive of skin colour or culture, is entitled to dignity (although the general acceptance of it lasted several bloody centuries).

'Dignity' has gradually become the equivalent for 'being human' per se. To put it differently, 'dignity' became so directly associated with 'humanity' that both concepts became almost synonymous. The issue of course is what that humanity means. On the one hand dignity supposes *equality and equivalence*, in other words something that is generally human. On the other hand dignity for the modern man also has an inevitable connection with the concept of *'individuality' of each individual*, with 'being yourself', with 'authenticity'. For instance in the example of the 'midget throwing' we already observed how both interpretations of dignity could clash with one another. The developments of generalization and individualization themselves have also led to ambiguous results. The generalization of dignity resulted in particular in a claim to equal rights ('our perfect right!'); individualization especially in the ideal – and/or destiny – of self-development ('become who you are!'). We indicate this briefly.

The equality ethos is one of the most important cornerstones of the post war welfare state. The moral relation between people, between youth and senior citizens, between employed and unemployed, between healthy and sick people, has been determined by a fine-meshed system in which basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, warmth and medical care are being transformed into claims on the collective. Via numerous capillaries of the welfare state a part of the income of the employed goes to the senior neighbour across the road – that person that we often hardly or not at all know. This transition from 'bread of mercy' to 'right' definitely is an attainment. Nobody needs to beg anymore. People depend on the collective and no longer on the charity of employer or the parish and of the charitable initiatives of ladies from the highest social circles. At the same time the equality ethos also evokes questions. When it concerns claims on services of the welfare state, it not only deteriorates into 'after all that is my perfect right'. It is also the question to what extent this emphasis on formal equality now really leads to a more humane society. On behalf of us all the senior citizen across the street regularly receives the home help for the support stockings and the washing (her perfect right after all), but besides this she never sees anyone again. We are indeed responsible for each other, but no longer to *each other*. Talking in terms of 'rights' provides us with a rich jargon for claims the individual may put on the collective, but it is rather poor as a means to express the needs of the individual before the collective.[28] The needs for a social involvement, to put it differently. The fragile basis of our moral society has led to needs having become rights, and those rights leading to care. We do not want to go back to that situation. After all there lies the Dickensian society of poorhouses. But it is the question if we do not need more for being a dignified human and a humane society, than only equal rights. And to what extent is this 'more' a political

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27 | Cp. Ignatieff, Michael, *The needs of strangers*, London 1990, pp. 25-53.

28 | 'We are responsible for each other, but we are not responsible to each other.' Ignatieff, Michael, *The needs of strangers*, London 1990, p. 10.

issue. Should not the political debate on the future of the welfare state, in addition to the question on who and why and to which extent people could claim the services of this welfare state, also be about needs of people that surpass the safeguarding of basic services?

Also individual freedom and self-development are attainments that are unabandonable. More and more it comes down to the question if self-determination has not also led to purposelessness, to detachment of supra-individual objectives and thus to lack of meaningfulness. Does not have self-development the tendency to result in an *Originalitätswut* (Kierkegaard), in an aesthetic life that ultimately finds no haven or anchorage? Is freedom thus the synonym for the purposeless standard of self-determination? The great thinkers of the Enlightenment definitely did not associate freedom of the individual with 'I can say what I think' or 'do what I want'. Rights of freedom were not void.[29] The individual human being itself was called to account for his duties and responsibilities, as a sensible, mature, moral and therefore *free* creature. Until recently values such as the freedom of speech, autonomy and political participation for us, in our safe and prosperous society, had become self-evident. We hardly experienced them as *normative objectives*, but chiefly as conditions for self-development, to do and not do whatever we seem proper. At the beginning of the 21st century we have lost that self-evidency because of threats of the democratic legal order (political murders amongst others). Freedom must be defended. But have we not gradually lost the perception of what is the matching criterion? The thinking about the freedom of the individual, the 'self', happened from the assumption of the *individual human being*. Freedom is freedom from external limitations . We however, are restricted in our self-development in numerous ways, not only by physical limitations (there is no way that we can do everything at the same time and quite simple for must of us many ambitions seem just unfeasible, for instance winning the *Tour de France*), but also because of the fact that the appeal that individuals, communities and society make to us. Thus the time that I spend with my sick father will be at the expense of the development of my musical talents and also … a society does not need thousands of concert pianists. Based on the modern idea of the manipulability of the individual this all means nothing but a limitation of the 'self'. But how is the 'self' really limited by it or will it only really start flourishing in those limiting and appealing relations? Even the uncomfortable notion of the *brokenness of our life* plays a role in all this (after all we do not appear that manipulable *and how often do we not do the good that we want and do we do the evil that we do not want?[30]*). This by the way, does not deny the importance of individual development, but the question has been raised within which context that

development is optimally outlines. In chapter 5 ('Our Perfect Right!') and 6 ('Become Who You Are!') we will elaborate on these questions.

The *second* comment: the modern perception of human dignity cannot solely be seen as a secular invention

The modern developments which we briefly outlined, slowly but surely let us say goodbye to a strongly hierarchical class society. That society was strongly dominated by Christianity. Seen from that perspective it is understandable that some secular thinkers consider our perception of human dignity and human rights as an attainment which has been gained on Christianity (and thus as non – or even anti-religious). This idea of affairs is at least one-sided.

Firstly the hierarchical class society is not an invention of Christianity. For instance, also the Greek society was strongly hierarchically organized. Some Greek philosophers might have declared 'the human being' as the 'standard for all things[31] – which modern secular thinkers gladly point out – generally however, the Greek thinkers defended without hesitation the natural inequality of people (in his *Politeia* Plato distinguished three classes, being peasants and craftsmen, soldiers and regents; Aristotle even called a slave an 'animated tool and a possession'[32]).

Secondly many thinkers who were considered to be the patriarchs of the liberal secular Enlightenment were faithful Christians with no intention whatsoever to renounce the Christian faith, even on the contrary (for instance Calvinist John Locke, Puritan Adam Smith and Pietist Immanuel Kant). Even the French Revolution, with its *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* from 1789 declares in its preamble that the rights are acknowledged 'in presence - and under the auspices of the Supreme Being' (in certain aspects the French Revolution was more anti-clerical than anti-Christian).

The main problem of this one-sided assumption is that one does not do justice to this multicolouredness, to movements and traditions that are the foundations of our thinking about dignity. The reduction to the secular thinking obstructs further consideration of our concept of dignity in today's situation. The major cause is the static perception of both culture and religion. Sometimes this leads to black-and-white caricatures out of which all nuance has disappeared: there is 'the' Christianity, which is characterized by an authoritarian belief, peer pressure and sense of sin which have served as models for the hierarchical medieval class society in which God was the tailpiece of the social order, and there is also 'the' secular thinking in which human dignity is 'autonomous' (not derived from the dignity of a Creator) and 'complete' (not put into perspective by a sense of sin). Its is true that the breakthrough of secular thinking did not happen without a struggle, but it is thought that the *Universal Declaration* could be seen as the ultimate victory.

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29 | Kant's well-known remark that Enlightenment means that one no longer thinks what one should think on the authority of others and that for one's moral one should follow one's own conscience, is in the context of resistance against secular and spiritual leaders who prescribes the law to others (see e.g. Kant, Immanuel, 'Beantwortung der Frage. Was ist Aufklärung?' *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (1784) December, 481-494).

30 | As is written by the apostle Paul in Romans 7:19.

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31 | The quote comes from the sophist Protagoras.

32 | Aristotle, *Politics: books I and II*, Oxford 1995.

Cultures, however, do not allow themselves to be caught in these types of 'moulds'. They are being characterized by multi-colouredness and contradictions, by continuities and discontinuities, by dominant powers and sounds of resistance. *Religions* – in this case Christianity – do not allow itself to be reduced to homogeneous phenomena whether or not legitimizing the social order. For instance the fourteenth-century Marsilius of Padua, who developed an anti-clerical state doctrine in which he advocated popular sovereignty and related religion to the inner freedom of responsible individuals, does not fit into the above mentioned black-and-white diagrams (unless it is being annexed as a forerunner of the secular thinking of the Enlightenment). For his advocated form of government Marsilius let himself be inspired by Plato and in particular by Aristotle. But in that part of his work in which he advocates freedom of religion and separation of church and state, he clearly and convincingly calls upon the New Testament. Also Luther with his 'Priesthood of All Believers' or Erasmus and his plea for (religious) freedom cannot be caught in digital diagrams.

Of course, in the first place it often was about minorities, sometimes even dissident individuals and groups, that opposed themselves against authority and the dominant ideology and developed ideas that were of importance for our later thinking about human dignity and the more egalitarian and solidary society which developed itself. On the other hand, one could also think of the Christian deaconate and monasteries, that contributed largely to the development and distribution of health-care. They took seriously the dignity of the poor, the sick, orphans and widows and offered them help, assistance and care. Thanks to conventuals the swamps in North-western Europe were cultivated and agriculture was developed. In monasteries education was offered and knowledge passed on. The deaconates have founded hospitals. In short, within the 'Christian' culture a unique system of charity has been established, which was carried by the belief in the equality of each creature and the virtue of love for one's fellow human being. This broadened the meaning of 'human dignity'.

One may still argue about the question to what extent these types of opposing thoughts and practices have led to change of culture and, conversely, to what extent their ideas – that by the way went back to age-old views – have got room and became politically operative simply because of slowly decaying hierarchically structured class society (because of social-economical developments such as urbanization and the rise of the citizenry). Anyway, the Christian faith cannot be compared with the medieval social order, with the clerical way of thinking or with the political theism. Who, from the angle of this caricature, sets modern thinking on human dignity against Christianity, separates the basic idea of the human dignity from important roots. Important (religious) sociologists such as Max Weber have always acknowledged this. The American theologian Max Stackhouse even states:

The deep roots of human rights lie nowhere else but in the Biblical tradition, because here we find the revelation of a perspective in which the first moral principles

demand respect for the fellow man and this is to be carried out universally. This is the reality that Western traditions call God. That inheritance merges with the Greek-Roman way of thinking and with a legal and social tradition which had developed itself on completely different grounds and notion of universal normative moral order. Those developments had been a minority tradition for centuries, often suppressed by interests of power, by sorts of myths and magic, by heathen tendencies. But every now and then they again were brought up again and made on the basis of the society. They led to a theology of conciliarism that preceded the development of the democracy, especially in those aspects of the Reformation that were so important for the development of human rights.'[33]

Stackhouse's opinion – at least as it has been formulated here – is too exclusive. Nevertheless it is inevitable that there are lines from the age-old Jewish and Christian traditions to the present day discourse of human dignity, democracy and human rights. The important author of the history of political ideas, Quentin Skinner, has pointed this out time and time again.[34] From a cultural-historical perspective the dignity of every human being seems to be a biblical inheritance. As said before: in Genesis 1 it is not only the ruler, but man in general (literally Adam means 'man', 'earthling') that is created *in God's image*. We will come back to this in the next chapter.

The crucial question that forces itself on us is the ancient question from Psalm 8: What is man?

We summarize. It is important to explore the social meaning of 'human dignity'. That exploration cannot, especially politically speaking, take place in a void. The modern perception of dignity (and the values that come along with it) in itself is ambiguous. We may, to a certain extent, consider certain developments of our understanding of human dignity – the 'generalization' and the 'individualization' – as something that cannot be abandoned, we should on the other hand also be aware of the tensions and dilemmas. Freedom may change into noncommittance and purposelessness. Equality may change into a straitjacket and bloodless rights.

More and more the modern idea of dignity is expected to function in a pluralistic society. In such a society is does not work if one religious or secular ideological tradition claims exclusive rights. After all every philosophy of life, religious and secular, will encounter people who object to it. In that respect an appeal to 'humanity' is as problematic as an appeal to a transcendental reality.

We have also concluded that our society is strongly susceptible to changes. We live in a time of flexibilization, of a world-economy and of ICT-revolutions. Old insti-

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33 | Stackhouse, Max L. & Stephen E. Healey, 'Religion and Human Rights: A Theological Apologetic', *Religious human rights in global perspective*, eds. Johan D. Van der Vyver & John Witte, The Hague [etc.] 1996, 485-516, p. 492.

34 | Skinner, Quentin, *The foundations of modern political thought*, Cambridge etc. 1978.

tutions are under pressure. This pressure brings forward the question how human dignity and the modern design of institutions could merge.

We stated that the biblical image of mankind, cultural-historically speaking, has been of fundamental importance for our thinking about dignity. Given the dilemmas we are facing, it makes sense to point out this influence of the image of mankind from a broader perspective than only from a historical perspective. We will draw again from the same source in the next chapter. This cannot only be realized by asking how we could 'apply' the old biblical texts to our situation. We will raise the fundamental underlying question, a question that in the end is also ours, being the question from Psalm 8: *what is man?*

4 | **Image of God**

4. Image of God

In the previous chapter we concluded that the modern thinking about the dignity of every human being has its undeniable roots in the Christian tradition, in particular in the biblical vision of man as 'image of God'. Therefore it is self-evident to start our re-sourcing with that fundamental vision (as a basis for the next chapters, in which we will elaborate on the dilemmas raised by the development of the modern, western perception of dignity). The expression 'image of God' has often been explained in the (ecclesiastical) history as mandate to 'rule'.[35] As 'a crown on creation' – which is not a biblical expression – man should 'rule' over the earth[36] – and so subject and mould nature to his own design. The little ruler (often a man, often Caucasian) as an image of the Big Ruler. This image of mankind is 'anthropocentric' (man is central) and strongly activistic. That interpretation has been heavily criticized during the last decennia, for instance in (theological) discussions on the environmental issue and from the reflection on care for the disabled (should we, based on the 'activistic explanation', together with the German activistic theologian Helmut Thielicke, draw the conclusion that human beings with a mental disability are an 'image of God out of order'[37])? The criticism of this dominant explanation of 'image of God' is so fundamental that the question arises if this expression has not by now become too much contaminated to still be used. Fully aware of the derailments in the explanatory history, we still focus on the expression 'image of God'. By demonstrating its stratification (it is *both* about responsibility and about being human in relations), we hope to prove the relevance of a reconsideration of this mysterious expression.

The classic location is Genesis 1:26-28:

[26] Then God said: 'Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth and over all the creatures that move on the earth.' [27] God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. [28] He blessed them and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it: rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground.'

Over the question what is meant here by that 'image of God' numerous generations of theologians and scribes have racked their brains.[38] None of the explanations seems completely satisfactory. This could also be intentional. Just as we are not allowed to make 'a carved image' of God – who after all cannot be captured by human handiwork (Exodus 20:4) – we cannot make a 'carved image' of God's image, man. People could be pinned down in all sorts of ways: on their past, their possibilities, their social relations, their physical condition, their economical circumstances. As we will emphasize later, our 'real I' cannot be seen apart from this, but at the same time is not absorbed by it. We do not converge with what we have become because of whatever circumstances. A human being is always more than the image it has of itself or with which it is presented by others.

If in the Christian tradition one speaks about man as 'image of God', then by the way, the theological emphasis lies not in this story of the creation. In the New Testament it is Jesus Christ who is described as 'image of God'. The arrival of this 'new Adam' (new man) presents us humans with the surprising possibility to shed off the ballast of a wrong past, to start again and to comply with our destination as renewed, reborn human beings. Someone who is 'one with Christ' is 'a new creation' (II Corinthians 5:17). This does not make the question raised in Genesis 1 not less pressing: what is that destination, that being an 'image of God'?

Although the Bible start with Genesis 1 it is not the oldest part of the Bible and also not the only part in which the creation and the origin of mankind is discussed. It does however, powerfully express how Jews, Christians and also, through the Koran, Muslims look upon mankind: built upon the *relation* with God, the fellow human being and nature and *called to* responsibility. Both the equality of all human beings and the image of God and the right to development of the personal 'being human' may be derived from it. We will come back to it in the next chapters. Here we will first investigate how, biblically speaking, the 'dignity' of man lies in his 'being' and his destination.

The story of the creation typifies man as a creature drawn from clay which receives the royal mission to rule the world and which lives, revives and coexists through his continuous, intimate relation with the Creator and his fellow creatures.

What is man? That is the issue of Psalm 8. The psalm of the human scale, so to say:

[4] When I look up at the heavens, which your fingers made and see the moon and the stars, which you set in place,
[5] of what importance is the human being that you should notice it?
[6] You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, crowned him with honour and majesty,
[7] appointed him to rule over your creation and you have placed everything under his authority

35 | Daly, Herman & John Cobb Jr., *For the Common Good. Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*, Boston, 1989.

36 | Nature in the time of the Bible was something different from our neatly arranged piece of land: not a 'monument' with a fence around it, but 'thorns and thistles', 'lions, panthers and bears;' on the other hand, whereas yesteryear's battles were fought per square meter, now catastrophes of global proportions arise.

37 | Thielicke, Helmut, *Wer darf sterben?: Grenzfragen der modernen Medizin*, Freiburg etc. 1979, p. 63.

38 | For an overview see Westermann, Claus, *Genesis 1-11*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1974, pp. 203-214.

This psalm is in line with the tradition of the Jewish *schools of wisdom*. They cherished high expectations of mankind, without at the same time forgetting its limitations. Are we more than just a tiny piece of dust in the endless universe? And: how wonderful that God thinks about us, made us a little lower than heavenly beings? That duality is the background of the classic philosophical question about man.

This question is being asked in the third person singular. Thus 'the' man is brought forward as a theme. Yet this does not raise a detached, abstract philosophical discussion. The man from Psalm 8 does not raise an academic question, does not perform self-analysis, but, taken by surprise by the bliss of creation and the Creator, wonders: 'What is man that you think of him?'[39]

These schools of wisdom played an important role in the lives of the Jewish exiles, who had been deported to Babylon (in Mesopotamia, the modern Iraq) in the beginning of the 6th century BC.. Of course this deportation (first of the elite and later also of other layers of the population) had led to a social, political and also a religious crisis. The supporting structures that had determined the social identity of the people had disappeared: the city of Jerusalem, the temple, the worship, the royal family. Never had they been further from home. That crisis put pressure on the old social, political and particularly on the theological traditions. Were they resilient enough to provide renewed answers to the questions that imposed themselves? As no other the philosophical question about 'what is man' thus became the political and religious identity of the Jewish people.

Thus the exile became a time of reflection and critical self-reflection. New prophets appeared announcing people the truth and the words of the old prophets, on social wrongs, self-enrichment and poverty, were remembered. In the psalms there was *despair* and *lamentation*. But there were also *recollections* of how it once had begun, of the why and of the purpose of mankind. New groups arise that start writing down the history of the people in a new way, that speak about the past to make clear what the future will look like. Some scribes start reading the entire Jewish *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible, as such a re-narration, as stories about yesterday with an eye to tomorrow. Here we focus on the so-called 'primordial history' in Genesis, chapters 1 through 11, and in particular on the stories of the creation.

In the stories which were being told by the rivers of Babylon (the Euphrates and the Tigris), a number of older narrative traditions come together.[40] They are compositions of stories about the creation of the world and of man, the 'adam', the 'earthling'; about Adam and Eve in paradise; about the deathly conflict between the brothers Cain and Abel; about the great Flood and Noah and his boat full of animals;

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39 | Barth, Hans-Martin, *Dogmatik. Evangelischer Glaube im Kontext der Weltreligionen: Ein Lehrbuch*, Gütersloh 2001, p. 484.
40 | Here we refer to the so-called 'nomad'-tradition (amongst exegetists known as 'E') and the Jahwistic tradition (known as 'J'), that were integrated and reshaped by the schools of wisdom during the period of exile and later, after the return, were adapted by the Priest Narrator ('P').

about the Tower of Babel that collapsed and made humanity fall apart into many different peoples. These primordial histories are, as already said, an expression of self-reflection in the specific context of that time. A special type of self-reflection. It is a concrete listing of who did what wrong and where. The primordial stories are, to use an anachronism, no report of a parliamentary fact-finding committee. As it were the narrators position themselves at a distance. They raise fundamental questions which dig under the feeling of crisis and answer by means of stories about the beginning, stories about 'man' in general who holds a mirror up to the concrete people of that time and also of today. The narrators thereby used age old stories which had been handed down from generation to generation. They weave them into new stories in which they get a new meaning and shine a surprising light on fundamental human questions of the meaning of life and coexistence. The characters that play in these stories have been idealized, they are personifications, enlargements of certain human characteristics. It is about 'the' man, about man and woman, about two arguing brothers, about the arrogance of mankind, etcetera. Thus a room has been created that we as modern readers can step into, with our own urgent starting points for the classic questions of meaningfulness. This of course does not directly result in political views for the problems of today. Maybe some very fundamental notions of being human that could help us ahead in the reflection of our social and political situation.

The notions of the creation of mankind have – as supposed by the Bible exegetists – different backgrounds. It is believed that some come from groups of nomads that roamed the deserts with all their belongings and in the 'desert' they felt themselves as small human beings placed right before God. Other notions probably go back to the court of ancient Israel from before the exile. Here the emphasis lies on the responsibility of the king who should rule the country righteously. Anyway it is not about a scientific explanations of the creation of man. In essence it is always about the *relation in which man exists*.

In the so-called 'desert stories' the creation of man is described as the personal 'handiwork' of the Creator. He creates man from the dust of the earth, Adam, the 'earthling', and blows the breath of life into his nose (Genesis 2:7). Thus the Creator is very directly involved with creation of man. Also in some psalms we find traces of this tradition, for instance in Psalm 139: 'Certainly you made my kidneys, who wove me together in my mother's womb.' And: 'When I was made in secret, and sewed together in the depths of the earth, my bones were not hidden from you'. These texts suppose an intimate and lasting relationship between the Creator and his creation based on trust. God, the Creator, the Procreator, the Midwife, protects man as a mother and a father. This close relation is also expressed in proper names: Abiel, Achiel, Amiel, or my father, my brother, my relative is the Almighty.

The essence of this old spirituality was the overwhelming realization to have been *created*, the experience of the power of the creating God in oneself and in others. That realization expresses itself in gratitude and amazement: 'I will give you

thanks because of the incredible miracle of my existence, your deeds are awesome and amazing' (Psalm 139:14). Man, as earthling moulded from the dust from the earth, thus is the image, the ' outline' of the Creator. This outlined 'man', roaming through the desert, lives and recovers under the continuous, indispensable blessing of the creating God. The downside – as we will see below – is that apart from the Beginning, man is no more than a shadow. A delusion. A dream evaporating.[41]

The second important tradition to affect the stories of creation is the so-called 'king's spirituality'. We also find this in certain psalms, the 'king-psalms'. Whereas the oldest traditions focus on the creation of man, this king's spirituality focuses on the creation of the world.[42] Objective of those stories of creation is an interpretation of the existing *order*, an order that continuously needs to be defended from the threatening chaos. That order is supported by political and religious institutions. Temple and royal family have a order creating function. Both politically and religiously the king takes in a central position. Some experts believe that behind Genesis 1 there would be a perception of *representation* that had been widespread through the entire ancient East. Egyptian and Assyrian rulers were seen as living 'images of God', as representatives of God on earth (Tutankhamen for instance literally means: living image of Amon). In their turn such kings created images of themselves to represent their power. Thus, as rulers, they were present in the most remote provinces. The question remains if also in ancient Israel the king was so exclusively seen as the sole 'image of God'.[43] In any case a special responsibility fell to him. He had to show that he was an 'image of God' by maintaining *justice*. The image does not automatically belong to the king. Next to a designation it is above all an assignment. Justice, by the way, is not the legal concept as we know it (everyone his share, equally divided based on one's merits), but, much broader, an expression of the 'good life' in which everything and everybody (including earth itself!) comes out well. Such justice is biased, in favour of the poor and weak who again and again do not come out well (we will elaborate on this in chapter 5). In Psalm 72 we find the job description of such a king:

'For he will rescue the needy when they cry out for help, and the oppressed who have no defender; he will take pity on the poor and needy; the lives of the needy he will save; from harm and violence he will defend them, in his eyes their blood is precious.'

'image of God' therefore does not relates to a certain quality of the king, a status symbol, but to a an agreement between him and God. God and king have been united in the care of 'justice'. And together with the king also the people. To a cer-

tain extent the royal-psalms are one large invocation: 'O God, grant the you're your laws to the king, your justice to the king's son. May he judge your people fairly, your oppressed ones equitably' (72:1-2). Only when the king, focused on God, acts fairly, the people will live in justice and peace and also the land will prosper and be fertile ('may its fruit trees flourish like the forest of the Lebanon'...).

People draw from these ancient narrative traditions, those from the desert and those from the Israeli court, when they tell stories of creation in Babylon, that should provide an answer to the big questions of the origin, purpose and meaning of man. The philosophical *question* 'what is man?' finds its origin, as we already stated, in the experience of limitation. We human beings are insignificant, rootless, a piece of dust in an endless universe. The *answer* to the question is 'royal'. In the story of creation in Genesis 1 not the king, but *man* is God's 'representative'.[44] Similar to the great of the earth who then erected an image of themselves as a mark, also man, *every man*, as image of God, is God's *representative*. Some exegetists emphasize the social criticism of this thought. On good grounds people claim that the story of creation rebels against the dictatorial Eastern ruler and that equality of human beings lies in the creation of Adam (the human) by the Almighty.[45] According to Psalm 8 man – again every man – is 'granted with honour and majesty' and irrespective of all his flaws and limitations royally answerable and en responsible for the order on earth, for the 'work of [God's] hands' that have been put under his 'authority': 'sheep, goats, all cattle, as well as the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea and everything that moves through the currents of the seas.'

In this tensional relation between 'philosophical question' (raised from the experience of limitation and insignificance) and the 'royal answer' (man being entrusted with the responsibility for the world) lies the basic structure of the biblical portrayal of mankind. Being human means living in the unsolvable tension between finiteness and authority, being rootless and being established, vulnerability and divine talent (Kierkegaard has described the essence of 'being human' in a similar way as the tension between reality and equality, between transitoriness and eternity; your concrete being human is determined by the way you shape your life at this fracture). This tensional image of mankind has subsequently been embedded in the direct, intimate involvement of the Creator in his creation. The Creator thinks about man, the earthling, cares for him, meddles with him (see for instance Psalm 8). Man does not exist in isolation. He has been created as an individual. The embedding

41 | See e.g.. Psalm 39 and 73.
42 | Cp. Westermann, Claus, *Genesis 1-11*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1974, p. 31.
43 | See Middleton, J. Richard, *The liberating image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, Eugene, Oregon 2005, m.n. pp. 104-122.

44 | Usually here people refer to publications by Gerhard von Rad, e.g. Rad, G. von, *Der alte und der neue Mensch. Aufsätze zur theologischen Anthropologie*, München 1942, p. 7: 'So wie auch irdische Herrscher . . . ein Bild ihrer selbst als Wahrzeichen aufrichten, so ist der Mensch in seiner Gottesebenbildlichkeit auf die Erde gestellt als ein Hoheitszeichen Gottes.' Claus Westermann points out several objections against this conception (Westermann, Claus, *Genesis 1-11*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1974, pp. 211-213).
45 | Middleton, J. Richard, *The liberating image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, Eugene, Oregon 2005, pp. 147-231.

of his existence lies outside himself, in the relation with the Creator who protects, feeds, inspires. In spite of all his limitations man can be made responsible, because that responsibility is the result of the continuous claim that the Creator and the creation, God and man, have on each other.

To summarize, man is a creature moulded out of dust and clay, vulnerable and limited, with a royal vocation. This tensional identity affects his dignity. A *vulnerable dignity*, that is. It could also go terribly wrong.

The political translation of this portrayal of mankind demands attention for the *personal responsibility of people* and for the *relations* in which they live. In order not to lapse into one-sided individualism or community thinking, we specifically emphasize that man is 'open' for 'higher things'

The stories of creation reflect on the social, political and religious situation of that time by asking the underlying fundamental human questions. What is the essence of man? His origin? His destination? In such a way, we said, a room is created which we as today's readers, with our own question could enter. How?

In modern interpretations the emphasis switches alternately between the 'representational' and the 'relational' aspect. To put it differently, people emphasize either man's assignment in this world as God's representative on earth, or the relations in which man has irrevocably been woven into. In C*hristian Democratic* contemplations there often is a deliberate attempt to justify both angles.

Thus being an 'image of God' is interpreted as an assignment. A 'culture assignment'. That assignment gives man 'an inviolable value', that he – and this is mankind specific – also had and has to live up to'. Here it is about the responsibility of people, about stewardship, about active dedication, 'in all aspects of their lives: housekeeping, labour, interaction with others outdoors, participation in politics'.[46] In short, the biblical portrayal of mankind is translated imperatively: seek justice, live up to responsibility, be solidary, behave meticulously as a steward!

Every time this 'representative' aspect comes up in Christian democratic texts, it is emphasized that this should not lead to 'immoderateness'. Man may use the fruits of the earth, but not with the intention of his own profit. The criterion is *what do we need*. In other words moderateness. But how much does a man need? And how do you stimulate people to be satisfied with only 'that which is needed? An additional element is the fact that *others* share in what is 'needed'. Here we come upon an important aspect of the thinking of the human scale. People 'only come to their full maturity in relation to others'. Therefore, the relational aspect is essential. 'The Christian Democracy rejects an approach that only considers mankind as a set of separate individuals or that affects, in its consequences, the mutual involvement and replaces this with the concept of public acknowledgement of the human

solidarity'.[47] People are involved in relations and *those relations precede the aspect of man himself is* (we will come back to this 'relationalism' in chapter 6).

In short, man is summoned within the actual relations within which he lives. Relation and vocation, claim and responsibility, presuppose each other and continuously evoke one another. That coherence we find back in the puns in which the Christian Democratic vision on mankind often is captured: respons(ibility), *voca*tion. In responsibility 'response' is embedded, our response to God's appeal to us, and also to the claim of fellow human beings and fellow creatures; in vocation a 'vox'/voice is calling us, but also our own voice that matters. The essence of the Christian Democratic image of mankind is the *bipolarity* of *relation and vocation*. Man is determined by the relations in which he lives. However, the quality of those relations depends on the human shaping of it.

Critics think that in the actual political translation the emphasis has now been put too unilaterally on the 'representative' aspect. The 'own responsibility' of the individual would become the focal point. According to some the ideological identification would in the end be no more than a Christian Democratic territorial mark with a liberal image of mankind, in which ability to live independently and autonomy of the individual came first. On the other hand there was criticism that Christian Democratic community thinking would indeed lock up the individual too much within the communities in which it lives. In a political climate, in which the borderline seems to be drawn between 'I-thinking' and 'we-thinking', a Christian Democratic vision that wants to do justice to both the personal and the relational aspect of being human, soon becomes trapped.

We state that, if we want to do justice to both the individual and the relational aspect, without falling into unilateral individualism or community thinking, we have to emphasize that man is not only a social, but above all also a '*transcending*' being. By this we mean that man is an 'open' being that is not coinciding with his surroundings and that does not reconcile easily with the given facts. It is typically human to *want to rise above oneself*, looking for what carries us and what supports us, for completeness, happiness or rest. This is exactly why, as we said in chapter 2, laws and legislation alone do not suffice; without that transcendental dimension of moral, against which rules are being checked and that motivated people to stick to them, laws and rules narrow and become some sort of legalisticism (which had a deadly outcome with Socrates and Jesus).

Much has been written, especially during the past century, on this never ending ambition of man. Man is 'incomplete', a *Mängelwesen*, according to the great philosophical anthropologists of the 20th century, a creature that by nature is not at home in nature and that needs 'culture' to survive. People desperately look for deliverance from their Worries and Fear, according to the existentialists. It is the compensation of the absence of a Father figure that we have felt since our childhood, according to

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46 | CDA, *Program of Principles*, 1993, p. 12.

47 | Ibid., p. 15.

Freud and his followers. No more than a chemical process, according to the neuro-physicists in their reductional vision of man; maybe some sort of 'reli'-lobe in our brains. Anyway, people are self-confident beings that ask for the reason why something is good and that cannot avoid the issue of the meaning of what they are doing. The answers to these questions are not sure in advance

For that matter we should not interpret this tendency to 'transcendency' only too spiritually. The human 'openness for the higher things' also means that we want to refine the world and sometimes even rebuild it – with advantages and risks. From our needs, the dangers threatening us and the ideals we have, we for instance reconstruct the land: dikes against the water, roads for our transportation, factories, hospitals… Further and further we seek; and behind every solutions a new question arises. Human ambition seems insatiable.

No doubt the Christian tradition has positively interpreted this 'transcendental' longing of man as a quest for God. 'Everybody', according to Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, 'has , be it vague, an idea of the Highest Good in which his mind comes to rest and that he longs for. And everybody aspires to it'. This longing for God is a 'con-created and perpetual thirst for the realm deiform'. In other words it is embedded in man to be focused on God and to find in him his fulfilment and rest. God is the highest good, the *summum bonum,* man's objective. Man's focus on God, the creature's focus on the Creator, also plays an important role in Christian Democratic thinking of man.

Catholic thinking speaks of man's natural longing for God. Man has an 'intimate and vital solidarity with God', that characterizes him, even if he denies or forgets it.[48] Also in Protestant thinking, for instance in the political philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd, the strong longing of man for his Origin is pointed out. The Church Father Augustine wrote: '[…] you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'[49] That 'Augustinian moment' has always been crucial to both the Catholic and Protestant traditions within Christian Democracy.

We also find that 'transcendental openness' in the story of Genesis (the term is ours of course and not of the narrators). The primordial history in Genesis is, as we already said, a critical self-reflection of a people in times of exile. It judges the recent past by asking questions about the beginning. And that beginning was 'good', as the story goes. By now it may have become clear that we read Genesis 1 especially as an interpretation of the *nature* of our existence: we and the world around us have been *created*. And well! In several ways it is expressed how from a wild and lifeless primordial soup life is being created, how order is being created out of chaos and processes of life come into being. Light is being separated from darkness, the earthly waters from the firmament, the sea from the land. Young green germinates, trees start bearing fruit. Two big lights are being placed in the firmament to separate

day from night, a big one for the daytime and a smaller one for at night. All kinds of living creatures are being created that swarm in the water, fly along the sky or crawl the earth. Amongst which, finally, also mankind. All these acts of creation in this story are proceeded by the same small sentence: 'God said…' The process of creation has first of all been typified as a speech of God. From nothing God calls life, which until then had not existed, into existence. Thus being created means having been *called* for life. It says something of this life. Man, as a living creature, does not exist *by* itself. Its origin, its basis, its anchorage lie in his being called to life by the Creator. Neither does man exist *for* himself, but for the answering of that call. And, finally, neither does man exist by himself, but only in the many relations with others and with the creation in which the answer to that call becomes concrete.

In short man cannot be obtained separately. Also his responsibility is not something abstract, but a tangible responsibility in the tangible relations in which he lives. Man, as image of God, is God-oriented by nature. First of all, this being so, does not mean his being disconnected from the earthly natural reality. After all he himself has been created from the dust of the earth and thus inextricably connected with the natural reality. Even a little bit too much or too little iodine in our body nearly makes us a different human being…

Man, as image of God, is God-oriented by nature. Secondly, this being so, does not make him disconnected from the social reality. The stories of creation emphasize how God did not create mankind in singular but in plural.[50] Genesis 2 explicitly states that God created mankind as man and woman and also very explicitly people are being placed in lines of ancestry, which indicated the importance of the community between generations. The genealogies, the 'from generation to generation', are the base-rhythm of the biblical stories of creation; it is a form of historiography that not only emphasizes the living *next* to each other in the world, but also the community *between people in time*, the link with the generations that preceded you and the responsibility of the generations to come after you.[51] How will we leave behind the world for our children? With how many types of butterflies? And how much peace between people, better-offs and poor, old and new inhabitants of our cities and villages?

Man, as image of God, is God-oriented by nature. Thirdly, this being so, does not detach him from the 'economical' reality. The word 'economical' is placed here between quotation marks, because the biblical stories after all do not suppose an economical truth as we know it. In those first chapters nothing is mentioned of trading and making a profit; however there is talk of labour, even 'in the sweat of one's brow'. The latter element has laid a haze over the concept of labour. Work is

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48 | See e.g.. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Chapter 1, section 1, part 1.
49 | Augustine, Aurelius, *Confessions*.

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50 | With phrase 'let us make man in our image, after our likeness' (Genesis 1:26) we end up in theological debates on the image of God. In the so-called 'social trinity doctrine' that has been developed by several theologians during the last decennia, God is explicitly positioned as community of three 'persons' and for that matter, man only as community 'image of God' (see for instance Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes. Zur Gotteslehre*, Gütersloh 1994).
51 | See e.g. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1974, pp. 9 vv.

definitely no game. It is part of the imperfect human existence. Make the most of your talents! This sounds like: let us lay on the lash! There is no way that you should feel comfortable. In the Christian Democratic tradition this has been explained differently. Labour has also to do with development, with vitality, with creativity, with inspiration.[52] Labour offers people the opportunity to reach their destination, to develop themselves. It should be something that you long for and that you are proud of. This need not mean that work should always be fun or be as varied as possible (although this is of course important). In the first place it is important that labour provides you as a human being with the possibility to shape the responsibility for the world around you in your own way. '*The purpose of all labour is responsibility.*'[53]

Man, as image of God, is God-oriented by nature. Fourthly, this being so, does not disconnect him from political reality. In the first chapters of Genesis it is not directly about tangible concrete political actions (although the building of the 'tower' of Babel in Genesis 11 is of course a political action). As a reflection of the past history, however, the primordial story has a political dimension. In Genesis 6 expressions such as 'giants' and 'sons of gods', who intermingle with humans, of course refer to political leaders that are guilty of crimes.[54] Power and powerlessness, the political issue par excellence, surely plays a role in the story.

Therefore being-human means being embedded in relations. Man however, does *not get lost in those relations*. He is not just a piece of nature or a cog in the machine of a larger community. This would devalue the royal responsibility that man obtained to a natural instinct or to 'socially desirable behaviour'. Openness towards God and responsibility for the world go together. Because of man's openness towards God and towards a life as it was meant (when it is 'good' or even 'very good'), he surpasses his concrete relations. At the same time man only fulfils himself in those other relations. We will come back to this in the next chapters.

The openness towards the 'higher things' determines both man's *grandeur* and his *misery*. The disruption of human relations can only be really understood from man's insatiable longing

The 'moral' of the story of the creation: if creatures listen to their 'call', life is good. Being called to life contains a promise. The chorus of the story of the creation is that God, with everything he created, saw that it was 'good'. After the creation of mankind it even says 'very good'. Maybe this reflects the narrators' irony. What else is the story of the creation, that portrait of the good life, than a story of contrast, but making painfully clear what man (read: the narrators themselves) have made of

it: not really something 'good'. Where did it go wrong? That is the question that is bothering them. How could it be that we have allowed things to go wrong to such an extent? As we stated earlier the narrators of the primordial history did not look for their answer in a concrete analysis of the social and political practices and structures of their collapsed society. They wanted to dig deeper and look for the causes within man himself, in his essence, his 'core structure'. The tensional portrayal of mankind that we reconstructed earlier in this chapter is not just an ideal image of man. It serves an interpretation framework for the interpretation of the past history and thus obtaining an insight in the future. The insignificant man is made royally responsible for the well-being of the creation, for justice and equality. This responsibility typifies mankind, but cannot be seen separately from the intimate relation between the creation 'man' and the Creator. This is the crux of the primordial story. The moment that relation becomes disrupted, also the responsibility overshoots its purpose and man misses out on his vocation. Why man dislodges himself from his relation with the Creator is not really explained. Apparently the temptation is too great and apparently this conclusion suffices. There is even more attention for the consequences. And for hopeful signs of a new beginning.

Disruption of that essential relation with God also means disruption of the other relations in which man is involved. And thus a disruption of his being (fellow) human. '*Man, where are you?*' is God's question when man walks away from his responsibilities. That question cannot be seen separately from that other piercing question: *Where is your brother?* With that question of God to Cain, so to say, all moral consciousness begins. Or the other way around, Cain's grumpy answer, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' signifies all immorality, fratricide and genocide, throughout the entire history, from Cain and Abel till the European religious wars, from slave trade, the front of the World Wars, the Holocaust, the dictators in Africa, Iraq and much more. Implicitly there is a third question: *how do you treat your fellow creatures,* the animals, the land? Primordial stories show that not only fellow men suffer from irresponsible behaviour of people, but also nature. Animals share in the drama of the Flood (and also the joy of the rainbow). And in the Jewish tradition the exhaustion of the land was mentioned as the reason for the exile. According to 2 Chronicles 36:21 was the fact that man had not allowed the land its rest, its *Sabbath*, was the cause of the exile: 'It remained desolate for seventy years and had its rest, until all disregarded sabbatical years had been compensated'.

If in the biblical story of the creation it is suggested that man has been 'built' on a relation with God, or even that his entire essence is not embedded in himself but only in that relation with God and if man thus is portrayed as responder, as seeker of God by nature, then this comments on *society* and therefore also on the ideals regarding the social and political relations. It is not about a mystical relation with God apart from this reality, a private mystical hearing and seeing. The biblical vision of man is 'worldly'. With both legs he stands in the mud out of which he has been created. It is about an interpretation of the wrongs. Prophets prophesied in a

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52 | For the intrinsic social dimensions of work see e.g. the encyclics *Laborem Exercens, 1981,* 6, 14 and *Centesimus Annus,* 1991, 30. Work is work *with* and f*or* other people.

53 | This is a reference to the German politician and industrialist Walther Rathenau, who often has been cited in Christian Democratic circles.

54 | See Moltmann, Jürgen, *Im Ende der Anfang: Eine kleine Hoffnungslehre*, Gütersloh 2007³.

direct, outspoken manner against injustice. They told the whole story. Here, in the primordial history, the wrongs come back in a stylized narrative form. It is concluded that man apparently walks away from his responsibility, blames others, murders and cheats, is ruined in ambition and jealousy. The suggestion is obvious. This can no longer be about incidents, about small mistakes or an incidental lapse, a human mistake. In the story of the Flood the narrators of the primordial history point out a deeply rooted injustice that permeates all social relations, an all spoiling crime, an *Untat*, as German commentators call it, that in its ultimate form results in bloodshed, rape and suppression: 'God saw the earth, and indeed it was ruined' (*Genesis* 6:12). One would say there is no escape for the individual human beings. However, the story in Genesis is not a tragic philosophy of life. Man has not been determined, not been handed over to the circumstances, to the supra-human interplay of forces on which he has no influence. Of course he is also not a blank piece of paper that can be filled completely to his wishes. Nevertheless he remains responsible, literally and figuratively. God will continue to call him to account, regardless of the circumstances, and regardless of his shortcomings. Sometimes even on the verge of despair, as becomes clear in another story from the tradition of philosophy, in the book of Job:

> '[...] leave me alone, for my days are a vapour. What is mankind that you make so much of them, and that you pay attention to them? And that you visit them every morning, and try them every moment? Will you never look away from me, will you never let me alone long enough to swallow my spittle? Have I sinned? What have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you set me as a target? I'm already a burden to myself' (Job 7: 16-19).

In the Christian tradition that claim, that word and answer have always been considered as the essence of human dignity. Already in the New Testament we read how Jesus, as stated earlier portrayed as image of God par excellence, proclaims that relation with God and lived as an example of an intimate relation of love and requited love (he calls God *abba*, father). This talk of love does not so much express a feeling, but rather an attitude, the acknowledgement that God is the centre of our existence. That acknowledgement expresses itself in words such as trust, submission, praise, thanking and even enjoyment. By typifying that relation as a love relation, the essence of man is typified as a turmoil, a longing. Augustine's famous words: 'Restless is our heart until it rests in you', immediately catch the eye again.

The essential political question that results from this, is how we can appeal to the good that comes from that strong human passion. A vital *civil society* is indispensable.

With the acknowledgement of the human 'openness', his freedom to shape his concrete responsibility in line with the relations in which he lives, also the possibility of

human failing has been demonstrated. In the words of Romano Guardini: 'The spirit of man is free, both to do well and evil, both to build and to destruct.'[55] In short, the human passion is ambiguous: we can do much good, but also much evil (and how often is the evil not the unintended side-product of something good that we want to achieve?). The human dignity may only be evaluated at its merits if the passion, which determines both the *grandeur* and the *misery* of mankind, is acknowledged.

Thus in the human openness towards the higher things also lies a danger. Maybe it is because that we humans do not only need freedom, but also grip. The Christian tradition has always emphasized that we build on sand if our grip lies in finite elements (welfare, hearth and home, pat on the backs by others, etcetera). The flood will wash away the ground from under our feet – either because of a disappointing vacation, or because the children want something different from what the parents had hoped for, or because 'politics' cannot solve everything, or because somebody gets ill and can no longer do 'everything'. Sometimes the search for a grip may even become obsessive and make us degenerate into *workaholics*, sex animals or religious fanatics. The Bible calls this sin: we overshoot our objective.

For some liberal thinkers, as we saw in chapter 3, the modern secular concept of human dignity is mainly a victory over the Christian awareness of sin. Man's dignity is no longer 'put in perspective', but done justice to in its full in glory. Time and time again the Christian – mainly Protestant – portrayal of mankind is pinned down on that one passage from the *Heidelberger Catechism*, in which the question if nothing good can come from man and if he has the intrinsic inclination to all evil, is answered with 'Yes'. People forget that this 'yes' is not followed by a period (let alone an exclamation mark), but by a comma. Pessimism is not the final stage. Exactly by recognizing evil, renewal and recovery is also possible. God has not created man as 'bad and wrong', but as good and after his image [...].

Of course in history of Christianity the awareness of sin has often degenerated into melancholy, into distrust of the good in man, into fear and more than anything else into guilt complexes. But the Christian awareness of sin still influences our thinking and acting in the Western world and the accompanying sense of guilt still exists. With the mistakes that we make we still not only have the perception that we wrong ourselves and others, but also that we violate certain written and unwritten rules. A feeling for justice for instance. The sense of guilt has of course changed drastically. God becomes more and more invisible and with him the institute against which we do evil and sin. To a certain extent we ourselves have become the standard of things, including *the standard of our sin*. You yourself are responsible and only you. The church no longer impresses standards. We ourselves determine what moral categories we employ, what is good for us and what is evil. Of course others still play a role in this, and also religious traditions, but we are our own points of reference and in principle this makes every opinion equal to another. Thus everyone has 'his

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55 | *Op. cit.* Mieth, Dietmar & Rudolf Walter, *Vom tätigen Leben*, Freiburg [etc.] 1984, p. 288.

own, personally chosen and therefore also partly socially shaped awareness of sin'. Sometimes this very well thought-out, sometimes very impulsive.

Sense of evil and guilt has thus become a personal issue. Social workers try to relieve us of the guilt complexes and inhibitions by weakening the irrational demands that we apparently enforce upon ourselves. You cannot be perfect, you do not always have to live up to the sky-high expectations of yourself and of others, there often is a force majeure. But if this is really liberating remains to be seen. Because immediately another question arises. Is it only he who has no expectations at all and who slides away into indifference, who is delivered from his 'sin complex. It remains to be seen if such a *Beavis and Butthead*-mentality is satisfying.[56] Sense of guilt supposes a standard against which we measure ourselves and not a standard that we can choose ourselves. This also applies when we could be (really) satisfied with what we are doing.

The problem with a strongly individualized sense of sin is the fact that it often is strongly *moralized* (also in the Christian tradition the individualistic morality has for that matter a long tradition). When we start from the autonomy of man, all sorts of deprivation and crime should be considered as extremely serious. Criminals are people that are no good at all; people in the gutter only have themselves to blame. It goes without saying that a criminal is someone who does something seriously wrong. But if you start talking about 'all people are sinners' and 'let he who is without sin, throw the first stone...' then together you will end up differently. Then there is an underlying relation under each difference between good and evil and every man remains dignified.

In the biblical perspective of man that we elaborated on in this chapter, man is seen above all in the *variety* of *concrete relations* in which he lives. He is not in the first place an individual, but a Londoner, an Englishman, a general practitioner a father, a child, member of the Rotary, churchgoer, supporter of Arsenal, committee member of the volleyball club, etcetera. It is not good ('sin') if, within all these relations, he has no time for his responsibility that is appealed to within these relations. For whatever reason. The disturbed relation with one's parents may overshadow everything; the potential relegation of Arsenal could influence his life to such an extent that other responsibilities suffer from it; his need to be seen as a sympathetic general practitioner could devour all the time he actually wanted to spend on his children.

We should go one step further. People cannot be seen separately from the 'circles' within which they exist and have their responsibilities, to which they have been called. However, the social-critical element of the portrayal of mankind that we have painted until now, is that people will never completely converge with one of those areas. They cannot and may not ever fully converge with it. One's true-self – which

exists because of your being addressed by God – does not converge with the social-self, but at the same time one's true-self cannot been separately form the social-self. The other way around, you are who you are because of the relations in which you exist, but at the same time you are more. There is a 'transcendental' moment in each relation, a longing, a freedom. Being 'open', free creatures people are never completely stuck in unchangeable patterns. And social institutions should never try to force people into such patterns. Therefore Guardini speaks of the necessity of a *personal organization*: institutions have been organized in such a way that they do not imprison people within a straitjacket, but on the contrary, strengthen them in their freedom and responsibility. From the relations in which they live there always is the possibility to re-appeal to their responsibility. There is room for joining and leaving, for freedom, for falling and standing up. And there is room for forgiveness and a new beginning. This implies a *confirmation* of life, of ourselves and of the lives of others. Also the evil sides and the suffering resulting from it. Confirmation in this context does not mean that we should identify with evil, having to cover it with the cloak of charity, or as Nietzsche, taking it 'heroically' on our shoulders. It means the affirmation of life and the unconditional acceptance of the other in love and forgiveness (within the Christian tradition this is referred to in terms such as *agapè* and reconciliation). Not by withdrawing from evil in an (ironical) indifference (*Beavis and Butthead*), and not by veiling evil, but by the *acceptance of evil, failure and tragedy* disturbed relations may be opened up through love and forgiveness and there could still be a perspective of the good in reality. The power of acceptance through forgiveness and reconciliation is aptly phrased by Cynthia Ngewu, a South-African mother who told the Truth and Reconciliation Committee about her son Christopher Piet, who had been killed during the years of the apartheid:

> *'This thing called reconciliation … if I am understanding it correctly … if it means that this perpetrator, this man who killed Christopher Piet, if it means that he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back … then I agree, then I support it all'.[57]*

From this portrayal of mankind arises the political question how we can appeal to the good in man and how his urgent longing may be 'channelled' correctly. What we need is another perspective of reality than just our own. Exactly this is the danger of an individualistic society. In the Protestant as well as in the Catholic development of state and society people started with man and in particular with the portrayal of mankind that we outlined in this chapter. Both the Protestant concept of the 'sovereignty in one's own circle' and the Catholic concept of 'subsidiarity' acknowledge the importance of the many relations in which people live and have their responsibilities. Especially in these relations a claim is laid on people. The government

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56 | See also Grünewald, Stephan, *Deutschland auf der Couch: Eine Gesellschaft zwischen Stillstand und Leidenschaft*, Frankfurt [etc.] 2006.

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57 | *Op. cit.* Krog, Antjie, *Country of my skull*, Johannesburg 1998, p. 164.

should not want to control everything. Firstly because it cannot oversee everything and secondly it will kill the creativity of people and their non-governmental responsibility will not be taken seriously. The government should respect the responsibility of all people (and encourage it) and have the several sections of society do as much as possible on their own. In this way Christian Democracy looks for a way between on the one hand the (socialistic) absolutism of the state in which social life is being regulated by the state authoritatively and on the other hand liberal individualism in which the course of society is being left to the individual citizen. Man lives in a fundamental plurality of unique, specific relations and circles.[58]

This vision of man, society and state (in that order) demands a strong 'civil society'. Jan Peter Balkenende phrases it as follows:

Interpretation of responsibility answers the Christian vision of man and society. God gave people their own responsibility. That is what is so special about the creation. He gave them the responsibility to choose between good and evil, and to fashion the earth to their own design. Though we know we cannot create heaven on earth, people will always have to try to build a better world. And the structure of society should allow them the scope to do so. A flourishing civil society is crucial.[59]

Here we will not elaborate on ideas on a vital 'civil society'. We will continue with the train of thought of chapter 3, that ended with the tension between equality and self-development. What can be said about this from the perspective of the portrayal of mankind and society which we presented in this chapter?

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58 | With Kuyper the diversity of the circles of life lay in the 'creation sovereignty of God', which is expressed in the 'order of creation' as given by God. Every circle is defined by its own specific standards as laid down by the Creator. This has been elaborated on by Herman Dooyeweerd. Though the diversity of laws the Creator arranges and maintains his creation. In the sight of the anthropological assumptions it is important to point out that Dooyeweerd's vision of society is not static. In his works he points out different factors that transform this complex of specific circles with their own laws into a dynamic unity. One of them, perhaps even the most important, is meaning. With the term purpose Dooyeweerd refers to the religious root and the divine origin of all being. Our total reality refers to that Origin and is related to it, including us human beings. Especially the latter refers to the 'Augustinian moment' in Dooyeweerd's thinking. Chaplin, Jonathan, 'Dooyeweerd's notion of social structural principles', *Philosophia Reformata* 60, 1995, pp. 16-36.
59 | Balkenende, Jan Peter, 'Solid values for a better future', Lecture on the occasion of the receiving of the Abraham Kuyperprize', 2004.

5 | **Our Perfect Right!**

5. Our Perfect Right!

What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. We were brought up on this principle of equality : if she may do it, I may do it too! 'Your child has a strong sense of justice', says the teacher at the parents' evening. But what sort of justice? Try to explain to the same child the biblical story of 'the labourers in the vineyard' from Matthew 20. Here at the end of the day the day labourers, who have been picking grapes all day long under the burning sun, receive the same reward as the labourers who only lent a hand in the late afternoon. Is this not absolutely unfair? *Undeserved*? Equality and justice are related. But what is equality and what is justice?

'Equality' is intrinsic to the modern conception of dignity. Just as dignity terms such as equality, equivalence and non-discrimination also have a strong rhetorical function in the political debate.

Equality is an important political issue. The principle of equality was the driving force behind the post-war welfare state, as we already stated in chapter 3. Equality was mainly associated with emancipation. Nowadays, in a society as radically pluralistic as ours, equality mainly refers to 'non-discrimination' and equal treatment. How often do we not summarize situations and developments that we find undesirable as 'unequal treatment'? Politicians may differ in their political interpretation of 'equality', the use of the term in itself doubtlessly already has great rhetorical power. Who takes it lying down when he is accused of 'discrimination'? Just as with 'human dignity', 'equality' automatically calls for sympathy.

This of course is not really strange. After all in chapter 3 we already saw how equality belongs to our modern concept of dignity. The past few centuries, we said, a generalization of dignity has taken place. Dignity did no longer converge with honour, that only dignitaries were entitled to, but with equal acknowledgement of each individual as a human being. The honour of the class-tied individual became 'democratized' into the universal (because 'essential' and 'embedded') dignity of mankind. More than that, dignity not only became democratized, but generalization itself became part of our definition of dignity. Thus types of equal acknowledgement became essential for our modern democratic society: equal acknowledgement with regard to gender, sexual disposition, and philosophy of life.

Again let us emphasize that this democratic principle of equality - the equality of all people as human beings – is not self-evident, but an attainment with a long and painful history. If you study for instance the background of the American Declaration of Independence ('all men are created equal') and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen ('Men are born and remain free and equal in rights'), you feel the emotional tension of the principle of equality. 'Never again' we will submit to the yoke of suppression and patronization by the nobility or the church. 'Never again' shall anyone be privileged over another because of his birth and ancestry.

This pursuit is still dominating the identity of today's Western democracies. Often it is said that Western societies should have no 'soul' or that this soul would only consist of market and money. This is much too cynical. Or too short-sighted. That soul is typified by visions of a manipulable, better world, definitely also visions of the equality of all people. The unmakable manipulability of dignity of which we spoke in chapter 3 has become painfully clear in the fiasco of the great historical experiments regarding equality (for instance the communistic regimes). For many the heaven of equality on earth appeared to be a hell. To put it in the classic words from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others'.[60] This does not mean that the Western society is not still permeated by the ideal of equality.

Of course it is the question how we translate this into political ideals. In our political debate this mostly translates into a strong or less strong *claim* to *equal rights*. In this chapter we will maintain that this claim is insufficient for a humane society and may even work counter productively. First we will investigate the elasticity of our concept of equality. The opinions vary from a very minimalistic freedom of choice to the absolute equality ideal of 'equal results'. In between we find the most common vision, that of 'equal opportunities'. Here also many varieties exist. What opportunities are involved and what differences – what blocking of opportunities – is unfair and should be compensated? This is mainly a question of our 'point of comparison'. We do not consider every difference as a problem (on the contrary). When do differences become 'inequality'? When 'injustice'? Our concept of justice is, as said before, mainly a perception of equal rights, of 'equal sauce for both goose and gander'. We will demonstrate the shortcomings, because who we are is not determined by our equality, but *in and by our differences*. The point of comparison here is the *claim* on us all to deploy the diversity of our talents. We will come back to this in the next chapter ('Becoming Who You Are!'). Here we will primarily emphasize the coherence with justice. This would be the broad biblical concept of justice *tsedaka*, in which rightfulness and compassion come together. Justice is not an equal right to 'get', but an equal right to 'give'.

The political discussion on equality takes place between two extremities: the minimal perception of equality, equal right of choice, and the maximal, absolute equality as objective.

Equality appears to be an elastic concept. It may be seen as limited, but also as broad. A very limited idea is the liberal ideal of equality as the equal right of all people to freedom (of choice). The advocates of this concept, for instance, refer to

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60 | Orwell, George, *Animal farm*, Harlow 1996, p. 133.

John Locke, who is sometimes considered as the father of the classic-liberal concept of equality. Equality means 'being free of every higher power on earth' that hinders you in your free development as a human being.[61] For that matter, Locke's theories were not actually about every possible choice of every individual, but about respecting the freedom and autonomy of each individual to live up to the supra-personal universal moral, that was embedded in a divine order. We already saw this in chapter 3 about the human dignity. Obiter dictum.

The broadest possible concept of equality is equality as equal result. This is, so to speak, a reverse game of Monopoly. The starting point of each player differs, but at the end streets, houses and money need to be divided equally. Equality as an objective. It is of course the question which form of government and which powerful apparatus of government could accomplish this. We already pointed out the disastrous experiments of the 20th century.

The political discussion mostly takes place between the two extremities of equal freedom of choice and absolute equality as an objective. An obvious example is the position of women in the labour market. It has been generally accepted that we should not discriminate – i.e.: making a difference – on the grounds of gender. But does equality only mean that women should have the same opportunities as men or also that they should be 'positively discriminated' in certain male-dominated environments? This type of discussions is about a broad or narrow interpretation of equality as equal opportunities. Does this politically mean only the removal of obstructions or also the compensation of arrears? If so, to what extent? Is it only about the 'external' elements (for instance the financial situation of parents that prevents their children from going to university) or also about the 'internal elements'? Should we for instance also compensate such personal elements as talent and physical condition?

Especially in the Social Democratic approach it was emphasized that the environment (school, parents, the neighbourhood) stimulated inequality and maintained it and maybe was a greater influence than natural talent and limitations. That 'cultural' inequality could be taken away, or at least be compensated. More than that, also natural inequality could be compensated with education policy, for instance by putting together pupils of different levels as much as possible and keeping them together for as long as possible. The underlying assumption was that both cultural and natural differences in cognitive and physical talents and all kind of 'coincidences' (children could also be 'thrown back' by illness, by divorce of their parents, etcetera) could and should be set right by education.

There has been much criticism of the broad visions of equality. Apart from educational objections one could also question the portrayal of mankind. Apparently man is primarily a social being that is being determined by environmental elements. Do character traits such as perseverance not play a much stronger part?

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61 | Locke, John, *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, IV.

Or more aptly, are talent, social class and achievement in the personality of people not much more interwoven? These types of questions we will not deal with here. We are concerned about the underlying crucial question: *what differences do you normatively consider to be unequal*? What barriers have to be removed, because they are preconditions that should not make a difference? We all agree on it being undesirable if only bright people with a lot of money could arrange a good education for their children. That inequality should somehow be compensated. But to what extent? A minimal vision is that everybody at least in principle should have the same access to all education. Somewhat further goes the vision that children with a social disadvantage or physical shortcomings should be compensated. Children that are dyslectic 'deserve' extra attention, just as foreign infants with a language deficiency. Still further goes the vision that all children together should attend the same school. The crucial question with a smaller or broader interpretation of equality is what differences we find unfair (because *undeserved*). It is unfair when a dyslectic child has fewer opportunities than a child with reading difficulties. After all he is not to blame. But does this not apply to all differences between children, differences in family situations, physical conditions, character, IQ, EQ, etcetera? Where do you draw the line?

Equality is not an isolated value, but a *comparative* concept. It is always the question what our (implicit) point of comparison is.

In order to determine this, 'equality' as an isolated value is not enough. Equality is not an isolated ideal. It is a comparative concept. Herein it differs from the descriptive concepts, such as the concept of 'pregnant'. 'I am pregnant' could be an isolated statement, 'I am equal' could not. Equality in itself is an empty term. We need other conditions to fill it. What is the context in which equality is brought up, what do you compare to what and from what perspective? When difference is the opposite of equality difference and when do we talk of inequality?

Difference means polyphony, instead of monotony, variation in stead of boring uniformity. Difference is a part of life. Our reality is typified much more by difference than by equality. Difference we often gladly accept, as long as it does not become inequality. But where is the turning point? Differences could be determined empirically. Inequality supposes a point of comparison, a benchmark, a (moral) norm that we select during the evaluation. We cannot compare apples with pears, as we say. This remains to be seen. Apples and pears as fruits are incomparable, but comparable based on weight, sugar level, their time of harvest or their meaning for the painter of still-lifes. Which point of comparison do we use for human beings?

Salary is a well-known point of comparison, especially if we want to discuss the social underestimation of certain professional groups. Why does the senior executive of an energy company earn so much more than the nurse (m/f) who runs his/her legs off during the entire day? Why does the professor who can start his next publication on the Peloponnesian War in peace and quiet in the morning get paid more

on a monthly basis than the teacher who, a few blocks away, has to keep a class full of VMBO students under control? The rhetorical essence of these examples not only lies in this type of phrasing, but already in the point of comparison itself. You cannot compare people from different professional groups on the basis of their length or their favourite food, but on the basis of their salary. Why? Apparently what someone earns is an indication for social acknowledgement.

As soon as we define certain characteristics as normative, then differences become inequalities. In the choice of a point of comparison itself already lies a moral standard. Consciously or unconsciously we assume certain (social) values.

Behind all these values that consciously or unconsciously play a part, there are portrayals of mankind. Equality, as we said, has become part of our definition of being-human. In pre-modern societies it was hardly seen as problematic that some-one belonging to a high social class had more status and was bestowed more honour upon than someone from a lower class. Of course we see many and big differences be-tween people. Without those differences man would not be unique and not develop a personality. For that reason there should be diversity. Subsequently equality should not be the objective of governmental actions. On the contrary: equal treatment by the government appears to be a precondition for social room in which man could take responsibility, to live according to one's own views and to develop himself spiritu-ally, morally and emotionally. Freedom is an objective of governmental actions. This is almost a sacral issue: without that freedom man cannot live up to his destination. These are the foundations of, for instance, the Catholic social thinking. Especially because of an equal treatment by the government room is created for diversity.

However, at the same time we know: in a certain, non-empirical, metaphysical way we are all equal. But could such a general and abstract principle of equality do justice to the dignity of individual people?

The idea of fundamental equality of all people has been developed to bring justice to the world; however, we acknowledge our mutual humanity exactly in our *differences*, not in those aspects in which we, at a very abstract level, are equal

Have we defined the human scale with a general and abstract principle of equal-ity? Michael Ignatieff discusses this issue in an analysis of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, to which we already referred in chapter 3.[62] He questions the liberal-humanistic concept of equality which is self-evident and dominant in our society. King Lear wondered if he would still mean something if all his royal 'honours' – his followers, his retinue of knights – would be taken away from him. At a certain moment, disap-pointed in the love of his daughters, he wanders all alone, like a beggar, outside the town. This was not the romantic countryside, but (for instance just like in biblical

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62 | Ignatieff, Michael, *The needs of strangers*, London 1990.

parables) the wilderness outside the civilized world, a shelter for beggars and exiles. For Shakespeare this *no man's land* is the world in which pity, social obligations and habits no longer determine the human interaction. It is the world of the 'natural' man, the naked man, without 'retinue' and therefore, for Shakespeare, without dignity and respect. Here – and only here – equality rules, but it is an equality of contempt that no man can bear. Lear, just as all the other 'scum', dependent on the charity of others for his basic necessities of life, finds: in the end a human life is as cheap as that of an animal. He can only hope that '*communal being-human*' would be reason enough for a claim of the abundance of others. The only equal, egalitarian is that claim: every human being is entitled to basic necessities of life. In this the king does not differ from the beggar. And as a matter of fact nor from animals.

For Shakespeare dignity does not lie in what people need (food, shelter, educa-tion – everything that we nowadays have recorded in constitutional rights), but in what people owe to other people. In Lear's case: a father deserves the respect of his van daughters, a king deserves a retinue (a beggar does not). One could say that this sense of honour characterizes a bygone world. After all in today's world our most fundamental political concepts of human dignity are based on the concept of equality. In Shakespeare's world – and therefore also in King Lear's perception – hu-man dignity is based on difference: on status, title, etcetera. For Shakespeare the dimensions in which people are equal – nudity, suffering, mortality – definitely were no intrinsic elements of human dignity. To treat people equally is to deny them the respect that they deserve. To treat a human being on the basis of his general human needs means to reduce him to 'pitiful equality' of his natural being. This contemp-tuous equality typifies the attitude of Lear's daughters: their father will receive no more or less than an arbitrary anonymous beggar. In this way they *dishonour* Lear, they take away his dignity.

Again, we have left behind that world. But does this also include the intrinsic problem? Is equality more than the 'pitiful equality' of the claim that we, on the basis of our being-human, can have on other people for the satisfaction of our basic necessi-ties of life? Today's humanism is milder and more generous for man than Shakespeare was. It sees more parallels between people than only the *bottom line* of basic needs. People are creatures gifted with reason, with speech, with the ability to give mean-ing to their lives, etcetera. Exactly here the problem arises, that we already touched upon in chapter 3. As soon as one interprets the definition of 'general human' people will drop out: are the heavily mentally disabled who do not comply with our image of 'reasonable' beings not human beings? Of course they are. The intrinsic dignity of a human being after all, is more than a 'construct' based on what a society considers to be essential human characteristics: human dignity is acknowledged and not made. This is why it stands out above itself. What is mankind that you make so much of them?, exclaims the poet of Psalm 8. Human dignity lies exactly in that 'looking back'. This has not crossed out all concrete and individual characteristics and living condi-tions. On the contrary: exactly in those characteristics man gets an identity. If not,

being-human would become such a general concept that nothing much would be left except for that claim of the naked beggar Lear for basic necessities of life.

According to Ignatieff the crux of *King Lear* lies in the fact that in the real, concrete life of human beings no difference can be made between generally human and specifically individual. Lear not only needs clothes, a bed an food, but the clothes, the bed and the food which he is entitled to on the basis of his rank, his merits, his history. His daughters only accept that which he claims as a poor, naked animal and deny him what he is entitled to as a father and a king. Ignatieff continues the line to our time and refers to one of the most harrowing examples in our history: the concentration camps in which people were stripped of their 'retinue': clothes, suitcases, rings, glasses, hair, clothing, in short of everything that made them who they were. They were reduced to equal unities of the naked being-human. Only one claim remains in that situation, Lear's claim: because they are human they deserve to live. But, says Ignatieff with Lear, that is in the end the weakest claim that people can have on each other, a claim on anybody at random and therefore on no one.

When a Jew could no longer appeal to his fellow German as a neighbour, as a friend, as a relation, as a partner, as a fellow Jew even, when at the end, naked at the barbed wire, he could only appeal to the man with the whip as a fellow human being, then it was more than too late. When men confront each other as men, as abstract universals, one with power, the other with none, then man is certain to behave as a wolf to his own kind.[63]

This provides us with an interpretation of the issue of a policy of equality. To bring justice to the world, even in *no man's land*, the concept of the fundamental equality of all human beings has been developed (this obtained a global exposure in the universal declaration of the human rights). However, we particularly recognize our mutual humanity in our differences, in our individuality, in our history. Our identity does not lie in our *universality*, but in our *particularity*. We derive our dignity especially from our difference from others, from what makes us special. But if treating people 'unequally' is the only way to treat them respectfully, to respect them in the human beings they are, then what inequalities are justifiable?

The question for equality should not primarily be answered from the individual and its rights, but from an intrinsic vision of the fair society. In the biblical concept of justice rightfulness and mercy converge.

Here, of course, we cannot give a detailed answer to the question which inequalities are and which are not fair . Anyway there is no general answer to this question. The

answer depends on the concrete situation in which this question arises. However, we can say something about the perspective from which one looks for answers. A *perspective* in which one does justice to differences without legitimizing or promoting inequalities. In the liberal humanism as described above, equality ultimately is in the right of basic necessities of life of every human being. In a democratic constitutional state we cannot go back behind that claim, but from a Christian Democratic point of view it is not absolute. This is connected with the portrayal of mankind which we described in the previous chapters: man as an image of God. Fundamental is the royal appeal that is made of every human being. In the end equality is not based on the claim that the individual may have on the collective, but the other way around, on the claim that is done on the individual. It is not about the equality of the 'naked' human beings, who, at an abstract, non-empirical, metaphysical level are equal, but about the equality of concrete human beings in their concrete and therefore very different living conditions, with their very different possibilities and talents. *The egalitarian is in the vocation, the claim made on every concrete human being with its concrete talents in its concrete situation.* Not the coincidental circumstances, the more or less coincidental characteristics of people, their intelligence, their looks, social abilities and the like are determining for being-human, but the question how people deal with those matters. This is decisive: in ethics in principle all human beings are equal. To what extent this is related to justice becomes clear when go back for a moment to the sources for the portrayal of mankind in Genesis 1.

Equality, we said, converges with justice. The biblical image of justice, or to be more precise: of the fair government, is expressed in Psalm 72, the 'king psalm' to which we already referred in chapter 4. 'Give the king thy judgements, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgement.' This is a prayer for a righteous king. 'He shall come down like rain upon the bare fields: as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.' In chapter 4 we already described the profile of this righteous king. He does 'justice to the weak', offers 'salvation […] to the poor', liberates 'who is weak and has no helper' (by the way not by offering an as optimal as possible package of social services, but by 'slaying the oppressor'). One could say that justice does not requires a neutral government that guarantees the freedom of each individual, but a stately right in which the divine right is being expressed.

Justice surpasses 'your perfect right'. In the Old testament there is no other concept that has such a central meaning for all human objectives of life as the Hebrew concept of *tsedaka*, that we could translate as 'justice'.[64] It is the standard for the relation between men and God, men amongst each other and also between men and nature. Without any doubt '*tsedaka* could be called the highest value of life,

63 | Ignatieff, Michael, *The needs of strangers*, London 1990, p. 52.

64 | At least according to Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, München 1957, p. 382.

the foundation of all life, all good'.[65] The focal point of statements on justice was the kingship. As head of his people the king guaranteed the right relations between God, men and nature. A just king means peace and prosperity, that will shall 'flourish like grass on the earth'. Also nature is involved in it: 'may the fruits of its trees flourish like the forests of the Lebanon'.

This broad concept of justice differs fundamentally from the modern concept. It is an all-embracing concept that does not start from the individual and its rights, but places the *individual in a larger context*. The vision of the good, fair life is not based on the absolute priority of freedom. With many contemporary thinkers democratic freedom fundamentally precedes justice. If the individual citizens are free and equal, they subsequently can decide themselves what they consider to be the good and fair life. In Psalm 72 it is exactly the other way around. The king can only be just if he knows the good life. Only then can he give everyone what is his or hers.

This is not: 'everyone his/her share, measured by merit', but an assignment to care for one's fellow men.[66] The other person should be able to get what he is entitled to, so that he may be judged as God intended it. An example we see for instance in Job 29:14-17:

> I put on righteousness and it clothed me,
> My just dealing was like a robe and a turban.
> I was eyes for the blind,
> And feet for the lame.
> I was a father to the needy,
> I defended the case of persons I did not know.
> I broke the jaws of the wicked
> And made him drop his prey from his teeth.

In the last lines we also see the harsh sides of the concept of justice. *Tsedaka* does not mean paternalism or patronizing, justice in the sense that people will not be obstructed in their possibilities in life. This surpasses charity and also rightfulness. Or put more aptly, tsedaka *includes both* and in addition focuses on human freedom: a freedom of development of the 'self', precisely by taking responsibility for each other.

Here we are faced with one of the most fundamental political dilemmas: that between rightfulness and mercy. It is true that *justitia* and *caritas* are often mentioned together (for instance the blazon of Amsterdam: *just, merciful, perseverant*), but are difficult to accomplish simultaneously. In addition for us *caritas* (charity) has also got a negative connotation. In one of the episodes of the popular American comedy

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65 | Ibid., p. 382.
66 | There lies the difference from the ancient philosophy and the ancient theories of law (Aristotle in particular), in which we indeed see a similar relation between justice and the good (a just distribution and correction is only possible from a vision of the good society), but still from the *suum cuique*, 'everyone his due'.

Friends the six friends want to go to a concert together. Three of them however, could not afford it. When the other three reached somewhat deeper into their purses and also paid for the tickets for their less well off friends, they cannot accept it: 'It sounds too much as...as...as...charity'. That allergy for charity is understandable. Patronizing and paternalism affect one's sense of dignity. After all we can no longer be dependent on charity. The switch from yesteryear's 'bread of charity' to 'right' we justifiably consider an attainment. At the same the adage 'rules are rules' does not work either. In the end such straightness always proves to undermine the human dignity.

The biblical Hebrew knows more words for 'justice'. In the royal psalm, Psalm 72, there are two: *misjpat* and *tsedaka*.

> Give, O God, thy judgements (misjpat) to the king,
> Thy righteousness (tsedaka) to the king's son.
> May he rule thy people fairly (tsedek),
> Thy poor with judgement (misjpat).

'Misjpat' above all means maintenance of law, the impartial execution of laws, and thus letting the guilty be punished and the innocent be protected. Mind you, here also it is not about rationalistic, 'neutral' rules of law, but about a right that has been derived from an ideal of good life and living together (the 'pact' between God and men). *Tsedaka* is broader. It is about the 'implementation' of misjpat. It is not so much a *procedural*, but a *substantial* concept. It is about 'salvation-bringing' righteousness. *Not only the strict righteousness of 'rules are rules' is leading here, but also mercy.* This seems a contradiction. Imagine you give somebody a certain amount of money. When he is entitled to it, then it is a matter of righteousness. If he is not entitled to it, then it is an act of charity. An act of charity cannot be righteous and a righteous act could not be described as charity.[67] The fact that *tsedaka* still contains both elements, can only be understood from the creation theology that was brought up in chapter 4 with the description of the portrayal of mankind.

It is not only about what someone strictly needs to survive (as also King Lear experienced), but also about what people are entitled to. It was different with Lear, because here this has nothing to do with status, but with us all being 'an image of God'. As we said in chapter 4, we are representatives of God on earth. This does not make us the owners of the earth. The central biblical thought is the idea that the earth is God's creation and therefore his property. We human beings manage the earth for God. We are his stewards, to use a well-loved Christian Democratic term. If it would be a matter of absolute property, then there would be a difference between righteousness (what the other must give) and charity (what the others could give out of sympathy, pity or for whatever other reason). Therefore the former is legally

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67 | Sacks, Jonathan, *Dignity of Difference. How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, 2002.

enforceable, the latter a moral obligation at the most. However, because we are not the owners of our property, but 'only' stewards, we are bound to the conditions God set for this stewardship. One of them – maybe the most important one – is that we share with people in need. What would have been charity in other legal systems, is a strict legal demand in Jewish law. Charity could be humiliating for the receiver. It makes people dependent and could strengthen the negative spiral instead of breaking it. In *tsedaka* charity is no violation of our dignity as a person, no undermining of our self-respect. Jonathan Sacks states: 'The greatest act of *tsedaka* therefore is the act that enables individuals to become self-supporting. The highest form of help is the help that enables people to continue without that help.'[68] He adds a remarkable observation. In Jewish law it is stated that a person dependent on receiving *tsedaka*-gifts should also be able to give *tsedaka*-gifts himself. In other words, people are entitled to sufficient means so that they in their turn could also give to others. Sacks writes: '[...] the rabbis understood that giving is an essential part of the human dignity is'. Also the apostle Paul refers to it in Acts 20:35: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

In the Bible the vision of justice is directly translated into politics. In our political reality this is more problematic. At least two standards may be derived from the concept of *tsedaka*. Firstly, justice means that everybody should have the opportunity for self-development (this has a primarily strong social dimension, as we will see in the next chapter). Secondly, justice means that nobody should end up in a situation in which he can only receive from others. A humane society is not a society in which everybody is at least at a minimum level of existence, but in which everyone has the means to be able to give (the encyclical *Laborem exercens* refers to the right of participation)[69]. Thus the perspective is not a right to receive, but a right to give. In the Bible it is the king who is called to account for the realization of *tsedaka*. He is not blindfolded, like the symbol of Justice, but biased in favour of the weak. A just king stands up for the weak, for those that have no voice. This image of justice assumes a certain political-religious framework. Divine justice is the point of reference for everybody. Within this context the prophet may call to account the king by referring to the divine justice. Again, how could this biblical concept of justice be transferred into our situation?

With this question we encounter a well-known and often discussed political-philosophical issue: could we, in a secular, pluralistic society, assume a presupposed concept of justice? Does that society not ask for the priority of democracy over every concept of the good and just life? The advocates of the 'priority of the democracy' point out the diversity of opinions of justice and the good life and they are apprehensive of a paternalistic government that will prescribe us citizens what would be the good life for us (even if this is done with the best of intentions, such as for

68 | Ibid.
69 | Cp. *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, 14.

instance the emancipation of neglected groups). You could also ask the question if we should and could not introduce something so fundamental as social justice in the political debate. If not, are we then not at risk to exclude those that do not have the social position and the possibilities to defend their interests adequately? In short, how does democracy relate to a presupposed, traditional, ideological concept of the good?

In chapter 2 we already pointed out the danger of a too formalistic idea of democracy and of the secular prejudice that is embedded in it (as if 'the' democracy exists, apart from the ideologically coloured vision of it). The alleged neutrality is no neutrality, but the dominance of a liberal position that excludes other ideological re-orientations of democracy. We called it cultural self-mutilation and we advocated reconsideration of the several ideological traditions from which the core values of our modern democracy derive. Equality for instance. The democratic ideal of equality has, as we stated in previous chapters, biblical sources. It even goes back to Genesis 1, in which man is depicted as an 'image of God'.

This portrayal of mankind, as we said, is a democratizing royal-idea in ancient Israel, the ideal of Psalm 72. In chapter 4 we saw how the first chapters of Genesis were born out of a cross-pollination of several traditions in the times of the Babylonian exile. That exile was a time of re-orientation. The old social and religious structures that had determined the identity of the Jewish people, lost their validity in the rivers of Babylon. The prayer for a righteous king of Psalm 72 should be read in a context of religious and social unity, in which the king could be called to account for his responsibility to execute the divine right. The divine justification of the social relations and the right is undermined in the pluralistic Babylon, that is ruled by an authority that does not accept this divine authority. One of the most important developments in the (religious) identity of the Jewish people in exile lies exactly in that democratization of the old royal-idea. What once was only attributed to the king, being the royal responsibility of right and justice, now becomes something of all men. The principle of equality of Genesis 1 is not a formal equality before the law, but an equality in the royal appeal made to every single individual. The people are no longer situated as praying around the king, who as the arbitrating authority between the divine and the earthly is supposed to bring peace and justice, but *every human being itself is called to account*. This even applies to the most vulnerable. They also should be facilitated to … give! After all here lies the ultimate dignity of mankind.

Politics that call upon this biblical portrayal of mankind should give room to people to answer to the appeal of royal responsibility that is made to them. Here 'to give room' contains more than just taking away obstructions that limit the choice of freedom of people. And the appeal of responsibility is something different than the ability to live independently of the individual citizen. To give room for responsibility means to create conditions in which every human being could respond to the appeal that is made to him (in the Christian Democratic vision of government and society this is expressed in the phrase 'public justice'). This means: an appeal to the talents

of people (this differs from as much individual freedom to develop myself as much and as versatile as possible; in the next chapter we will come back to this).

This change of perspective touches on the essence of the Christian Democratic vision of equality and justice. The biblical concept of justice as we outlined it, is also behind the biblical story of the 'labourers in the vineyard', in which the labourers, who had been summoned in last instance, receive the same payment as those that had been there from the beginning.

Are you being treated unfairly if I live up to my promise? The owner of the vineyard constantly returns to the market to summon more labourers. In other words, to call upon those people that are on the sidelines and had been ignored the first time. First the strongest shoulders were called upon (and, according to the political *one-liner*, they have to carry the heaviest loads). The vulnerable people were left, but the owner keeps returning to the market until also the last ones have their job. 'When, at the end of the day he again returned to the market he found a group of labourers that were still there. He asked them: "Why are you standing here the entire day without work?" "Nobody wanted to employ us," they answered. He said to them: "Go ye also into the vineyard."' (Mat. 20: 6-7).

In the end the principle of justice is not in the claim of the individual of the collective, but in the appreciation and acknowledgement of contributions of all men. Equality with justice is more than getting your perfect right, more than 'what is sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander'. Above all equality is the right of us all to answer to everything that appeals to us. This is different for everybody, but *in that appeal we are all exactly equal*. This is 'our perfect right'.

That royal responsibility also implies to give the other person his due. This comprises of a system of social services to which people are entitled and can appeal to 'with one's head held high in the air'. But there is more. The disabled person is entitled to an allowance, but should he not benefit more if opportunities would be created within which he could bear social responsibility? The senior neighbour from across the street is entitled to a social worker to come by. But should she not come 'more to her perfect right' if in one way or another she could contribute to the community? Please keep in mind that this question is not being raised from an economical perspective (the 'folding chair economy' – we make an appeal to people if this economically sensible). The starting point is the humanization of men. 'Becoming who you are.' We will elaborate on this in the next chapter.

6 | **Becoming Who You Are!**

6. Becoming Who You Are!

One night Tertuliano Máximo Afonso, the history teacher in José Saramago's book *The Double*[70], collapses into an endless identity crisis. In a worthless B-film discovers an actor who is almost his look-alike. More than that, he really is identical in everything. The same eyes, the same nose, the same voice, the same build. He broke out in a cold sweat. How could this be? Who is this man? Are we really identical in everything? And if so, am I the original or just the copy?

Saramago suggests that nowadays this question is characteristic of Western individuals. We are being governed by the desire to be unique. Or more aptly, by the fear of being interchangeable. That suggestion could of course easily be illustrated by abundantly clear, extreme examples. Just take one single look at the auditions of the talent scouting show *Pop Idol (Idols)* and immediately one is inclined to agree with Saramago. Participants – sometimes desperately, sometimes annoyingly self-confident – try to reach stardom and the expert jury judges within two minutes if someone has 'personality' or is no more than a 'singing housewife'. The *X-factor* – either you have it or not. And you if you do not have it, your entire world collapses in front of the merciless camera. The worrying element of Saramago's book however, is that his main character is not a *would be* pop idol, but an average middle-class man with a responsible job who grades papers at night and before going to sleep reads a chapter from his book on ancient Mesopotamian civilizations. Also as a history teacher Tertuliano Máximo Afonso knows, better than anyone else, that we have been determined by our history; the history of the land, the people and the world, but also by our personal history. Our history and course of life resemble those of others, but at the same time they are unique and anyhow never exchangeable. Nevertheless the discovery of the B-film actor, who only in his outward appearance is his copy, undermines his self-esteem.

The look-alike story becomes even more complicated. When Tertuliano eventually succeeds in getting hold of his spitting image. When they meet it turns out that he is thirty-one minutes younger and therefore the replica. The original, the actor in this case, unquestioningly assumes that they both will reach the same age and looks ahead at it: 'For thirty-one minutes the replica will take the place of the original and become an original himself. I hope for you that you will intensively experience those thirty-one minutes of personal, complete and exclusive identity, because as of now these will be your only ones.' This gives the actor an unknown position of power. In the role of Tertuliano he even goes away for the weekend with Tertuliano's girlfriend. Actor and girlfriend die in a car crash. This offers Tertuliano, who had been momentarily robbed of his identity, the opportunity to return once and for all to his

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70 | Saramago, José, *The Double*, Harcourt 2004.

own life, to say that it all had been a misunderstanding, an unfortunate concurrence of circumstances. He does not do so. He chooses to let everybody think that he himself has died (his mother is the only one who cannot be fooled, for whom he cannot be interchangeable …) and takes over the life of the B-film-actor. He now consciously becomes what he feared to be: a copy, a copy of an actor in bad films. A fatal choice. As soon as he has somewhat settled himself in the spacious house of the actor, the phone rings and somebody announces himself in an identical voice claiming to be his double…

With the help of the double motive Saramago reveals a strange paradox: in all efforts to be unique we resemble one another more than ever. It is indeed in our search for our unique identity that we become what we really fear: interchangeable. Whether or not you share his gloomy social criticism, Saramago's parable evokes a crucial question: to what extent does the praised and reviled 'modern' individual' really exist.

The last decennia the social debate strongly leaned on the assumption that the autonomous individual should have the choice of freedom to design its own life and to develop itself – its unique self. The 'myth of self-development' seemed sacro-sanct, also in political The Hague, and affected many policy areas: from welfare to education and art grants. If we question this, then it is not from an anti-individualistic sentiment. Also in the Christian Democratic tradition the uniqueness of the human being is central. This is a central biblical thought. Throughout the entire Bible people are addressed in their concrete situations, called by their names, from Adam to Zacheus and from Abraham to Paul. Therefore 'I' should not be talked about less, but better.

In this chapter we will make a stand against the *become-who-you-are* ideology in our culture, an inheritance of the modernity and The Romanticism in particular. 'Yourself' you are not without your history and the relations in which you are woven, but in and by that history and those relations. To clarify things, who we are also does not completely converge with it. We are free individuals. However, that freedom does not mean that we can be obtained separately and could and should do everything that we want, but the ability to rise above ourselves in the relations in which we stand and to shape our lives within it. Freedom, responsibility and uniqueness, as we will conclude, are the backsides of one single pyramid.

In our search for our 'unique self', in our tendency to overrate originality, we appear to be children of the Romanticism (much more than of the Enlightenment, which is often stated in politics)

Where does this urge for 'being unique' come from? Always and everywhere people have asked the question about themselves (according to Saramago already 'since that day in the distant past that for the first time a human face recognized itself in the smooth surface of a pool and thought, That's me'). But, in the light of the history of mankind, that fixation on the unique self seems a rather recent phenomenon.

This report does not offer room for a psychogram of us modern people, or for an analysis of the many attempts to it. For that matter it is not only material for psychologists, but also for historians, sociologists, philosophers and theologians. To at least understand ourselves to some extent, we should understand the spirit of the times that has a grip on us. We will at least make a cautious effort.

It is at least clear that, in particular concerning the ideal of self-development, we are more the children of the nineteenth-century Romanticism, with its emphasis on perception, identity and authenticity, than of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment with its rationalism, universality and reason. Therefore it is remarkable that in the public debate the reference to the Enlightenment (including a capital and an exclamation mark) plays such a dominant part. The Enlightenment would be a phase that the secularized Westerners had already achieved, but that religious people, who still dwell in the Dark Ages, yet have to 'experience'. When we look at the popular interpretations of this command to Enlightenment – I can be who I am, think what I want and say what I think – then it rather seems to be 'Romanticism in an Enlightenment disguise'.

Sometimes it seems that the more forceful we spoke about the 'I' during the last few centuries, the less secure we became of our 'I'. In previous chapters we have already pointed out how we gradually broke loose from traditional relations. A long time our identity had been determined by our place in the social order. Of course there had been a perception of an 'I', a 'self', but that had been woven into the concrete relations, into the community, into the social, religious and cosmic order. As an 'I' we were a part of larger entity and that 'entity' did not exist without understanding the larger entity. In fact the Enlightenment was no more or less than the slogan of the rising citizenry that, in particular in Germany, resisted against the nobility and, in particular in France against the influence of a supreme church. The emancipation of the citizen from the authority of church and nobility resulted philosophically in the well-known definition of Immanuel Kant: 'man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity'. For Kant this immaturity was mainly a matter of lack of courage. Therefore he added: *sapere aude*, or: dare to know.[71] The Enlightenment was especially a movement of thought, a process of development, and certainly no phase that we would reach after in time, or that we would have 'completed' at a certain moment. Kant would never have arrogated this to himself and he probably would have been appalled by the shallowness of people who, in the name of the Enlightenment, defended the 'freedom of speech' as 'to have the right to say what one thinks'. The Enlightenment certainly meant: being oneself, not being muzzled by whatever authority. But with Kant and other Enlightenment philosophers, the 'oneself' was defined in universal phrases. We already saw this in chapter 3. Actually there was no 'individualization' yet at that time. The individual was called to account for his responsibility. Being 'oneself' meant: complying with the universal

law that every reasonable human being could be familiar with. Moral should not be enforced upon people by authorized or non-authorized authorities, but be appropriated by themselves. The real enlightened individual, in short, is the autonomous master of his emotions and natural tendencies, who follows rationally the universal moral law and thus aspires to moral completion.

The 19th century Romanticism is partly a reaction to the Enlightenment, in particular to the portrayal of mankind as well. The shift from the Enlightenment to the Romanticism begins when in the course of the 18th century the idea arises amongst philosophers – Jean-Jacques Rousseau in particular – that human beings are creatures with a 'moral sense', an intuition for what is good and what is evil.[72] Knowing good and evil is not only a matter of rational assessment, but also a matter of listening to our feelings. The moral has a voice in our inner self. That voice, according to Rousseau, is only too often outvoted by our – often socially encouraged – passions that are playing up because of our dependency on other people, in particular by our pride. He was concerned about the recovery of the authentic moral contact with ourselves, making us moral beings. Actually still the ideal of the Enlightenment, but with greater emphasis on our inner 'feeling' as the source of that moral.

The main point of this new concept gradually started to shift in the course of time. Whereas initially the 'inner voice' was particularly important because it told us what was the right thing to do, now gradually this contact with our inner self gets an independent and moral meaning of its own. It becomes something that we have to achieve in order to become true and perfect people. Especially the 18th century German philosopher Herder has had a great influence on the concept of this ideal: every human being has an original way of *being-human*, a standard of his own that he has to look for. According to Charles Taylor and many others it is this version that has 'embedded itself deeply in the modern consciousness'. There is a special way of *being-human* and that is *'my'* way. My task, it is my vocation to live my life in that way. Being loyal to oneself thus gets a new meaning: if I do not become what I am deep within myself, then I fail in what *being-human* means for me personally. This ideal was strengthened by the principle of *originality*. I am absolutely unique. I cannot only not shape my life according to the demands from outside – for that matter I cannot even find a model outside myself, no example which I could follow to come to myself. This I can only find within myself. It does not really matter what I am, as long as I can be it in my own way. The idea of being a copy of other people is not seldom a spectre of the modern man.

For that matter the human scale has become more and more individualized. On the one hand we stated that the Romanticism was above all a reaction to the Enlightenment. The puritan, ascetic, rationalistic ideal of mankind was considered to be too limited and to be aiming too high. Man is driven by passions, has all sorts of dark sides and is much less free from external influences than the sovereign indi-

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71 | It concerns the first paragraph of: Kant, Immanuel, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?' *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (1784) December, 481-494.

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72 | Taylor, Charles, *The ethics of authenticity*, Cambridge, MA [etc.] 1991, pp. 46 vv.

vidual of the Enlightenment. Even if we have to point out that the unaimed and evil passions were mainly seen as the social product of an artificial, unnatural society. Back to nature and to one's inner self is the remedial advice, in that case. Partly for this reason the Romanticism was the era of adventurers and bohemians, of personal experience and back to nature, of impulsiveness, creativity and imagination, of the big longing and suffering of life, *Weltschmerz*.

On the other hand the individual subject obtains more overtones. A new self-consciousness arises: the expression of the unique self. It is no longer really the universal moral, the general human aspect, that matters anymore, but the unique, the particularity of human beings, cultures and nations, an individualized identity, that is specifically mine and that I discover in myself. Becoming who you are is not complying with the general ideal of reasonable moral creatures, but the discovery and development of who you really are, deep inside. Thus one derives one's identity from one's own uniqueness and the ability to look for that uniqueness and to realize it in a life as authentically as possible. This conception of identity goes hand in hand with the ideal of 'being honest to oneself', to 'your own way of being'. Here fits the ideal of the genius who must be original and only too often is misunderstood. *Origi-nalitätswut,* as Kierkegaard calls it in his dissertation. It is about a self-dramatizing that still affects our lives.

We observe different 'Romantic' escapes from reality, retreating movements into a nostalgic past, into an ideal future or into our true self.

In chapter 1 we pointed out a remarkable development. Research indicates that we are not satisfied with the world around us, but remarkably satisfied with the quality of our own life. People seem to withdraw into relations that still are surveyable: the family, the circle of friends. That domain is well-organized, safe and familiar. Although understandable, that development also has its worrisome ramifications. Apparently the circumstances ask for an escape from reality, into ourselves, into the community, into a self-created past or into the illusion of the simple, real life. A romantic escape. The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann attributed this to an increasing 'insimultaneity' of our consciousness. According to him our consciousness no longer matches the actual relation in which we live (and in which we experience a lack of 'humanity'). Technological developments go too fast, geopolitical relations outgrow us, mass media dish up more than we can chew. It is a 'survival strategy' to believe that the (public) life that we live now, is not the real life. Moltmann distinguished three types of this insimultaneity: social romanticism, inner emigration and the utopian consciousness.[73] The utopian thinking, which projects the real life in a golden future, a future ideal state, flourished in the seventies, when Moltmann wrote this. By now it seemed to have faded away quietly, but for instance Hans

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73 | Moltmann, Jürgen, *Man: Christian anthropology in the conflicts of the present*, Philadelphia 1974, pp. 53-62.

Achterhuis, who had already buried the utopian thinking, poses it to be alive and kicking.[74] Also to two other types still seem to be vital.

'Social romanticism' refers to the trend that our consciousness lags behind the developments of the economical, social and political relations. This consciousness cultivates the memory of times gone by and idealizes them into golden times: the good old days, when everything was neatly organized, when there was solidarity, when law and order ruled and the authorities still had authority. This undercurrent has characterized the modern industrial society from the very beginning: the true, the total, the harmonic man, that man used to be, has degraded into a the man in the crowd; the good life that once existed has degraded into the hung up life that we now live. Social romanticism is the survival strategy of the retreat.

An example of this is nostalgia. We seem to cherish a communal homesickness for the alleged cosiness of yesteryear. We romanticize the Saturday evening feeling, the feeling of 'those were the days'. In the cinemas we saw the pleasant *remakes* of family films, that turned our lives into a sweet candy floss. We rather ruminate on the old things, are satisfied with the second-hand things, than that we rejoin the battle – a battle that seems to be lost in advance.

The romantic escape backwards makes the past – when all was still original, unspoilt and good – into a standard for the present. It nourishes a conservative reaction against the destruction, against the decadence, in which people sometimes fall back on the 'original' points of anchorage: the church, the family, the blood relationships, the mother country. In this perspective we could perhaps place the increased interest in our past, the re-experience of the 'national identity' the search for a stronger feeling of solidarity. There is also the longing for the 'simple' harmonious, real life. For instance the television shows in which people in their thirties get out of their well-paid life to realize their dream: a biological hotel in southern France, an olive farm in Tuscany. With millions of people – who watch the process with a mixture of envy (that is what I want too!) and malicious delight (often it appears to be one big disaster) – a nostalgia slumbers for the original life that most of us have never experienced – the simple farmer's life, the life in the country.

Social romanticism is a paradox. People long for the 'green grass of yesteryear's home', for the village with solidarity and Mr Policeman was not fooled by anyone, but where nobody wanted back the social control of those earlier days, and the moral tyranny of the old institutions (after all one should be able to say what one thinks).

Whereas 'social romanticism' is an escape backwards, 'inner migration' is an escape inwards. One withdraws oneself from one's concrete life, into oneself. Your relations, the commitments that you have entered upon, your life as it has turned out – this is all relative. It is not your real 'I'. The point perhaps is not to what extent

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74 | Achterhuis, Hans, 'Violent Utopias', *Peace Review*, 14, no. 2, 2002, pp. 157-164.

you 'should be somebody', but that we have developed an idea of a 'self' that may be compared to a 'black box', separate from the rest. Is 'the other' in our 'I' not always included? We are only 'ourselves' in relations. We live in a certain society and in a certain culture, we have a certain relation with the people with whom we have grown up and with the people with whom we associated. Those relations have formed us. Sometimes also deformed. Anyway, those relations have made us to who we 'ourselves' are. Often one is under the impression that in our culture your 'true self' is almost separate from concrete situations and the relations in which you are tied up. There are enormous amounts of people, in all types of self-help courses and meditation trainings, looking for their 'pure' self, as if that would be something to dig up from underneath the debris of every day's life?

To prevent misunderstandings: of course it could be important to break through one's own masks and façades and through the identities that others force upon you. You do not converge with the one you have become. A human being is more than the total of all his external successes and failures. It becomes risky if the 'self' becomes romantically disengaged from the human being one has become. A certain portrayal of mankind is behind this all: the outward appearances, the parts that I play, those relations, that is not me, not my real self. That is behind it, deep inside me. The biggest problem is the suggestion that follows from it, namely that the relation between 'become yourself' and 'find happiness'. Self-development becomes a welfare doctrine, wrote the psychologist H.C.J. Duijker already in the late seventies.[75] A welfare doctrine that also affects politics.

The welfare doctrine of the self-development is, also politically speaking, still very much alive. That welfare doctrine assumes a *portrayal of mankind* that sees the individual and his development separate from the relations in which people are being tied up.

The social and political repercussions of the welfare doctrine we especially observe from the sixties. That decennium is typified by a revival of the 'romantic order'. Against the background of on the one hand the lower middle class and on the other hand the atmosphere of prosperity, of science, of freedom that started casting ahead its shadows, that revival is understandable. The revival of the Romanticism that followed, has determined the identity of an entire generation, the generation of 'baby-boomers', the Woodstock generation, the generation of Paris 1968. The entire romantic repertoire is being re-discovered: the primacy of the youth (many baby-boomers still profile themselves as the younger generation that resists the elder generation, that rebels against the establishment), the longing for nature, for natural simplicity, for spontaneity, for spirituality and mysticism, for escapism (drugs for instance) and for freedom, especially freedom. Also the political consciousness

is determined by it: young against old, the new against the established, frivolous against formal, free against inflexible and dogmatic.

In those years the political and social relevance was mainly determined by the relation with the Marxism, or more precise, by the idealism of the 'young Marx' that certainly catches on with the students. The core concept is *alienation*. Capitalism estranges the labourer from the result of his effort and thus from the real *being-human*. The romantic portrayal of mankind of the young Marx is the utopia of the 'complete man' who is in harmony with himself. Man is not only 'a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critically thinking human being', but a creature that can decide to do this today and that tomorrow, ''to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize dinner', if he feels like it, without ever becoming a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman or a critic.[76] In short, the ideal is the *all-round* man, free and completely himself, who can fully develop himself, who completely converges with whom he truly is. It is the social and political structures that estrange man from that really, harmonious *being-human*. They make us, as Herbert Marcuse put it, into one-dimensional beings that have to regain themselves from their alienation in order to become what they essentially are.

That emphasis on the social alienation and the search for harmony increases in the course of the seventies. It no longer is primarily about structures that estrange, but about the alienation within ourselves. Emancipation movements – especially feminism – emphasize the liberation from this self-alienation. We must discover and develop ourselves. The 'myth of the self-development', the andragogist A.J. Nijk called it. For several reasons he deliberately spoke of a myth. Firstly he saw the sacredness of the story. Do not touch it! Secondly is seems to fill a gap that arose by the loss of function of Christianity in our society. Thirdly the self-development ideology contains components from the world of mythical thinking. For instance here Nijk thought of the biological growth model behind it: actualization of what we potentially are, as an acorn that should become an oak tree. Duijker, in his strong criticism of the jargon in the world of education, also emphasized this growth model.

The dominance of thinking in terms of self-development – especially within welfare work and education, but definitely also in politics – should be mainly attributed to the popularity of the so-called 'humanistic psychology'. Especially the works of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers should be considered here. The central thought is that man has an 'essential nature' of his own, a potential that should be actualized.[77] By nature man is good. It is the circumstances that obstruct the development of his essential nature. Take for instance physical limitations, inferior education, shortage on the labour market, relations that ask too much of you, unsafety, etcetera. Those obstructions could and should be taken away by promoting political freedom, choices of the individual, or for instance of technological and medical developments.

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75 | Duijker, H.C.J., 'De ideologie der zelfontplooiing', *Pedagogische Studiën* 53, 1976, pp. 358-373.

76 | Marx, Karl, *Die Frühschriften (published by Siegfried Landshut)*, Stuttgart 1953, p. 361.
77 | Maslow, Abraham H., *Motivation and personality*, New York etc. 1970.

Maslow made the assumption of a fixed hierarchy of lower and higher needs (his well-known 'pyramid of Maslow'). It starts with food, followed by security, then solidarity and social safety, then acknowledgement and self-respect and 'finally personal growth, creative self-development and self-realization'. Only when all lower needs have been fulfilled, man is ready for self-realization. Most people never achieve that level and already get stuck on one of the lowest levels. During a study involving 3000 students Maslow himself only found one 'self-realizer'. This hardly did any harm to his theory. On the contrary, it strengthened the thought that the circumstances of most people are still so unworthy that they cannot achieve development. Therefore we must see to it that the social structures change, that people will achieve self-realization by satisfying their lower needs.

Nijk, as mentioned earlier, talked about a myth. Duijker about a welfare doctrine. After all the development ideology has its foundation in 'the pretence to be able to evaluate the quality of a human life'. That pretence cannot only lie in a certain evaluation of the human being, but also in an ideal of a good *being-human* that we should strive for. Or more aptly put, the evaluation of the human being is determined here by an *ideological vision of being-human*. But what is it? What is a good human being? That human being that has actualized his possibilities as much as possible? Which ones? The talents that already are manifest (the child that already could draw well as a toddler)? Or also the hidden talents? But how do we recognize them? Perhaps that medieval cobbler who never got the hang of his profession would have been a good system manager. Would he have been a better, because a more developed human being if there had been computers in those days? And how about anti social talents? Should the very talented swindler have the opportunity to develop himself? Of course not, but why not? Ultimately the ideology of self-development does not bring us any further than a naturalistic conception of what a good man is. It is about his natural ability. There are no external criteria. People still pretend to be able to evaluate the quality of the human life. You are more of a human being if you develop yourself more. In Maslow's vision someone's personality is characterized by the level of needs he manages to satisfy. The circumstances in which you live, the relations you are in, are only contingencies, attributes that may be useful, but more often obstruct your development. In the end this comes down to the law of the jungle. The tree that grows from the acorn needs light and space – at the expense of other trees.

One could argue that the thinking in terms of self-development, that still controlled the agenda in the days of Nijk and Duijker, by now has been overtaken by its criticism. Criticism that mainly arose because of the impossibility and derailments of this ideological thinking. In education 'self-development' by now has been replaced by the more pragmatic 'competence oriented' learning, in which it is not really the question how to develop and polish the unique self of every individual child, often still a rough diamond, but how to teach every child those skills that could help it on its way on the flexible labour market. In the meantime people also reconsider, more

critically, the financial aid to artists, now that art libraries are packed with subsidized pieces of art by potential Picassos collecting dust.

Still the thinking is very much alive, as we stated in the previous paragraph. The essence of our criticism is that the circumstances in which man lives are seen as 'co-incidences', as non-essential for who you are. It is true that they can be helpful for becoming who you are, as the theory goes, but often they are also disturbing. Anyway, the thought is that in the end your 'self' will be detached from it. We definitely do not want to claim the opposite, that man converges with his circumstances, but we are who we are in and by the web of relations in which are woven, the circumstance in which we live and work, our mental and physical condition, etcetera, *and especially by the way in which we ourselves deal with it, giving it a place in the story of our life*. By detaching our 'self' from those facts we impose upon ourselves an unrealistic self-obligation that loses sight of our social and mental boundaries.

We have always been included in communities and relations. Without a community of people I would not have come into being as an 'I'. We cannot describe our coming into being in active verbs. We *are being* begotten and born. From the very beginning has our existence been characterized by a *profound passivity*. Once the 'I' is there, then I am a son (something that cannot be without parents), or a colleague (for which I need other colleagues), or mother (something which requires children). There is no autonomous 'I' lying underneath all those relations. If you think away those relations, nothing will remain of me.

Again, this doe not mean that we converge with our relations, or that all relations should and could be comparable and equally strong. The relation with the check-out girl is different from the one with your daughter. Some relations are brief and primarily functional, others last a lifetime. But we could never make an absolute difference between functional and 'essential' relations.

Freedom starts with *self-acceptance* and is a *freedom of responsibility*. Although the circumstances in which we live determine who we are, this is also determined by the way in which we deal with those circumstances.

We cannot isolate ourselves from the web of social relations in which we exist. An 'I' as an abstract creature – detached from social relations – does not exist. We can even go one step further. Those social relations are a substantial part of our *being-human*. We already emphasized this in chapter 4, in which we discussed the portrayal of mankind from Genesis. A person is only a person to the extent in which he is in relation to others. But: should you not be a person first before you can be in a relation with others? Would you not otherwise be reduced to that relation?

That is the question of the freedom of the individual person. From a Christian Democratic perspective that freedom could not be determined 'negatively', as is the case with the liberal vision of freedom. That is: human freedom does not find

its boundaries in the personal domain (of freedom) of fellow human beings. Freedom thus becomes arbitrariness, permissiveness, endless freedom of choice, that may only be limited if the worst comes to the worst. Freedom is, as amongst others Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, the freedom of the human being that acknowledges his responsibility for justice and public order.[78] This is not an enforced responsibility, not an ability to do things independently. The essence of the concept of freedom-in-responsibility is that responsibility is an existential choice. Responsibility has to do with the meaning, the purpose of our lives. We will elaborate on this here.

Freedom starts with self-acceptance. That is to say, with the acceptance of yourself in the relations in which you are, your history, your strong points, your physical limitations, your emotions, your fears and other affects. That acceptation is something different from resignation. It has to do with the acceptance of life in all its appearances. In religious visions of mankind, especially in Christian ones, this means a liberation of man from his focus on himself, on self-realization by having to do all sorts of things, on self-acceptation by having to prove oneself continuously. Luther (and in his trail for instance Kierkegaard) pointed out how this could overload life and thus could lead to lack of self-acceptation.

With that phrasing a connection can be made with what has been written by psychologists in the course of the twentieth century on human self-justification mechanisms and on processes of self-acceptance and life-endorsement. That this is something different from resigning to your faith, we will emphasize below.

That 'acceptance of the acceptance' is also of major importance to the twentieth-century psychology. Carl Rogers for instance – together with Maslow the founder of the humanistic psychology – explicitly states that one can only accept oneself when you know that you have been accepted.[79] In particular in the populistic varieties of 'counselling' psychotherapy this soon transforms into 'everything that you do as 'you' is good because that is you'. This strongly differs from the Christian vision of the self-acceptance. Especially because of the moral dimension. Wrong choices are not being justified or argued away (because everybody makes mistakes, because it has to do with your character, etcetera). Not everything I do is good for the simple reason that I am who I am. I am accepted as a person that has the freedom to make moral choices. The 'yes' to me is not per definition a 'yes' to all my actions, but most definitely an unconditional 'yes' to me as a person. A person as part of the community, a person in relation to others, to the creation, to God. The liberating aspect therefore is not 'you may be who you are', but 'you as a person are important', 'we need you'. Man, where are you?

Therefore being yourself not only has to do with the development of your talents, but also with the situation in which you live and in which those talents are

called upon. You could want to be a master pianist, you could even have the talent for it, but in a state of war another appeal will be made to you. In such a war you could loose your right arm, and not have, unlike the concert pianist Paul Wittgenstein, someone like Maurice Ravel to compose especially for a piece of music for one hand. This does not make you a lesser man. What determines you as a human being is how you deal with your situation, with the people that cross your path, with your own feelings and fears. See for example the Sonja character in the novel *Crime and Punishment* by Dostojevski. 'What strikes is that Sonja does not loose her faith, does not besmirch the world, nor becomes cynical or low-spirited, but on the contrary fully accepts – also in regard of his background – the man behind the evil (Raskolnikov), in order from this point of view to keep sight of the higher plan, of the good thing in the reality, also morally speaking. Evil remains evil, but is not judged heartlessly, especially not because in the end God does not judge us in that way, but in the Gospels he encounters us with mercy. Here acknowledgement is at the same time, or more aptly put, intends per se to be elevation'. This is something different from resignation. It has to do with taking and getting responsibility, responsibility as a 'respons' that appeals to the essence of your *being-human*: that you are a responding creature.

This concept has been strongly elaborated on in the so-called logo therapy of the Jewish psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who, in his ideological founding of his theory, closely connected to the portrayal of mankind in Genesis.[80]

The logo therapist together with his patient looks for hidden logos, that is: the meaning of his existence. That meaning of the human being, according to Frankl, lies outside himself, outside his psychological and physical definition, in the acknowledgement that he is being addressed. Self-realization (and happiness) therefore, is never an objective per se, but a 'side product', a side product of 'self-elevation', of surpassing oneself. If you aspire self-realization, purpose of your life, as it is, then you will never achieve it. 'The human existence is in fact self-transcendency and not self-realization.'

The fact that people look for meaning, for purpose, is for Frankl a primary motivation of mankind. It has to do with the 'transcendental openness' of men that we discussed in chapter 4. People want to surpass themselves. They cannot accept what is done. They look for more. According to Frankl this 'more' does not come from within oneself. Meaning does not come from within ourselves, it comes to us, in the appeal made to us by our environment.

Therefore Frankl was much less inclined to dig in the pasts of his patients than many of his colleagues were. 'The logo therapy is much more future oriented, that is on the tasks and the meaningful objectives that the patient will have to achieve in his future.' For that matter, self-transcendency is not surpassing oneself 'ins Blaue hinein', but has to do with the *future*. It is man's possibility to look at himself from

78 | Niebuhr, Reinhold, *Moral Man and immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics*, New York, 1960.

79 | Rogers, Carl.R. and B. Stevens,. Person to person: The problem of being human, Lafayette 1968.

80 | Frankl, Victor E., *Man's search for meaning. An Introduction to logotherapy*, New York, 1984.

the future and to see the present as something changeable towards that future. To give meaning to your life therefore, has to do with living in a field of tension between 'that what you are' and 'that what you must become'. This field of tension is characteristic for *being-human*. In Frankl's ideas spiritual health is not about 'inner harmony' and 'balance', but about the question how to stand firm in this field of tension. This can only be realized if you have a reason to live, a reason that lets you surpass yourself, even in difficult circumstances. 'I dare to state, that nothing in the world could help a man to such an extent to bear even the most horrible living conditions, as the knowledge that his life has meaning and a purpose.' As a concentration camp survivor Frankl knew what he was talking about.

Frankl also understood that in our modern society we become increasingly more dependent on ourselves. The traditional relations in which that appeal on us had been made has become less obvious. In our 'globalizing' world of today this is even more the case than in time when Frankl developed his theory. You may conclude that meaningfulness has to do with being able to contribute to the world, but where should someone like Rico, who we met in chapter 2. For Frankl it is important that you recognize and acknowledge that challenge in the most common everyday situations. Of course we do no longer live in clearly profiled, staked out communities. But we still live in families, in neighbourhoods, etcetera. Life is still being constantly challenged in diverse situations. For everyone this is different. 'Every human being is interrogated by life and he can only justify himself before life, by justifying his own life. He can only answer life by bearing the responsibility for his own life.'

For Frankl that acknowledgement is an acknowledgement of men's freedom. His ideas were foremost a protest against the current psychotherapy, especially against the portrayal of mankind behind it: man as the inevitable result of biological, psychological and sociological factors. In its 'rehumanized' psychiatry the mechanistical portrayal of mankind made way for a portrayal of mankind in which freedom of choice and responsibility are central. The concentration camps Frankl saw so to speak as 'living laboratories'. Also in these dehumanizing circumstances, that were more or less the same for everybody, it became clear that some behaved like swine and others like saints. Man carries both possibilities – which one will be realized depends on his choice, not on his living conditions. Here freedom means that you can always surpass the circumstances in which you are (self-transcendency), that you always have, no matter how limited, the choice how to deal with those circumstances – and your own reactions on them. Although the circumstances in which we live are determining for who we are, in the end it is the way that we deal with it that ultimately determines who we are. We can never be reduced to our stimuli, our anger, social structures, etcetera. Our dignity lies in our accountability, in the appeal made to us and the choice that we have to answer to it.

A political translation into today's situation would anyway mean that man that man has never been fully determined by the 'globalizing' social, political and economical circumstances. Man has an absolute, eternal value; he is not swallowed up by the accidental, the temporary and the immediate. He never converges with - and he never is fully dependent on what Lady Luck has in store for him. At the same time he is a part of the concrete, historical, transitory reality. Dignity definitely means self-actualization. This however, is something different from the romantic 'Originalitätswut'. It is about how you shape your life within these concrete relations within which an appeal is made to you.

The portrayal of mankind as the free and responsible human being, the central thought of the *personalism*, is the starting point of our thinking about the human scale in politics, although we should be careful to avoid the pitfall of a neo-romantic community ideal.

In chapter 1 we referred to the beginning of Christian Democracy, the reflection of the nineteenth century social issue. Different from socialism, Christian Democracy started with the development of the individual human being. That person is not a separate individual, but exists in and by the social relations in which he lives. The Papal encyclic *Quadragesimo anno* of 1931, a reflection of 40 years *Rerum novarum*, provides three reasons for the development of the individual person. Firstly every person holds fundamental rights with regard to the society and the state. This means that the state should guarantee those rights. Secondly, man with his focus on society has been created by God. From God he received the task to develop himself as much as possible, for the honour of God, and to achieve the 'temporary and eternal welfare' by following his own vocation. Thirdly, man will only be ready for self-realization by acting concretely. If the community denies individual persons that freedom to act, for instance by taking away responsibilities from individuals, then it obstructs individual persons in their possibility to develop themselves emotionally, spiritually and mentally, to 'become who they are'. The primacy therefore, lies with the individual person, a person in communities. Oswald von Nell-Breuning, the 'ghost writer' of *Quadragesimo anno*, emphasizes this in one of his many works, as follows: 'If society exists for the people, of which and in which it exists, and not the other way around, then there is no other option than that this is its *purpose*: to assist these people as much as possible in their development and the fulfilment of their *being-human*, or at least no to obstruct or curtail them in it.'[81]

That primacy of the individual person has been elaborated particularly strongly in the so-called *personalism* (for instance in the thinking of Jean-Jacques Maritain[82]).

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81 | Nell-Breuning, Oswald von, *Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit: Grundzüge katholischer Sozial-lehre*, Wenen [etc.] 1980, pp. 14-15: 'Wenn die Gesellschaft für die Menschen, aus denen und in denen sie besteht, da ist und nicht umgekehrt, dann muß eben dies wohl ihr *Sinn* sein: diesen Menschen soviel wie möglich zur Entfaltung und Erfüllung ihres Menschtums zu verhelfen, auf keinen Fall aber sie daran zu hindern oder zu beeintrachtigen.'

82 | According to Maritain the possibility to build the society in freedom lies ultimately in man's vocation to develop himself into a social being (Maritain, Jacques, *Man and the State,* Chicago 1952).

Being-human is a process, a process of self-choice and self-realization, of growth. The moral, ethical life is progress on the road to eternal purpose. From here it is being emphasized that the possibility to build the society in freedom is embedded in man's vocation to develop himself as a social being.[83]

This is an inalienable starting point of the Christian Democratic thinking about men and society. At the same time it is also a pitfall. The tendency exists to consider the immediate relations, the so-called me-you relations, as standard for all relations and social contexts in which we live. The underlying thought is that only in that type of relations man really becomes complete human. Here he never is just a number, but always a person, a subject. The characterizing element of such relations is the direct contact, the dialogue, between the 'you' and the 'I'. This re-discovery of life in dialogue we find for instance with the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. He wrote: 'Also the gorilla is an individual, also the termite hill is a collective, but I and you only exist in our world, because men exist, that is: the 'I' only exists as a result of the relation with the 'you'.[84] This life in dialogue finds its origin in the relation to God. See Genesis. God is the 'true you' as opposed to the remaining 'I' of men. After all human me-you relations are the earthly mirror of the 'eternal You' and vice versa that 'eternal You' is only accessible for human beings through the 'you' of their fellow human beings. That is to say, in small well-organized communities in which everybody knows, acknowledges and respects everybody (anyway according to the popular interpretation of Buber's thinking). This sounds appealing to the human being who feels lost in the impersonal, 'globalizing' world. But is it truly a foundation of a political system based on the human scale?

Small communities, in which the responsibility from person to person is expressed in the dialogue between 'I' and 'You', are therefore seen as normative for larger relations. Here the problem is that too strong a separation is being made between what could be referred to as one's 'I-it-relation' and the 'I-you-relation'. The real being-human can only be found in the I-you-relations. This is a fundamental and important criticism of the individualistic Romantic thinking of self-development. But still the world of work, traffic, economy, consumption, in short the daily handling of 'the things' is judged as improper *being human*.[85] I-you-relations are spontaneous and direct. We look each other in the eyes. In order to 'institutionalize' that direct relation, that is to say, to shape it permanently within society, we depend on business relations and institutions. It is an illusion to think that we can only live in those spontaneous and direct relations and that we could safeguard the humanity in our 'globalizing' world by 're-personalizing' the social traffic. The woman behind the check-out desk in the supermarket may carry a name-shield with her name on it, that

does not mean that I would have to engage in a I-you-relation with her to pay for my purchases. It is exhausting and also undesirable to re-structure all social relations into I-you-relations. Political and economical processes cannot be reduced to a 'one-on-one-moral'. Also the ideal of 'living in dialogue' will thus soon become a romantic escape from reality, into small, warm communities.

Again this does not mean that the central thought of personalism, the portrayal of mankind as the free and responsible human being, would not be leading in the thinking on the organization of our society. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur could not get round the central thought of personalism, the relational aspect, but he had great objections against its rigid social and political effects. That is why he differentiated three types of relation that were relevant for the human existence: the relation of the individual to itself, the relation to another person in its vicinity (the short relation) and the relation to another person who is far away (the long relation via institutions). In the first relation self-esteem is linked to the care for the self. In the second, the short relation, the worry for the other person is linked to the care for the other person. In the third, the long relation to every other person the wish of the fair institutions is linked to the care for these institutions. In those different relations different standards apply. In the short relations friendship is the standard, and in the long relations it is justice. However, this does not mean that the direct relation is not of great importance to the quality and decency of our society, but that relations are being shaped in different ways. In politics it is also about long relations and therefore about justice. In the Christian Democratic vision however, that ideal of 'public justice' mainly take shape by starting at the development of the individual persons in their social relations. Short and long relations continuously interfere with each other (see Rico's life in the globalizing world). From the Christian Democratic vision on mankind the crucial question is how we could adapt the circumstances to such an extent that a 'personal organization' (see above: Guardini) is possible. That is to say: how could people be stimulated and equipped to arrogate and shape the relations in which they live in a personal way, and in such a way that the social circumstances do not obstruct the personal growth and development (or that they are brutally thrown upon their own resources), but on the contrary help them and equip them for it?

To what extent the anthropological reflections of it, as described in the previous chapters, could offer starting points for politics based on the human scale, we will, in retrospect, touch on in the last chapter.

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83 | See also: *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, 12: 'After all man, in his deepest nature, is a social being, and without relations with other beings he cannot live and develop his talents.'

84 | Buber, Martin, *Dialogisches Leben: gesammelte philosophische und pädagogische Schriften*, Zürich 1947, p. 458.

85 | Moltmann, Jürgen, *Man: Christian anthropology in the conflicts of the present*, Philadelphia 1974.

7 | Summary and Preview

7. Summary and Preview

We will summarize the most important courses that we have outlined in this report

Is the human scale of our society at stake? This question we explicitly asked in chapter 1. We even suggested a new 'social issue'. In a world in which political and economic relations become increasingly global and we, at the same time, are increasingly being thrown back upon ourselves more and more, we start looking like that poor Gulliver. In this way it is hard to find our correct standard.

That human scale, we postulated, has not been calibrated universally and eternally. In the past – maybe a couple of decennia, perhaps a couple of centuries ago – it might have seemed so. In traditional communities in which everything more or less had its own place, our 'standard' seemed more or less predefined and therefore self-evident. For him who takes the traditional patterns of society as a point of calibration of the human scale, the present-day developments such as individualization, commercialization, globalization, pluralization and technologisation are by definition 'immoderate'. From the beginning of this report we have tried to acknowledge the *ambiguity* of modern societies. For instance we live in a 'risk society' that suffers from chronic insecurity, but on the other hand also in an 'opportunity society' in which people are no longer set in their predefined patterns in advance and in which institutions enable people to develop themselves as unique persons. But in its turn again that development is generally human as takes place in those situations in which people take upon themselves their personal characteristics and circumstances in a responsible way. This again requires that they will be equipped to do so and that there are institutions that enable them to bear responsibility in the modern contexts.

In line with the Christian Democratic tradition we emphasized the importance of vital contemporary *institutions,* that is, institutions that 'breathe' together with the development of our life and society. The Christian Democratic vision of society is a direct result of the portrayal of mankind. People have been called upon to shape their society in freedom and responsibility. A society tailor-made to the 'human scale' is a society in which social institutions and relations could offer people room to do so and the necessary equipment. Therefore 'a personal organization'. As relational and social beings people live in predefined relations, but they are not, as in straitjackets, locked in it. Those relations offer people starting-points to give concretely voice to their involvement with their fellow human beings and society and because of that responsibility people also shape those relations.

In this matter also religious and ideological views are of essential importance in the political arena. In chapter 2 we pointed out a way of thinking that dominates,

not only economical, but gradually also political and other fields of our life, that is the *instrumental thinking* (the thinking of the banana man in Coetzee's book). What, in view of a certain objective, is the most efficient way to use the means available to me? Thus the 'substantial rationality', the issues of lasting values and meaningfulness, are not only banned from the economical area, but also increasingly from other fields of our society. For individuals it seems harder and harder to link the daily life to meaningfulness. This applied to the Rico from Richard Sennett's analyses. Not only our working environment is dominated by insecurity, the short term, the evanescence, the flexibility, but also outside it, our free time, our relations, our family life.

With Rico we saw how the values that he wanted to cultivate slowly fossilize into timeless abstractions to which no concessions may be made and which therefore become increasingly harder to implement. What we should not miss are the 'more subtle languages' to create the dynamic link between the social-economical and political reality in which we live and the ideological views that, when we, in all infiniteness, are confronted with our limitations, 'de-limit' our life, that is place it in a larger picture, against a horizon of purpose. This is not primarily a life out of which we get the most, but a life *that matters*.

This search for more subtle languages, for a 'revaluation' of our life and society, also touches politics. The interaction between social structures and moral awareness should not halt. For that matter, both with the evaluation of the problems we are facing and with the search for a solution, ideological and moral views always play an *irrevocable* part (we keep stressing this against every liberal who is always harping on 'neutrality' and 'fairness'). But our plea went further. Politics that are only procedural and governmental don't get us any further than an exposition of rationality, individual autonomy and control and thus obstructs the possibilities of renewal of our democratic constitutional state.

We point out the most important characteristics of the portrayals of mankind that we have encountered and relate them to liberal and social democratic perspectives

We have specifically focused on the portrayal of mankind. Not only because much political decision making could be largely reduced to the underlying portrayals of mankind (for instance think of the examples we gave in the course of the chapters of education and welfare), but also because, as we already stated in the beginning in chapter 1, Christian Democracy begins fundamentally with man and his life fulfilment. In contrast with the *liberal individualism* Christian Democracy emphasizes rather strongly that human beings are not separate individuals, but creatures that are essentially woven into relations. This also means that people are always committed. In this respect Marx was right: who wants to know man, should (also) look at his circumstances. But although the circumstances partly create man, it does suffice

to suggest subsequently that we should make the circumstances human. The road towards a humane society starts for a significant part with man himself. The circumstances mentioned are not only a fact but also an assignment: it is important to accept this responsibility in a responsible way. In that accentuation of the responsibility and the anti-determinism which comes along with it, Christian Democracy has differed from *socialism and Social Democracy* from time immemorial.

To be perfectly clear: it was not our ambition to describe fully the biblical and Christian portrayal of mankind (the absolute appropriate, although slightly obligate remark made here is that 'the' biblical and Christian portrayal of mankind of course does not exist at all). We also did not intend to write a score in which all Christian Democratic voices (also the dissonant ones) would be heard (let alone perform a solo part). Our starting points were a sounding of the Christian Democratic portrayal of mankind in relation to the modern issues and the dilemmas invoked by them. As a conclusion of this report it makes sense to list explicitly again the portrayals of mankind that appeared in it.

Firstly men are *called* creatures. We could also have written: 'open', 'transcending', 'metaphysical' or 'religious' creatures. Thus it becomes clear that this call is not only a moral obligation. All in all it goes deeper: it is about a fundamental appeal to us; an appeal that touches upon our entire existence. We human beings are *responsive creatures*. That is to say: characterized by a longing to answer an appeal that surpasses our own ego. In this context however, the term religious is debatable. What exactly is meant by it? Who defines it too narrowly (adhering to an institutionalized religion) subsequently suggests, perhaps unintentionally, that the secular part of mankind is deprived of transcendental experiences (or, even worse, that a- or anti-religious people cannot be fully human). Who interprets it too broadly, causes an erosion of the intrinsic meaning of the concept of 'religious'. This would then become a collective term for all 'higher things' that people are looking for. It is true that this offers something to hold on to when nominating all kinds of religious moments in society (soccer is war, but it is also religion). However, in this way also people are being annexed who do not want the goose pimples they experience while listening to Mozart's *Requiem* to be designated as 'religious', or their deepest political convictions as 'also a religion'. Terms such as 'open' and 'transcending' seem less problematic. After all the fact that people in some way or another long for or even yearn for some kind of 'higher thing' seems hardly overstated. People are 'open' to dimensions that provide an interpretation of their own fragmented existence and that give a purpose to it. From a Christian Democratic perspective such terms may be too vague. After all it is not really about each experience of 'something' higher, but to have been *addressed* concretely, an appeal that touches upon the entire existence. 'Transcendency' is related to involvement with one's fellow human beings and the world. Claim and responsibility, we said in our analysis of *Genesis 1*, presuppose each other and continuously evoke each other. The Christian Democratic portrayal of

mankind could be typified with puns such as respons(ibility), *voc*ation. In this light the emphasis should therefore be on 'responsibility' in the Christian-social thinking. This is not a moral obligation enforced by the government upon its citizens, but a concrete expression of an experience that belongs to the being-human. An experience that is related to the human *dignity*.

Who, socially and politically speaking, detaches the human acting from that 'vocation', detaches it from the motivation and for that matter from involvement, the sense of responsibility, creativity and renewal.

It is our conviction that therefore this longing, that *motivates* people, should not and need not be kept outside the public and also the political domain (this would be a decisionistic short-sightedness in which almost everything is being reduced to individual choices; that deep, essential attachment of people, that appeal which vibrates in every fibre, would then be a choice like any other choice). Therefore a society with only laws and regulations according to the human scale is not possible. That would be an over formalistic approach that thinks outside of motivations. Man is essentially 'open', also in the sense that he longs for the fulfilment and realization of his freedom. That freedom occurs in good - and not in servile rule-following behaviour. A few times we mentioned Socrates and Jesus of Nazareth as testators of the permanent moral reflection of laws and regulations in European history. Especially the fact that in the end they have been judicially murdered, underlines the importance of wisdom and moral evaluation over 'rules are rules'. Ethics doubt codes and regulations. Mercy has its doubts with moral rigidity. Rules are considered in the light of ideals that surpass the ordinary, of images and visions of a humane world, of the good life, of social justice. At the same time there is mindfulness of for the weakness of people. This is not explained away, but acknowledged and brought in mercy to a higher level than on which the digital moral evaluation operates.

The motivation of the openness of people, of the longing for fulfilment, has thus become not only a subjective preference that only belongs in the private domain, but also the starting point of a human society, for the involvement with each other and for efforts for the 'public case'.

That dignity of each human being as a 'responsive being' cannot be fully captured in a political language of *rights* – not in a *liberal* exposition of rights of freedoms which give the individual the right to be - and to develop 'himself', nor in a *social democratic* exposition of social rights, with which the individual could make a claim on the collective for his social security. With that we would trivialize neither rights of freedom nor social rights. Of course it belongs to human dignity that people have the freedom to control their own lives. But does optimal freedom of choice guarantee a humane society? And of course the services of the welfare state – to which people with their heads held high in the air should be able to make an appeal to – are part of our perception of a humane society. But does a fine-meshed safety net of social rights guarantee a humane society? No, this requires a society that is

characterized by mutual involvement: by relational strength. Kierkegaard already said it: money may be the numerator, but mercy is the denominator!

Secondly people are *relational* beings. We could also have written: s*ocial* beings. However, this might have resulted in the misunderstanding that we completely 'lock up' people in their communities, as beings that are fully swallowed up by social relations or put even stronger: beings that have been determined by them (this is the criticism often vented of certain varieties of 'communitarism'.). Who considers man as a relational being, states that we should not think *less* of the individual, but *better*. As said earlier, the starting point of the Christian Democratic vision on man and society is the individual person. But that person cannot be seen separate from his relations. The question 'who am I?' cannot be read without prepositions: *With* whom am I? *By* whom am I? *For* whom am I? *Against* whom am I? *Beside* whom am I? Without communities of people I would not exist as 'I'. But this does not mean that people are swallowed up by their relations, but it does mean that they are the product of social roles.

The vision of man, that pretends to be more than a catalogue of freedom or social rights, has direct consequences for the way in which we for instance look upon welfare. To what extent has the emphasis on formal equality, the foundation of our welfare state, actually led to a more humane society? The old woman from across the street in chapter 3 receives home help on a regular basis. Her need for care has been transformed into 'her perfect right'. The home help visits her on behalf of us all. And often also instead of us. That neighbour seems to miss increasingly the attention, having a chat and the love (and it is the 'occupational frustration' of many professionals that often the humane dimension in the current working conditions is being cut down and managed to ruins). It is true that we are responsible *for* each other, as we stated, but often no longer *with* each other. The fact that we pay taxes to maintain a social safety net and that we have a government that distributes welfare, is the foundation of our legal system. But a more and/or better distribution by the offering governmental bodies is not a guarantee for a more humane society, as suggested by *social democracy*. Many human needs cannot be expressed in a political language of 'rights'. That language is particularly suitable for claims by the individual on the collective. Thus social security has become too often and too fast a 'governmental' system, an 'amorphous colossus' in which no one recognizes the basic ideas of mutual involvement, sympathy and solidarity anymore. Welfare is something 'of the government' or of abstract bodies that too often takes place outside the scope of many people. In this light, for instance, the Christian Democratic pleas for the *ownership* of social security could be interpreted. After all, *who* owns the *social system*? Most citizens definitely no longer feel 'owner' of social services. It has become a system in which the government decides how much of your salary will be kept back and whether or not you are entitled to social benefits. The personal inspiration, the essential involvement with others often has become too instrumental.

On the other hand from this vision on man one could also question the *liberal* idea of *self-determination* that is dominant in many political decision making processes. Here the idea of man as an 'autonomous individual' is put so absolutely that characteristics such as altruism, solidarity and compassion – indispensable for a well-functioning society – have to be brought in artificially. For instance by stating that people, when they are free, could develop themselves and aspire to their own interests, still will look for each other. The individual in this development perspective is no loner, but a social being that tries to realize his desires by entering into relations with others and by participating in groups. As opposed to 'confessionalism', that is said to submit the individual to the Divine Will and church, and communitarism, that is said to be intolerant and lock up the individual in groups, the liberals emphasize the autonomy and the freedom of the individual. At the same time also most liberals admit that an absolute neutral attitude towards the ways in which individuals use that freedom, is politically untenable. Only the law as limit seems too limited. Certain virtues should be encouraged. Moralising is allowed. Liberalism may not offer an inspiring relation, but, as is posed, it does offer a complex of standards and values such as responsibility, respect for the other person and the ability to do things independently. But where do these values come from and how would you then be able to influence the political, social and cultural circumstances to such an extent that individualized people would sooner be inclined to behave 'decently'?

The difference between liberal and Christian Democratic vision on man also becomes distinctively clear in discussions on medical-ethical issues such as euthanasia. It is true that who starts from a relational portrayal of mankind, does not automatically end up with the arguments against legislation in this matter, but, but the underlying vision on man is provided with critical annotations, that is to say the thought that the alleged 'autonomous individual' is the only one to decide on his own life. Not only do others play a part in who a man is, but this human being also is also a part of what others are. The thought that every individual human being decides on its own life, on how he or she shapes it and in the end also how he or she possibly ends it, is from a Christian Democratic, relational view of mankind untenable.

Thirdly people are *socially* engaged persons. Mind you, we do not say that that human beings are completely determined by social institutions or structures (we stated this already earlier in this chapter). We emphasize that people live in social relations and that who they are is being developed in the concrete appeal that is made to them in those relations. The fact that we are 'social' creatures, is not a necessary evil thing (after all we need distribution of labour because we cannot everything ourselves, a police force because we cannot protect ourselves adequately, etcetera). The realization of social values such as justice, solidarity and responsibility essentially belongs to our being-human. From the very beginning that thought has been the foundation of the Christian Democratic vision of society. Social principles such as solidarity, subsidiarity and 'sovereignty in one's own circle' were meant to guarantee civil society

against a 'governmentalization' of society on the one hand (in the *social democracy*) and a collapse into separate individuals on the other (in *liberal* perspectives). Of course the 'civil society' that shapes the human scale is no longer the same one as in the late 19th century or the compartmentalized society of the fifties. Social institutions have changed their characters. The government cannot found trade unions, religious denominations or volleyball clubs in order to maintain the civil society. There is no need. We criticized the suggestion that the social organisations have disappeared in the time of globalization (a time in which on the one hand social relations become more large-scale and on the other hand more small-scale; the latter limited to the individual and the small circle of people around him). New initiatives arise, new relations in which the care for each other and social responsibility take shape. Usually those relations have not been organized by the authorities. They come into being because of personal initiative. From the Christian Democratic vision of man and society, as we already said in chapter 1, the question for the human scale is the question how these new relations could be stimulated. How, in the 'globalizing' political reality of today, do you achieve such a division of responsibility between government, citizens and their relations to such an extent that justice is done to those new initiatives of involvement and responsibility for each other and the for the 'public cause'?

On the one hand this requires institutions that equip and facilitate long-lasting participation. That is to say a participation that enables people to shape their own life story, without too many fractured surfaces and discontinuities. On the other hand it supposes institutions in which people can realized their ambitions and talents. There human dignity, freedom, creativity and activity converge. This demands a pluralistic society, institutions that enable people to participate and to partake significantly in a society that strongly evolves.

Those institutions to a certain extent have a bridging function. If those institutions are missing, then people will be thrown upon their own resources again. This for instance was the case in the nineteenth century. During the rough times of capitalism the trade unions were forbidden. Labourers were thus deprived of the possibility of standing up for themselves. Institutions could not form a bridge to a humane existence. On the other hand the once shaped institutions could solidify again and thus lose their equipping and bridging function. Then they no longer enable people. In modern times this applies for massive and strongly bureaucratic institutions. For institutions that no or little eye for tailor-made work and for individual needs. For instance social services that are only or mainly focused on transfer of income and not on enabling, education, on transitions on the labour market, on the combination of working and caring, on life-long learning, etcetera. Think also of institutions that assume a ready-to-use approach in health care instead of tailor-made through for instance the so-called 'person related budget' (vouchers). The same applies for education, for instance when students already at an early age are supposed to work independently, whereas many students cannot cope with it. Therefore tailor-made

and enabling activities are necessary. This requires institutions that can handle and anticipate on flexibility and diversity: institutions with subtle languages. Institutions that work on a culture of recognition and acknowledgment (of differences).

Fourthly we stated that human dignity is a *vulnerable* dignity. We might as well have written that human beings are *sinful* creatures. That would have exactly expressed what we want to state here. The concept of sin however, – partly because of the church and theology itself – has become so contaminated with negative associations that is remain to be seen if it is still usable in our area of religious analphabetism. In chapter 4 we described 'sin' as the disruption of the relations in which people live. People live in a diversity of relations and are free to shape those relations. Within those relations they look for a fulfilment of the strong longing that characterizes them. Often people aim their passionate longings at all sorts of things, that could never fulfil and satisfy that longing (we mentioned the *workaholic*, the *homo economicus*, the 'sex animal' and the religious fanatic). The Christian tradition however does not focus its attention on the human deprivation, but on the possibility of renewal. It acknowledges that people are free both 'to build and to destroy'.

The Christian Democratic perspective of man here also differs from the liberal perspective, in which man mainly does not achieve a 'good' life when his freedom of choice is obstructed by all sorts of social and natural events. It also differs from the Marxist idea of 'alienation'. The *social democratic* vision of man is of course not a copy the classic Marxist one, but does fall back on similar premises regularly. As editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* Marx experienced in 1842 the consequences of a new law that considered the wood gathering on the estates to be a criminal act.[86] How were people supposed to cook? And keeping a fire in midwinter? People were cut off from their natural resources: dead wood. What used to be public property became private. The rich made their laws and decided what room to give to others. This fundamental insight put Marx on the trail of his analysis of the human *alienation*. Someone's position as owner determines how he or she deals with inferiors or superiors. Class differences are being defined. If you are born poor you will remain poor all your life. If God has made you a day labourer in this life, then you should not complain. People have become alienated from each other and therefore also from themselves – this applies to the day labourer, the miner, the magistrate and the rich landowner. Already in chapter 1 we pointed out that Christian Democracy and social democracy both – at least for a part – originated from the nineteenth-century social issue. The Marxist vision of this 'alienation' could only place people as labourers. As we stated earlier all 'sin' was brushed together: the alienation that originated from the production relations around ground and capital (factories). Because of private possession wealth came into being and dependency on others. For that matter the deluge actually was the introduction of money that replaced the personal barter

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86 | See e.g. Wheen, Francis, *Karl Marx*, London 1999, pp. 44-47.

trade. So with Marx man is characterized as a labourer. Communistic regimes have never recovered from that. For other aspects of life, other shortcomings and other types of evil was little room left (the care for the disabled in the German Democratic Republic was left to the church). On top of this also social-economical alienation – at least temporary – had to be neutralized by the government. The government had to arrange everything, because only the government is positioned above the groups with their diverse interests (a factory owner cannot be trusted, because his interests are wrong). Again, today's social democracy cannot be compared to this. Philosophically however, it seems that in its vision on man the same assumptions are being used. That vision on man however is too narrow. One is quick to explain that what goes wrong between human beings and peoples and within our society from economical and social circumstances and it is the government that should solve this alienation, by legislation, by creating jobs, by redistribution. As we described extensively, Christian Democracy has another vision of the government and the talents of people who are employed in the different social fields: in each field people may regulate as much as possible by themselves, because that is their talent and responsibility and their contribution to society as a whole. In the past the concept of man as an 'image of God' may have been connected too unilaterally to ruling and governing, however from the first page of the Bible the portrayal of mankind is relational. Sin could never be only reduced to greed or economical and political misuse of power. Life has many more aspects and in each aspect man could not only do a lot of good, he could also fail. Therefore there are more areas of our life in which we could work together at a good society in which people acknowledge each other, respect each other and are willing to cooperate.

In short, a just society is a society in which the diversity of relations are being given room and in which in that diversity of relations an appeal is made to the good in people. This is something different from the ideal of manipulability of the manipulable society and/or the manipulable man. Evil cannot be banned by laying down human relations as much as possible in rules and by creating as much as possible just structures (a social democratic tendency) and by giving people as much freedom as possible and by letting them 'develop' themselves (a liberal illusion). He who starts with 'let he who is without sin, throw the first stone', acknowledges the human failing, without setting the other apart and writing him off. Especially the ability to take seriously talents and shortcomings and to call wrong things wrong, without putting oneself above another – that ability is the prerequisite of a *decent society*. More aptly put: the essence of the Scripture is that we are not confronted with the nasty facts in an absolute way, but, on the contrary, that we are approached from this acceptation of our human person. At the same time that acceptation appeals to the good thing in people and invites to restoration and elevation. This allows us to not become a *permissive society* of toleration in which calculating citizens look for the loopholes in social legislation and ethics, but a society in which people keep each other focused without losing the solidarity, the mutual understanding and mercy.

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MAN, WHERE ARE YOU?

Man where are you?

This study is about the Christian Democratic portrayal of mankind and its political translation. How can we design social institution to human scale? How should we interpret human dignity? And what is the base of equality?