

Europe, back to  
the roots!



# Europe, back to the roots!

*The Biblical view of man as the basis  
of European politics*

*Harm-Jan Rouwendal*

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Author: Harm-Jan Rouwendal, Groningen.

Cover photography: Cees van der Wal, Kinderdijk.

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## **Content**

Europe ends where...	7
Preface	9
<b>1.</b> Introduction	11
<b>2.</b> The Origin of Europe	15
<b>3.</b> Values in the European project	29
<b>4.</b> Human Dignity and European Values	39
<b>5.</b> Conclusions	49
<b>6.</b> Literature overview	53



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## Europe ends where...

'Europe ends where the church towers end', said former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in so many words. This shows just how much Europe is associated with Christianity.

The European Union was built on Christian values such as solidarity, modesty and justice. The Allies reached out to a defeated West Germany. This act of solidarity led to a new partnership in which countries could count on one another and respected one another. Peace and prosperity would ensue. But now, as the church towers are disappearing, so, too, it seems, are values such as solidarity and community spirit. The European Union is still a community of shared values, but what values?

The Brussels agendas contain numerous proposals for full self-determination. The European Commission is pressuring countries into favouring same sex marriage and in particular allowing abortions. Even the fact that these ethical issues are not within the European remit is clearly no obstacle to Brussels involvement.

'Europe ends where abortion ends' is the adage that many atheist EU politicians would like to impose. The outstretched hand seems to be changing into a coercive shove. Any national government that struggles with a particular EU plan or contests a decision, is not met with understanding but instead is summoned to appear before the European Court of Justice.

This new arrogant and individualistic stance being adopted by Brussels is provoking resistance and tensions that are undermining peaceful cooperation. This strikes me as counter-productive, irrational and undesirable. We must get back to being a European community inspired by Christian values such as respect, discretion and community spirit. A community where there is also space and understanding for countries and inhabitants with policies inspired by Christian ideals. If the pressure becomes too great, the whole thing will explode. This law of physics also applies in politics. If that happens, we will no longer need to complete the sentence 'Europe ends where...'. Instead we simply would have to conclude: 'Europe ends'.

*Bert-Jan Ruissen, lid Europees Parlement*



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## Preface

What is the basis of European politics? According to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union the answer is: human dignity. Human dignity in today's European politics serves as a fundamental right and as an ultimate value. However, there is no general accepted definition of this term. It is therefore unclear how human dignity lays the foundation for the interpretation of other rights.

This short study examines the development of thinking about human dignity in Europe and advocates a discussion about the interpretation of this concept as the basis of the EU. For this, we position a Bible-based, dependent interpretation of human dignity vis-à-vis the dominant autonomous interpretation of this concept. Then we investigate what is the meaning of a Christian interpretation of the concept of human dignity for European values and European cooperation. A return to the Christian roots of Europe gives direction to European values and collaboration.

This memorandum was written on behalf of Bert-Jan Ruissen of the SGP delegation in the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament.

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*Harm-Jan Rouwendal, December 2021*

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# 1. Introduction

‘Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected.’<sup>1</sup> So reads Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, adopted by the European Parliament in 2000. The explanation states that the dignity of the human person is not only a fundamental right in itself but constitutes the real basis of fundamental rights, in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

While the pivotal importance of the concept of human dignity is striking, it is not new. It was made clear in the declaration of the Congress of Europe in The Hague in May 1948: ‘Human dignity is Europe’s finest achievement, freedom her true strength. Both are at stake in our struggle. The union of our continent is now needed not only for the salvation of the liberties we have won, but also for the extension of their benefits to all mankind.’<sup>2</sup>

Preserving peace was the most important goal of Europe’s founding fathers. To achieve this goal, nations had to be united on the basis of shared values.<sup>3</sup> Reconciliation of nations that have fought so many wars was possible, according to the founders of the European project, through shared views on freedom, equality and justice, centred on a common conception of human dignity.

Although human dignity has been the cornerstone of the European project and forms the basis of European law, a clear and generally accepted definition is lacking.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, between the Congress of Europe in The Hague and the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, ideas regarding human autonomy, and hence human dignity, underwent an enormous change. The extent to which human dignity has provided a basis for other (fundamental) rights and a key to their interpretation therefore remains unclear.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, an appeal to human dignity opens the door to ever more far-reaching proposals to ensure its protection. However, the absence of any

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<sup>1</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. See: [fra.europa.eu/nl/eu-charter](http://fra.europa.eu/nl/eu-charter).

<sup>2</sup> De la Torre, 2014, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> De la Torre, 2014, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Schachter, 1983; Schroeder, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Schroeder, 2012.

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European political debate about the significance of human dignity is reflected in a lack of discussion regarding the interpretation thereof.

This brief study takes as its point of departure the unsustainability of any (on-going) discussion regarding common European values that fails to seek a basic interpretation of human dignity. The Reformed Political Party (SGP) has become increasingly vociferous in its criticisms of the workings of the European Union. While the fundamental political misconceptions underlying Humanism and the Enlightenment have been pinpointed <sup>6</sup>, less attention has so far been paid to establishing a positive basis for European political thinking.<sup>7</sup> This study accordingly seeks to fill the gap by highlighting the significance of a Christian conception of humanity and, more specifically, a Christian interpretation of human dignity. The aim of this memorandum is to demonstrate the significance of Bible-based thinking about human dignity as a basis for European values and cooperation. The main question is as follows:

*How should Bible-based thinking about values, particularly human dignity, form the basis of European cooperation?*

In a bid to find an answer, three secondary questions are asked. First of all, the study seeks to analyse from a historical perspective the values that have come to determine European identity, starting from the roots of European civilisation. It then describes the development of European values and the interpretation thereof under the influence of the Enlightenment. The central question in the second chapter is as follows:

*How has the concept of human dignity developed in the history of Europe in relation to other key values that have come to determine its identity?*

The study then focuses on the role of values in inspiring the founders of the European project and the texts of the European Treaties. The central question in the third chapter is as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> Van der Waal et al., 2003; Schippers, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Boersma, 2018.

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*How has the concept of human dignity developed in relation to the key values that have guided the European project?*

In the fourth chapter, an autonomous interpretation of human dignity is compared with a Bible-based understanding of human dignity. The implications of the latter in terms of European values and cooperation are then examined. The third question is as follows:

*What does a Bible-based understanding of the concept of human dignity mean for European values and European cooperation?*

Chapter 5 presents a summary and conclusions.

This memorandum is a call to Europe to keep its Christian past in mind and to return to its Christian roots, based on a conviction that adherence to divine laws benefits the whole of European society.

The former President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, argued years ago in favour of 'giving Europe a heart and a soul'. This has been followed by frequent appeals to Europe to return to its origins and Christian roots.<sup>8</sup> This time a different appeal is being made, focusing on an understanding of human dignity as a cornerstone for other European values and consequently addressed both to the Member States of the European Union and to the other countries of Europe.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example: Korthals Altes, 2001; Wentsel (ed.), 2016.



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## 2. The origins of Europe

### *Introduction*<sup>9</sup>

There is much discussion of the question of exactly where Europe begins. Does Russia belong to Europe? And can Turkey be counted as being part of it? Due to the lack of a clear physical boundary in the east, reference is often made to a jointly evolved culture and shared values.<sup>10</sup> European countries and peoples share something that distinguishes them from non-European nations. The European Union therefore presents itself as a community of values, despite the need to clarify what exactly this means.

The Dutch Van Dale dictionary defines a 'value' as a 'guiding principle that is considered important for a particular culture' or, in other words, a principle or a basic norm that one wishes to abide by and that guides political thinking and policy making. Values can, however, also be understood as ideals or, in this case, inspirational objectives to which an individual or community may aspire. Both definitions of the concept reflect the fact that values can be binding and that they form the basis of a common culture.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the coming into being of a civilisation on which the European community of values is built, tracing the concept of human dignity back to a number of sources. The key question is as follows: *How has the concept of human dignity developed in the history of Europe in relation to other key values that have come to determine its identity?* An examination of the sources of European values is followed by a brief description of their role over the course of European history.

### **The origin of European values**

The debate on the list of 'European values' is unlikely to reach a swift conclusion. Nor is it therefore easy to identify the most important sources of these values. There is nevertheless agreement on the far-reaching influence of the

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<sup>9</sup> This chapter is partly based on 'The spiritual basis of the European Union'. In: Van der Waal et al., 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Brague, 2013.

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Judeo-Christian tradition, Greek philosophy and Roman civilisation. Compared to these sources, the influence of other cultures and traditions, such as Germanic, Slavic and Celtic, shrinks into insignificance.

*Jerusalem, Athens and Rome*

The Judeo-Christian tradition, inextricably bound up with the city of Jerusalem, is based in the Bible, that is to say both the Old and the New Testaments. It is difficult to overestimate the influence of Christianity on European civilisation. Although blended with ideas from Germanic, Greek and Roman culture, the Christian outlook on life has formed the basis for a recognisable, cohesive European culture and civilisation.<sup>11</sup>

Human dignity occupies an important place in Christian faith. This is based on the biblical teaching that God created man in his own image (*imago Dei*).<sup>12</sup> All human beings reflect something of God the Creator, and consequently possess a fundamental dignity. Every human being is a unique creature and all humans are equal before God. It then follows from this that all humans in their daily life bear a responsibility to their Creator and cannot just live for themselves. This notion of equality and protection of every human being leads on to other fundamental Biblical teachings, for example, caring for the weaker members of society. Indeed, the Old Testament already contains a number of detailed admonitions regarding the treatment of widows, orphans and strangers..

The unique nature of each creature does not, however, mean that the Bible sets any great store by autonomy. God places humans within the bands of family, tribe and people. On the one hand, humans are independent beings with responsibilities and, on the other, they are never alone but always part of a community. Neither can the particular position of man with respect to the rest of Creation, and animals in particular, be viewed in isolation..

The fact that the world and every human has been created by God is reflected in the conviction that history on Earth has a meaning and a purpose. Judeo-

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<sup>11</sup> Geluk, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:26-27.

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Christian thinking therefore contains no reference to a cyclical perception of history being continuously repeated, an idea that was prevalent among the Germanic peoples, the Greeks and the Romans. A linear perception of history means that political action inspired by Christian thinking must follow the historical path ordained by God. The idea of a relationship between man and God defined above all by adherence to moral standards in everyday life also originates in the Old Testament.<sup>13</sup>

Other biblical notions have also played a significant role in European history. The relationship between Church and State as it has evolved in Europe in various places and in various ways is difficult to imagine without the lessons from the history of the people of Israel. The Old Testament makes it clear that kings or emperors are not above, but subject to, the laws of the country.<sup>14</sup> There is also a distinction between political and spiritual ministries. Rulers, priests and prophets each have their own role.

The influence of Greek philosophy, associated with the city of Athens, on European values is recognisable particularly in scientific development and ideas about the State. While the pursuit of science in ancient times was mainly a matter for priests, the free citizens in ancient Greece also had the opportunity to focus on increasing their knowledge. Thinking was consequently detached from a direct religious context and acquired a strongly abstract nature in Greece. Plato's theory of ideas gave new content to concepts such as goodness, love and reason. In some cases, these concepts themselves were regarded as independent, supernatural entities. Aristotlean logic has had a significant impact on Christian theology through Thomas Aquinas.

The superiority of human beings was regarded among the Greeks, and later among the Romans, as the basis of human dignity. In this conception, which can be found in Aristotle and Cicero, for example, humans have a fundamental value through their moral and physical dominance over other humans and the animal kingdom. This partly ties in with the Old Testament, in which the Hebrew word 'gedulah' occurs, referring more to someone's dignity or status within

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<sup>13</sup> Brague, 2013, p.66.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, 1 Samuel.

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a community rather than to the concept of moral dignity. This notion is also reflected in the Stoic idea of 'oikeiosis', the assumption being that all humans display a particular familial likeness. There was no uniform definition of the concept at that time, since even the Latin term 'dignitas' (giving us the word 'dignity') has two meanings: inner dignity and dignity in the sense of standing, respect or status. Plato, Aristotle and later on the New Testament use the Greek term 'semnotes' to denote dignity in the sense of character.

Aristotle has also greatly influenced political thinking. Following Plato's seminal teaching that the law binds the State together, he was the first to elaborate a theory centred on the notion of democracy. The administration of the city-state (polis) by the citizens follows this line of thinking, ensuring the protection of their freedom, equality and rights.

Roman civilisation, centred on the city of Rome, can be identified as the third source of European values. The legal principles and the theory of public administration developed by Rome have both been highly influential. Roman road networks, architecture and military discipline have left a deep imprint on Europe. It was thanks to the Roman conquests and subjugation of tribes that the Greek philosophy was able to gain a foothold throughout Europe. Roman ideas about human dignity were, to a certain extent embodied in the Roman legal system, which is still of relevance today. The requirement of equal treatment of both parties is an example of this. The banning of arbitrariness from law as far as possible and the idea that those who hold power are also subject to the law are partly attributable to Roman thinking.

Other sources that have deeply influenced Europe over the centuries are obviously identifiable, too. At the same time, Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, were the principal points of departure for the European values that were to become dominant later. It was in Christianity, however, that their joint legacy was consolidated, forming a basis for Christian civilisation in Europe.<sup>15</sup> Human dignity, founded in the biblical teaching that man has been created in the image of God, is an important (implicit) starting point in this.

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<sup>15</sup> Dawson, 1948; Brague, 2003

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## Values in European history

### *The Middle Ages*

As a result of the mass migrations between the fourth and sixth centuries, Europe became a patchwork of peoples and cultures. The steady Christianisation of the continent in the early Middle Ages did not erase this diversity. Slowly, partly through the monastic system, cultural treasures and insights were passed on to subsequent generations including Christian precepts and also practical matters. The French historian Jacques Le Goff, for example, points to the influence of monastic canonical hours in forming the basis for the modern division of our day.<sup>16</sup> In the Middle Ages, Europe gradually acquired a uniform cultural countenance. The conquests of a large part of Southern Europe by Muslim armies prompted a further consolidation of Christian cultural identity. For a long time, it was not unusual for 'Christendom' to be used to designate Europe.<sup>17</sup>

The Great Schism of 1054 split Christianity into two. However, the cracks were already beginning to appear before then. For a long time, imperial and papal authority remained intertwined in the Greek or Eastern Orthodox Church. However, the Latin or Catholic Church in the West was divided. Theocracy was rejected while warring kingdoms, both large and small, were later precariously united under an emperor and the bishop of Rome. The division between religious and political power in Western Europe consequently had a very long history. The 14th-century conflict for supremacy between the secular and spiritual powers was finally decided in favour of the former.

The concept of human dignity exercised a number of medieval thinkers, including Thomas Aquinas, who explained *dignitas* (dignity) in terms of the place allotted to man in the hierarchy of Creation in its entirety. The dignity of man was fundamentally different to that of other creatures such as plants and animals. However, all humans had the same dignity, regardless of origin, intelligence or abilities. The possession of a free will, the potential to learn and a sense of responsibility distinguished man from the rest of Creation. Man was unique in his potential, in both a positive and negative sense.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Le Goff, 1995, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Dawson, 1948.

<sup>18</sup> Van de Breevaart, 2019a.

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It is clear that these ideas about human dignity were frequently ignored in practice. There would be many pages to fill about the dark sides of the Middle Ages, which manifested themselves, for example, in the Crusades, rising antisemitism and persecution of heretics. However, the frequent depiction of the Middle Ages as the 'Dark Ages' is not altogether fair. Many developments in science, art, music and the economy would be unimaginable without the (preparatory) work done in the Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup> Such developments were indeed occurring at the very time when existence was bound up with the Catholic Church and preoccupation with the life hereafter..<sup>20</sup> This was also reflected on the great practical store set by loyalty, which was of paramount importance in a world of strong mutual dependence, such as the feudal system of lords, vassals and serfs and also in the communities formed by the family, the village or town and the people. Social rights and obligations brought with them protection in the event of illness and other disasters. At a cultural level, there was growing awareness of fellow Europeans with whom particular values were shared. This could be manifested in art and literature: at the spiritual level with depictions of saints and at the secular level with the figure of the chivalrous knight.<sup>21</sup>

The often implicit influence of Christian thinking on human dignity in the Middle Ages could also be seen in fundamental developments such as the gradual emergence of the logical and scientific approach in Scholasticism. It was in dependence on his Creator that man could gather knowledge. This was reflected even more clearly in the medieval texts and ideas on which the modern concepts of freedom and tolerance are based.<sup>22</sup> While Greek and Roman culture were to a large extent based on the right of the strongest, Christianity took a different view of poverty, injustice and unequal balances of power. Based on the idea of man as a creature reflecting something of God, ideas were developed regarding the protection of the weak. In that way, the basis was laid for the human rights formulated later.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Woods, 2018 and Falk, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Aalders, 1995, p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> Van der Waal et al., 2003, pp. 98-99.

<sup>22</sup> Siedentop, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Holland, 2019.

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*Renaissance, Reformation and Humanism*

Europe underwent significant development at the end of the Middle Ages. Technological progress, such as book printing and gunpowder, increased the power and range of ideas and military strength. Europe's self-awareness and place in the world changed fundamentally as a result of the discovery of America. Many of the inventions and discoveries made in the 15th and 16th centuries were direct consequences of developments in medieval society. The Renaissance, Humanism and the Reformation caused the pace of existing developments to accelerate.

Interest in sources from Antiquity increased and the classics started to be read again and taken as an example. The view of nature changed at the same time. The view of nature as independent of grace paved the way for a complete mastery of nature through science and technology. A significant difference arose here between Humanism and the Reformation. Renaissance thinking and Humanism developed an image of man with great scope for autonomy. Man was no longer dependent on God but responsible for his own happiness. The authority of the church and tradition steadily declined in the wake of this thinking. The idea that man had personal responsibility in relation to God occupied a central position in the Reformation. Following Luther's example, his followers rejected the idea that the Catholic Church fulfilled a mediating function between God and man. At the same time, the Reformation emphasised the importance and function of the God-given laws for man and society.

Although Humanism drew on sources from Antiquity, this movement would be unthinkable without the input from the Christian Middle Ages. The leading humanist Erasmus was himself a devout Christian. It would therefore be jumping to conclusions to assert that present-day conceptions of human dignity and human rights originated in Humanism.<sup>24</sup> It could, however, be argued that Humanism paved the way for the subsequent inclusion of autonomy in the concept of human dignity, as elaborated in the Enlightenment.

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<sup>24</sup> Harper, 2006.

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As a European movement, the Reformation also had a significant impact on political thinking. With his distinction between the secular and the spiritual, Luther paved the way for a stricter division between Church and State. The political vision of the Reformation, as elaborated by John Calvin, can be summarised in the idea that the government is God's servant and must govern society according to biblical norms.

### *Enlightenment and revolution*

The Renaissance laid the basis for an autonomous human image, but it was not until the Enlightenment that this really took off. All human progress in science and technology could be attributed to one thing only and that was thought, that is to say human powers of reasoning. The 'light' of human reason illuminated European society from the 18th century onward. The idea of human reason being a reliable compass was elaborated upon by various Enlightenment philosophers. This trust in reason resulted in a strong belief in progress. By applying reason, scientific success which improved living conditions and increased prosperity throughout society was achieved. But it did not stop there. Man himself can take the fight to nature and achieve a higher level of civilisation and humanity, so the thinking went. Reason offered man the chance to realise a golden future for himself.

While criticism of the Church and religion remained relatively muted during the Renaissance (partly due to the power of the Church), Enlightenment philosophers openly attacked the Christian faith. The Christian conviction that held man back from blind trust in his reason and trust in doing good contrasted sharply with faith in progress. The idea of the crucifix being necessary to take away the sins of the world was therefore a major stumbling block.

Enlightenment thinking obviously had enormous consequences for the dominant values in Europe. Enlightenment philosophy taught that man was capable of good and not inclined to evil. Greater prosperity and scientific and technical development were essential for a path to a better future. Everything old had to give way to reason and rationality, which had become the new normal in society and politics. A significant consequence of this was a change in the law. Divine right (*droit divin*) was replaced by human self-determination as a source of legal

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doctrine,<sup>25</sup> which, as expressed by statutes, could, in accordance with natural law, be tested against a higher law that was then regarded as something that ultimately came from God. In the thinking of the Enlightenment, natural law steadily lost ground to the view that only the law created by man or government was valid. It was in conflict with faith in progress to take the historically evolved, existing social order as a point of departure.

Because the divine basis for thinking about good and evil remained increasingly up in the air, other ethical foundations were sought. This was also the case with regard to the image of man. The German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant interpreted human dignity as follows:

‘The respect I have for others, and what others have the right to claim for themselves, lies in the recognition of the dignity (*dignitas*) of the other, a value that has no price and nothing of equal value against which it could be exchanged.’<sup>26</sup>

This definition reflected a crucial change in relation to previous understanding. Kant’s definition of human dignity fell, in fact, within his definition of human autonomy. Dignity was consequently not just something that was received, but also something that could be required. Human dignity was no longer anchored in the belief that man had been created. The rational autonomous human was himself the foundation of human dignity.<sup>27</sup> Faith in God, the Church and tradition was no longer necessary to guarantee human dignity.

The autonomous way of thinking was also visible in other developments. The concept of popular sovereignty developed by Rousseau implied that the norm for good and evil lay with the people. The people themselves therefore determined what was justified and unjustified. The French Revolution, partly based on this thinking, marked a turning point in European civilisation. The concepts of freedom and equality were radicalised at the expense of other values.<sup>28</sup> Individual and universal human rights were codified for the first time during this

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<sup>25</sup> Aalders, 1987, p. 116-134

<sup>26</sup> As quoted in: Van de Breevaart, 2019a, p. 80.

<sup>27</sup> Schroeder, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Groen van Prinsterer, 1939.

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period. In theory, great store was set by the protection of human dignity and equal rights for each individual, while in practice thousands of opponents of the regime were put to death during the French Revolution.<sup>29</sup>

Although the consequences of Enlightenment theories did not become entirely clear until later, this marks a significant watershed moment with regard to the thinking about human dignity. Human dignity was no longer the consequence of the belief in Creation. The autonomous and revolutionary understanding of the concept of human dignity made it possible to expand the number of individual rights ever further with a call for freedom and equality. The autonomous human determined for himself what his dignity was.

#### *The 20th century*

Nationalism became increasingly powerful around the time of the French Revolution. The formation of nation states was being actively pursued. States took measures to combine the, heterogeneous population within their existing borders into a homogeneous nation, for example, through education. A reverse trend also occurred in Central and Eastern Europe: a nation wanted to protect its interests and therefore, it set up a state.<sup>30</sup> In some cases, nationalist sentiment was so strong that the nation itself was idolised. The Franco-German War of 1870 and the two World Wars were inextricably linked to this. The high ideals of equal rights for all fell prey to reality. The rapid technical and economic developments at the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century made mechanisation and, consequently, a new way of waging war possible. The unrestrained faith in progress and the idea that man was himself capable of reaching an ever higher level of civilisation resulted in unprecedented cruelty and conflicts. For the Nazis, progress meant the creation of a society for the *Übermensch*. The Christian idea that every life was precious was completely submerged by a mix of evolutionary theory, atheism and paganism. Origin mattered. Weaker members of society did not merit protection but needed to be removed.

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<sup>29</sup> Altling von Geusau, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Pater & Paul, 2015, p. 309.

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Although faith in progress suffered a serious blow, Enlightenment thinking continued to prevail. In the end, with all their atrocities, the two World Wars did not lead to a reconsideration of the optimistic world view or a cautious return to a Christian vision of humanity. In its place, a nihilistic view of the human condition gained strength and resolution of international conflicts was sought through more cooperation.

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United States General Assembly. The preamble to the Declaration describes its goal and foundation as follows:

*'Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'.*

The consequences of Enlightenment thinking for human dignity become entirely clear in this fragment. The list of human rights that follows is justified by nothing other than an appeal for human dignity. For example, the appeal to the will of God as Creator is missing, from the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 while the binding power of the right to life, freedom and striving for happiness is not derived from the will of God but simply from human dignity. Human dignity in this way becomes a separate entity that ultimately justifies the appeal to self-determination. 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights could therefore be regarded as the consummation of Enlightenment philosophy.'<sup>31</sup>

Not until the Europe of the 1960s and 1970s did the consequences of the failure of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution become visible across society. Until that time, the activist secular family vision, for example, did not differ markedly from that of Christianity. The foundation of morality was radically different, but its understanding did not differ markedly from that of the Church.<sup>32</sup> However, this changed after the 1960s. Values that emerged from or were partly based on Christianity acquired a new autonomy and a secular interpretation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cliteur & Wissen, 1998, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Roy, 2020, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> Van de Breevaart, 2019b.

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Although the designations remained the same, values were constantly re-interpreted and re-explained. Freedom and, in particular, equality displaced other values.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, rapid secularisation was being completed in most Western European countries. Self-determination and radical individual freedom became the self-evident point of departure among large parts of the population. An autonomous understanding of the concept of human dignity fitted seamlessly with this. With a call for individual understanding of human dignity, justice became seen less and less as the most political norm, being replaced instead by absolute equality. Equality and freedom gained an ever larger place in treaties, legislation and constitutions. Self-determination was increasingly viewed as the core of modern humanity.

## **Conclusion**

*How has the concept of human dignity developed in the history of Europe in relation to other key values that have come to determine its identity?*

Jerusalem, Athens and Rome. The traditions represented by these cities provide the backdrop to the community of values that the European Union seeks to represent. It is in Christianity, however, that their joint legacies have become intertwined, that is to say in the Christian civilisation of Europe. Human dignity, founded in the biblical teaching that man has been created in the image of God, is a cornerstone of this approach.

However, under the influence of Enlightenment thinking, the biblical foundation of human dignity was abandoned. The French Revolution and, the cultural revolution of the 1960s signify a departure from the dependent human image of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. As a result of a steadily more autonomous human image, human dignity became a concept in its own right, no longer needing a foundation. Other values that emerged from, or were partly based on, Christianity also acquired a new, individual understanding. The concepts of freedom and equality were radicalised at the expense of values such as community and justice.

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<sup>34</sup> Kinneging, 2020.

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According to a number of authors, Western civilisation of the 21st century is continuing to build on the Christian tradition (often without being aware of it).<sup>35</sup> Others regard the structural influence of Christianity as something that has had its day. Awareness of being a dependent creation has almost disappeared in European society. A mix of Enlightenment and Romantic ideas, with freedom and equality as supreme values, has come to determine European identity.<sup>36</sup> Human dignity is the justification for self-determination.

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<sup>35</sup> Holland, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Kinneking, 2020.



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## 3. Values in the European project

### *Introduction*

The dream of a united Europe has existed for a long time. Although the idea was probably suggested centuries earlier, the first use of the term 'United States of Europe' is ascribed to the French writer and politician Victor Hugo. In his address to the International Peace Congress in Paris in 1849, he presented his plans for a European senate. He also predicted that the day would come when all the nations on the European continent would be united. In Hugo's liberal vision, a federation would guarantee freedom and peace.<sup>37</sup> Those who dismissed Hugo's ideas as utopian were proven right by the events of the next hundred years, during which three wars were fought between the antagonistic France and Germany.

Support grew greater for the idea of a united Europe after the First World War. Trotsky came up with idea of a Soviet United States of Europe in 1923. Around the same period, the young Austrian Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi founded the Paneuropean Union. His vision allowed great scope for cultural variation, but even more important was the attention paid to the feeling of 'European Spirit' shared by all Europeans. In opposition to both extreme nationalism and Communist internationalism, Coudenhove-Kalergi strove for a united Europe that continued to build on existing traditions. Although dismissed as utopian, his ideals served as an inspiration for the 'founders' of the European project.<sup>38</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to describe the role of values in the European project which grew after the Second World War. The key question is as follows: *How has the concept of human dignity developed in relation to the key values that have guided the European project?* The role of values for the initiators of the European project, particularly Schuman, is examined first. Secondly, the role of values in various European Treaties is discussed.

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<sup>37</sup> Metzidakis, 1994.

<sup>38</sup> Wiedemer, 1993.

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## **The making of Europe**

### *The Congress of The Hague*

Never again. That was the thought which bound Europeans together after two bloody World Wars. Throughout Europe, politicians played with ideas of the development of European political cooperation. In May 1948, nearly 800 politicians, philosophers, scientists, trade union leaders and other representatives from 26 countries met in The Hague. One of the most important figures at this 'Congress of Europe' was the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. He had already called for a start to be made on the formation of a United States of Europe in Zurich in 1946. Although the participants in the Congress sometimes had differing ideas, there was wide agreement on the need for far-reaching European cooperation. The Congress, which later became known as Europe's first federal moment, called for a political, economic and monetary union of Europe. There was still little clarity at the time on the way in which this would happen. It is clear, however, that there was a will and trust to unite the countries of Europe on the basis of shared interests and values. It is apparent from a quotation from one of the declarations that human dignity was regarded as crucial and as one of the most significant achievements in European history: 'Human dignity is Europe's finest achievement, freedom her true strength'.<sup>39</sup>

The emphasis on the importance of human dignity is in line with the Declaration of Human Rights discussed in the previous chapter. So soon after the ending of hostilities, there appears to have been no question about precisely what human dignity meant. The two wars had made terrifyingly clear what it was not. Human dignity and a 'dignified' existence formed the basis of all human rights, for example in Article 1: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.'<sup>40</sup>

### *The Schuman Declaration*

On 9 May 1950, exactly two years after the Congress of Europe in The Hague,

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<sup>39</sup> De la Torre, 2014, p. 31.

<sup>40</sup> See [mensenrechten.nl](http://mensenrechten.nl).

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Robert Schuman, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, read out a declaration in Paris in which he proposed integrating parts of the economies of France and Germany, and placing these under a joint 'high authority', an organisation that would also be open to other European countries. The Schuman Declaration was only a brief statement, but the ideas presented would prove to have a great impact on European history. This historic press conference, at which the foundations were laid for the European Coal and Steel Community and, consequently, for the European Union that was to follow, came so unexpectedly that there were not even any cameras or microphones present.<sup>41</sup>

*'The father of Europe'*

Robert Schuman (1886-1963) was a devout Roman Catholic throughout his life. His lifestyle reminded some of that of a monk. Indeed, he seriously considered entering a monastery. He regarded the fact that those around him dissuaded him from doing so as confirmation of his calling to demonstrate his convictions through politics. As an inhabitant of Lorraine, Schuman had German nationality up to 1919, and in that same year he began his political career in France. He would go on to be Prime Minister of France twice after the Second World War. In his efforts to bring about political reconciliation and peace between France and Germany, countries he knew all too well, he drew constant inspiration from his faith. For Schuman, the Declaration that bears his name was therefore an expression of the Christian values of forgiveness and reconciliation. In it, he set out the basis for efforts to achieve peace, cooperation and solidarity, inextricably linked to his Christian roots.<sup>42</sup>

Jeff Fountain describes how Schuman's Christian convictions motivated his political actions. According to Schuman, the roots of democracy – 'the principle of equality, brotherly love, space for individual freedom and respect for the rights of the individual' – lie in the teachings of Christ. Functioning democracy, he felt, was unimaginable without the influence of Christian thinking on human dignity, freedom and love. In his view, cooperation and democracy in Europe were therefore deeply rooted in Christian values. If these values were

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<sup>41</sup> De la Torre, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Wilton, 2016.

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abandoned, Europe would lose its basis for equality, human dignity, tolerance and compassion.<sup>43</sup>

Schuman shared his faith with other founders of the European project. Before the Paris Conference in 1951, he withdrew to a monastery with Alcide De Gasperi, Jean Monnet and Konrad Adenauer, to meditate and pray. As the heads of the Christian Democratic parties, they found in each other the same basic principles.<sup>44</sup> Giving up some national sovereignty by entering into economic cooperation and integration was, they felt, an expression of a Christian vision in which material interests were sacrificed in the service of peace and reconciliation. At the same time, it appears that idealism and national interests coincided at the beginning of the European process of integration. The common interests of peace and cooperation largely overlapped with the interest of the nation state.

The three Christian Democrats, Schuman, Adenauer and De Gasperi, spoke publicly about the influence of the Christian faith on their political activity and of the values on which it was based. The influence of Christian values was never set out in an official document in the first phase of the European project. They perhaps found it so obvious that it was not considered necessary or they may have been trying to avoid antagonizing the liberals and socialists.

### **Values in European Treaties** <sup>45</sup>

Initially, the European cooperation that came about after 1950 was mainly economic.<sup>46</sup> The most important point on which had been agreed upon in the Treaty establishing the European Community in 1957 in Rome was access to raw materials. Material interests were to the fore, and there was therefore little urgency about laying out shared views on norms and standards. Only the prohibition of discrimination based on nationality was set out in relation to staff appointments. This cooperation nevertheless had a clear political goal. Economic

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<sup>43</sup> Fountain, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Van der Waal, 2014, p.50.

<sup>45</sup> See also Van der Waal et al., 2003, pp. 103-110.

<sup>46</sup> Treaty of Rome. For European Treaties, see: [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu).

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cooperation was imperative for ensuring peace. This is apparent, for example, in the preamble and Article 2, which mention an 'ever closer union among the European peoples' and 'closer relations between the Member States of the Community'. However, the Member States themselves remained responsible for realising values such as freedom, democracy and (social) justice. European co-operation was of enormous importance in the post-war reconciliation process, particularly between Germany and France.

Although the precursors to the EU were principally economic groupings, the European Court of Justice ruled as far back as the 1960s that regulation at European level had a direct effect on national legal systems. This meant that European legislation applied not only to Member States but also to individuals, without the intermediate step of national legislation being necessary for that purpose. The Court later ruled that the European legal system had autonomous status and was above the national legal systems. Although economic rights (freedoms) were principally at stake, rather than obligations, European law thereby gained a unique position that would determine its later influence.<sup>47</sup>

The Single European Act came into being in 1987.<sup>48</sup> The purpose of this Act was to bring into effect the common market, which had been delayed as a result of economic setbacks and mutual disagreement. An agreement was reached to harmonise laws and eliminate barriers between Member States with regard to trade and the free movement of people. As in the Treaty of Rome, the emphasis was mainly on economic cooperation, but the economic agreements were now supplemented by a number of political objectives and conditions. The preamble refers to the fundamental rights and (fundamental) laws of the Member States. There is also a reference to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Social Charter. These two Council of Europe instruments from 1950 and 1961 relate specifically to the understanding of norms and values. The Single European Act endorsed this and referred to democratic principles, the idea of the rule of law and human rights, without going into them in more detail. The Single European Act did not just deal with economic cooperation; it also laid out other goals, such as the

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<sup>47</sup> Weiler, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Single European Act.

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promotion of democracy, defence of common interests and independence. Contribution to international peace and security is also included as a goal.

The next significant step in the European project was the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.<sup>49</sup> No objectives were added to the Treaty texts in comparison to the Single European Act, but the way was paved for an extensive deepening and expansion of the process of integration. The EU began to concern itself with social policy and judicial cooperation, took steps towards a common foreign policy and sought to establish a monetary union. The expansion of the EU, decided upon in Copenhagen a year later highlighted the values the EU wished to represent: democracy, rule of law, enforcement of human rights and protection of minorities. There was no further detail or clarification of these values.

The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam<sup>50</sup> went further along the same path. The EU furthered cooperation and integration, for example in the area of migration policy. The principles already mentioned, which the EU wanted to achieve, were set out and defined somewhat more extensively in the preamble. The description of these political principles confirmed that the EU wanted to become a political union.

### *The European Charter*

From the 1990s on, there was increasingly frequent mention of a 'European community of values'. The call for a European constitution was made against this background. At a meeting in Cologne in 1999, the European Council called for the rights of EU citizens to be enshrined in a separate EU document. On 7 December 2000, the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission adopted the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.<sup>51</sup> The innovative aspect of the Charter was not so much that new principles were formulated but that the EU was its own constitution, containing rights that already existed and that had been recognised earlier.

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<sup>49</sup> Treaty of Maastricht.

<sup>50</sup> Treaty of Amsterdam.

<sup>51</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

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It focused primarily on the rights of freedom and equality as well as social and economic rights.

The considerable amount of space granted to human dignity is striking. 'Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected,'<sup>52</sup> reads Article 1. Although no more detail is given, it is not illogical to regard human dignity here, as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a foundation on its own for other rights. There is no reference to God as Creator.

### *The European Constitution*

In line with the adoption of the European Charter, a proposal was made in 2004 to establish a European Constitution. After France and The Netherlands rejected the treaty in a referendum, a decision was eventually made to abandon the European Constitution.

From the point of view of values, it is particularly relevant to look at the discussion on the non-inclusion of a reference to God and Europe's Christian roots. The Convention on the Future of Europe, chaired by former French President Giscard d'Estaing, chose also to pursue a radical separation of Church and State, in line with the French *laïcisme*, at European level. God, religion, Christianity and Judeo-Christian values, which for centuries had left their mark on Europe, were not mentioned. However, there was explicit reference to Humanism and the Enlightenment in the preamble. These movements were identified as the origin of the values of the French Revolution: freedom, equality and solidarity in Europe. It was pointed out in various quarters that Humanism and the Enlightenment were unthinkable without a long Christian tradition.<sup>53</sup> The following wording was eventually decided upon:

'Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist traditions of Europe, which underpin the development of the universal values of the inviolable

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<sup>52</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 1.

<sup>53</sup> For the background to this critique, see, for example: Siedentop, 2014 and Holland, 2019.

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and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law’.

Here, too, Christianity and the Judeo-Christian tradition were not mentioned by name but lumped together under the common denominator of ‘religious tradition’. Joseph Weiler has some interesting criticisms to make of this. He is not only a respected legal expert in the area of European integration, who for many years has held professorships in various universities, he is also a devout Jew. According to Weiler, there is a Christian deficit in Europe; he even talks of ‘Christophobia’. In present-day thinking about the European Union, there is complete disregard for its Christian roots. The concept of the system of values that underpin European cooperation is lost by denying or trivialising the fundamentals of faith of the EU. The absence of a reference to its Christian roots is, according to Weiler, a triumph of secularism. At the same time, over half the EU population live in countries whose constitutions make reference to God.

‘The insertion of a reference to Christianity in the rich historical fabric recalled by the preamble would have been a credible choice without any ideological baggage. It would be a simple confirmation of a long-established reality (...). The absence of any reference to Christianity, on the other hand, is a deafening silence that comes with its own ideological baggage.’<sup>54</sup>

No space was given to Christianity in the European Constitution under the heading of tolerance. In the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon, which came about as an alternative to the Constitution, the proposed amendment to the preamble was adopted. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union has, since the Treaty of Lisbon, read as follows:

‘The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.’<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Weiler, 2004, p. 36.

<sup>55</sup> Treaty of Lisbon.

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### *European objectives*

The definition of the objectives pursued by the EU, as set out in the Treaties, is becoming increasingly precise, transforming its development from an economic partnership to a political one. For example, Article 3 reads: 'The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.'<sup>56</sup> Economic development is prioritised in the elaboration of this aim. The goal is to achieve a 'highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress'. Sustainable development, that is to say the conservation of nature and environmental enhancement, is also sought after.

The pursuit of equality is reflected in the combating of social exclusion and discrimination as well as the promotion of social justice, gender equality, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child. Evidence of the EU's intention to promote certain values not only internally but also externally is provided by Article 3(5), which states that the Union will uphold its values and interests in its relations with the wider world.

The European Parliament website sets out six core values 'that form the basis of our society': respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including those of minorities. The accompanying video states that the EU safeguards these shared values 'to ensure that inclusion, tolerance, justice and solidarity prevail'.<sup>57</sup>

### **Conclusion**

*How has the concept of human dignity evolved in relation to the central values that have guided the European project?*

Peace. This was the notion that united the founders of the European Union following two bloody world wars. The inspiration for far-reaching European cooperation came from the Christian faith. Robert Schuman, who is referred to as 'the Father of Europe' on account of his declaration in 1950, argued that,

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<sup>56</sup> Treaty of Lisbon, Article 2(1).

<sup>57</sup> See: EU values explained in one minute. [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu).

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without the principles of the Christian faith, Europe would no longer provide a basis for the values of equality, human dignity, tolerance and compassion.

Yet, the European Treaties concluded after 1957 do not contain any reference to God or the Christian faith, although the preambles define and elaborate on the political principles of the European Union in ever greater detail. The sources of inspiration here lie unmistakably in Enlightenment philosophy. Over time, the EU has placed increasing emphasis on social rights and on individual freedom and equality. What particularly stands out is the attention to respect for human dignity. However, in the absence of a reference to God as Creator, human dignity as the basis for other values is primarily interpreted as a justification for self-determination.

As a result, Schuman's warning that, without the Christian faith, Europe has no basis for its values has come to pass. With the disappearance of the awareness that humans are dependent on God as creatures of God, the basis for the values that determine identity and provided direction for the European project is also disappearing. Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights are, even though the name remained the same, coloured entirely by an autonomous view of humankind. The autonomous and individual interpretation of the concept of human dignity shows that the European project sees humans themselves as the source of right and wrong. As a result, the European Union lacks an objective benchmark for the values it aspires to. The European community of shared values has no firm footing.

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## 4. Human dignity and European values

### *Introduction*

The guiding values on which current European politics are centred no longer bear the hallmark of Christianity. Although some values stem from or are partly based on the Christian way of thinking, their interpretation has been changed entirely due to the influence of Humanism, the Enlightenment and the current liberal climate. Until the 1960s, the dominant culture could be defined as a secularised Christianity.<sup>58</sup> These days, however, freedom and equality are the standard. An autonomous interpretation of human dignity allows people to determine what this means for them as individuals.

In today's society, human dignity often functions as the ultimate value. Every human being has an inherent dignity that must always be respected. Human dignity can thus be seen as the bearer of other values such as solidarity, justice and equality. The previous chapters have shown that the concept of human dignity has been interpreted in different ways. This raises the question of the basis of current Christian politics in Europe. The Dutch Reformed Political Party (SGP) advocates open Bible politics. Recognition that Christian principles are the source of inspiration for European cooperation is therefore not enough. European cooperation must be based on submission to the word of God, specifically in the form of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments protect human dignity and justice in a manner that is not bound by time or culture.

This chapter examines the image of humankind that is contained in the Ten Commandments, while establishing a link to human dignity as an accepted European core value. The central question is therefore as follows:

*What does a Bible-based interpretation of the concept of human dignity mean for European values and European cooperation?*

The definition of human dignity is addressed first by contrasting the autonomous interpretation of the concept with a dependent interpretation. Secondly, the significance of a Christian interpretation of the concept of human dignity for European values and European cooperation is examined.

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<sup>58</sup> Roy, 2020.

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## **Human dignity**

### *Autonomous interpretation*

Few people in the Western world would contest the importance of human dignity. Since the Second World War and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, human dignity has often been defined in terms of human rights, and hence divided into legal categories. In light of the horrors of the two world wars, it is understandable that a strong emphasis has been placed on the protection of the individual against the might of the (totalitarian) state. The fact that in most Western democracies, a totalitarian threat seems a distant one has probably contributed to the convergence of human dignity with individual freedom in the minds of most citizens.<sup>59</sup>

Since the 1960s and 1970s, the Romantic world view has largely determined the prevailing image of humankind. Modern humans wish to determine for themselves how they organise their lives and are unwilling to submit to the authority of the Church or tradition.<sup>60</sup> Instead, there is a constant pursuit of authenticity. The thinking is that you need to develop your potential as much as possible in order to be who you really are. Obviously, individual freedom is a hugely important part of this. It is therefore understandable that personal autonomy has become the dominant value when reflecting on human dignity. In determining what is of value, there is ultimately only one decisive factor: the will of the individual. Given that every human is busy shaping his or her own future, equality is also an important value. From this perspective, all humans are equal and essentially have the same moral preferences. Of course, there is a certain value in the possibility of self-development, but the danger of degeneration into exaggerated individuality is evident in today's society.<sup>61</sup>

Construed from the point of view of individual freedom, dignity is no longer derived from anything outside of the person. Rather, humans themselves have become the reference point for their dignity. This way of thinking severs the religious roots of the concept of human dignity. In current thinking, the

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<sup>59</sup> Van de Beeten, Van der Linden & Neuteboom, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Trueman, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, 1994.

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autonomous interpretation is the dominant, if not the only, justification for the importance of human dignity.<sup>62</sup> Humans are no longer valuable because they are God's creatures, but because they are their own beings. This sentiment also decouples human dignity from other values. Although both views recognise, in principle, the intrinsic value of every human, the difference in the foundations underpinning human dignity has enormous consequences.

If an autonomous starting position is adopted, human dignity becomes merely a rational principle that can only obey itself. As a result, it can even come into conflict with values that stem from a Christian interpretation. After all, the pursuit of peace, justice and solidarity may stand in the way of individual autonomy. What is more, the will of the individual can colour human rights in such a way as to turn a protective right into its opposite. Human dignity, understood as individual autonomy, is being used as a political tool rather than as a pre-political starting point. The best-known example of this is the discussion regarding completed life. If the dignity of human beings ultimately depends primarily on their own experience, why should elderly people who consider their lives completed not seek professional help to end their lives? Considered from the perspective of a rational autonomous individual, this question is difficult to answer. The conclusion is therefore that the protection of human dignity is evolving in a direction that increasingly ignores or even diametrically opposes the Christian notion of the created human.<sup>63</sup> Consider also, for example, the invoking of human dignity to legitimise abortion.

#### *Dependent interpretation*

Christianity sees human dignity as a broad principle that defines what it means to be human. This interpretation is characterised by dependency based on the biblical fact that humans have been created in God's image (*imago Dei*). 'Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness (...)." And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.'<sup>64</sup> Every human reflects some aspect of God

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<sup>62</sup> Alting von Geusau, 2012, p. 136.

<sup>63</sup> Alting von Geusau, 2012, p. 249.

<sup>64</sup> Genesis 1:26-27.

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the Creator, and all humans therefore have an inherent dignity. As a unique creature, every human has a body and a soul, so all humans are equal before God. Due to the fall of man, humankind has obscured the image of God but not completely lost it.<sup>65</sup>

In the Christian faith, the foundations for human dignity lie outside humankind, in the manifestation of God. For this reason, the Christian tradition allowed an interpretation of human dignity that covered every creature, regardless of origin, religion, intelligence or physical characteristics. Being created in God's image means that every human has an origin, a purpose and a future. As creatures of God, humans are relational beings. This involves both a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with fellow humans, as expressed in response to the question about the greatest commandment in God's law. 'Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.'"<sup>66</sup> Humans do not live for themselves, but for God and their neighbour.

In the Christian tradition, human dignity is derived from being bearers of God's image. According to Saint Augustine, being created in God's image is mainly expressed in the inner person: in reason, language, judgement and free will. Here, Saint Augustine is quick to emphasise that humans are dependent and vulnerable. They must therefore focus not on themselves but on God. After all, dignity exists only in relation to God, who bestows dignity.<sup>67</sup> So, contrary to Enlightenment philosophy, human reason does not stand alone but sits within the order of the created reality. Human dignity therefore goes beyond the individual and his or her autonomy. That is why different aspects of dignity, such as social responsibility and individual freedom, should not be played off against each other.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Genesis 9:6.

<sup>66</sup> Matthew 22:37-39.

<sup>67</sup> Soulen & Woodhead, 2006, p. 4

<sup>68</sup> Van Geest & De Jong, 2011.

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The Christian concept of human dignity could be defined as follows: the conviction that humans have been made by a creative God in his image, have been endowed with reason, are called to accept God's authority and bear responsibility for themselves, for others, and for creation.<sup>69</sup>

In the autonomous interpretation, human dignity is something that can be claimed as a right. In a Christian definition, on the other hand, the emphasis is on human dignity as a gift from God, and therefore it is also a duty. The fact that God gives humankind dignity and a special position in relation to the rest of creation also brings with it special duties, rights and responsibilities.

### **The basis for European values**

In the autonomous interpretation, human dignity cannot function as a foundation for European values. The individual interpretation is always subject to change, which means that European core values can change hue. Unfortunately, in this respect, the Christian Democratic parties have also neglected the tradition of the Christian founders of the European project. If human dignity is recognised as having been created, however, it gives direction to European values and European cooperation. Christian politicians are aware that they have a responsibility to pursue the high ideal of human dignity but, at the same time, they realise the fundamental impossibility of fashioning human beings and society.

A dependent interpretation of human dignity can guide European values by means of a relational interpretation. In response to the responsibility that God gives to humans, we can establish a relationship with our neighbours and care for creation. In the deepest sense, based on the greatest commandment, this is about love. Human destiny lies not in autonomy and individuality but in relationships, and in their inherent dependency. This means that values are also shaped first and foremost in the immediate sphere and in the social connections of each individual. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, responsibility for life in society is made to rest, as closely as possible, with citizens. When it comes

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<sup>69</sup> See also: Alting von Geusau, 2012.

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to cross-border problems such as crime and human trafficking, the European authorities have a role to play.

The awareness that we have been created and have a responsibility to God, our neighbour and creation should also influence European values, correcting the imbalance brought about by secular Humanism, the Enlightenment and Romanticism.<sup>70</sup> Return to your roots! For European values, this means the following.<sup>71</sup>

### *Freedom*

In a relational interpretation, freedom is the situation in which humans live in communion with God as Creator and Redeemer. Instead of 'doing what you feel like doing', freedom is the state in which you are serving God and your neighbour. Humans do not live for themselves and should therefore not be motivated by the right to exercise their individual freedom, subject only to the narrow proviso that other people are not harmed. Freedom is not being free *from* ties, but being free *to* serve.<sup>72</sup> Thus, other people are not a threat or limitation to our freedom, but rather its purpose. This does not mean that there is no possibility of developing unique talents, but they must be employed for the benefit of others. Another important aspect of this value is freedom of conscience. The fact that every citizen has the right 'to freedom of thought, conscience and religion' is also enshrined in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. To safeguard these freedoms, other freedoms are also necessary, such as freedom of expression and freedom of association.

### *Equality*

The fact that humans have been created by God means that every human has value and is equal before God. An autonomous interpretation of the concept of human dignity risks ironing out all differences between humans. God specifically created humans with different characteristics, qualities and talents. Humans are therefore not equal in the sense of being 'the same' but in terms of having

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<sup>70</sup> Soulen & Woodhead (ed.), 2006.

<sup>71</sup> See also Luitwieler, 2013, pp. 46-49.

<sup>72</sup> Van der Zwaag, 2015.

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equal value. Human dignity means equality because every human as a creature is of value. Every life, no matter how young or old, therefore deserves protection. Inherent differences, such as between man and woman or in terms of talents and vocation, may therefore be valued. Unfair differences, however, that arise from unjust and unequal power relationships must be combated specifically in order to uphold equality. Due to the intertwined nature of the European economies, the European Union has a duty to secure a level playing field. However, at European level too, equality must be prevented from curtailing other values such as freedom, justice and solidarity.

### *Justice*

Given that every human has value, it is our duty to combat unfair differences between humans. The Bible gives clear guidance when it comes to caring for the poor, widows and strangers. But justice is broader than caring for the vulnerable and showing compassion towards one's neighbour. Justice begins with the recognition of God as the source of all law. Justice is therefore not something that can be determined (and adapted) by or on behalf of the people. Justice is founded in God's law. The Ten Commandments are a universal guideline for (European) life and coexistence. Justice is primarily a personal mandate; only when necessary do national and European governments have a role to play. Concrete examples include fighting crime, corruption, tax avoidance and human trafficking, but also receiving refugees, which require personal commitment but also national and European coordination.

### *Community*

In contrast to an autonomous interpretation, a dependent interpretation of the concept of human dignity makes the importance of community and solidarity self-evident. The significance of relationships becomes clear not from a position of (covert or overt) self-interest, but from awareness of God's love and mercy. Society is therefore not a place where everyone pursues personal self-interest on the basis of a social contract but a place where humans live together, with connections involving family, associations and churches. It is very important for citizens to be able to assume their responsibility both inside and outside these communities: responsibility for themselves, for their neighbour, for society

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as a whole and for creation. Based on the principle of reciprocity, citizens are expected to accept this responsibility and to obey the law. The fundamental role of religion in both small and large communities must be recognised and protected. At a higher level, nations can be regarded as communities of humans who feel connected by shared characteristics. By the same token, Europe too can be viewed as a community of Member States. It is not without reason that the name European Coal and Steel Community was used. It is clear that the European Community could not be further from its citizens. On the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, the European authorities should therefore focus on cross-border issues.

### *Diversity*

A dependent interpretation of the concept of human dignity positively appreciates diversity in the gifts and qualities possessed by humans. After all, it is God who provides these gifts. Paul uses the metaphor of different parts of the body. Christians together form one body in which each 'member' has a unique place and function.<sup>73</sup> Although this metaphor applies to the Church and not to society, it does provide direction for the organisation of society. Every citizen has talents that can be used to promote the well-being of society. Here too, individual development serves other people and society as a whole. Here too, the government should keep its distance from the connections in which citizens function, and respect their uniqueness. The principle of sphere sovereignty applies here. Diversity is part of the created reality and should be appreciated on this basis instead of being viewed from a utilitarian mindset. It is not just individual identity but also historically based national cultures and identities that merit appreciation.

### *Democracy*

From the awareness of having been created follows a recognition of God's sovereignty, firstly in one's personal life, but also within society. The people and the government should therefore recognise God's sovereignty. Thus, at the most profound level, the authority of the government lies not in the will of the

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<sup>73</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12.

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people but in the will of God, who has provided that government. This means that the government is God's servant and governs for the benefit of the people. It follows from this that the influence of the electorate on the public administration is a good thing; the government must focus on the welfare of society and the citizen.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, society may therefore be expected to act for the benefit of the government. The European Union, too, must recognise God's sovereignty as a level of government. In recent decades, it has been shown that it is difficult to achieve a transnational European democracy. The reciprocity that should exist between government and society is often missing, and the European Union struggles with insufficient democratic legitimacy. The European citizen is therefore best served by a European Union that has limited supranational powers and is based on values that are derived from Europe's Christian roots.

## **Conclusion**

*What does a Bible-based interpretation of the concept of human dignity mean for European values and European cooperation?*

Human dignity is interpreted in European politics as being based on the notion of autonomy. The religious roots have been severed and, based on the idea of individual freedom, dignity is no longer derived from anything outside of the person. Rather, humans themselves have become the reference point for their dignity. In a Bible-based interpretation, human dignity embodies the answer to the question of what it means to be human. This interpretation is characterised by dependency and can be defined as the belief that humans have been made by a creative God in his image, have been endowed with reason, are mandated to accept God's authority and bear responsibility for themselves, others and creation.

Values are shaped first and foremost in the individual sphere and in the social connections in which the individual is embedded. Considered based on the principle of subsidiarity, responsibility for life in society is made to rest, as closely as possible, with citizens.

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<sup>74</sup> Everse, 2016.

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A dependent interpretation of the concept of human dignity assigns a relational interpretation to European values. Freedom is not being free *from* ties, but being free to serve one's neighbour. Equality is not a threat to my identity but a recognition of the diversity of the created reality. Justice results from following God's good commandments, specifically the Ten Commandments. Citizens thrive in communion through connections involving family, associations and churches. Authority in society is based on the will of God and the government's purpose is to serve society as God's servant.

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## 5. Conclusions

*How should a Bible-based understanding of values, especially human dignity, form the basis for European cooperation?*

The background to the European community of shared values is shaped by traditions linked to the cities of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome. In the interrelationship between these three, however, it is Christianity that has created a synthesis between the legacies of these traditions: the Christian civilisation of Europe. Human dignity, rooted in the biblical fact that humans have been created in God's image, is a fundamental starting point here.

However, under the influence of Enlightenment philosophy, the biblical foundations for human dignity were abandoned. The French Revolution and, ultimately, the cultural revolution of the 1960s have undermined the image of a dependent human that prevailed in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. An increasingly autonomous view of humankind makes human dignity a measurand in its own right that no longer needs a foundation. The concepts of freedom and equality are being radicalised at the expense of values such as community and justice.

This is also reflected in the European project. Although the inspiration for far-reaching European cooperation came from the Christian faith, there is no reference to God or the Christian faith in the European Treaties concluded after 1957. The sources of inspiration for the political principles of the European Union lie unmistakably in Enlightenment philosophy. Over time, the EU has placed increasing emphasis on social rights and on individual freedom and equality. What particularly stands out is the attention to respect for human dignity. However, the religious roots of this concept have been severed and, based on the idea of individual freedom, dignity is no longer derived from anything outside of the person. In the absence of a reference to God as Creator, human dignity as the basis for other values is primarily interpreted as a justification for self-determination. As a result, the European Union lacks a benchmark for the values to which it aspires. Values that stem from or are partly based on Christianity have acquired a different, secular interpretation due to the influence of Humanism, the Enlightenment and current liberal thinking. Although the names remain the same, values are constantly being reinterpreted and re-explained. The autonomous and revolutionary interpretation of the concept of human dignity makes it possible to keep on expanding the number of individual rights

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by invoking freedom and equality. After all, the autonomous human determines his or her own dignity. The European community of shared values therefore has no reference point.

In a Bible-based interpretation, human dignity embodies the answer to the question of what it means to be human. This interpretation is characterised by dependency and can be defined as the conviction that humans have been made by a creative God in his image, have been endowed with reason, are called to accept God's authority and bear responsibility for themselves, others and creation.

Values are shaped first and foremost in the individual sphere and in the social connections in which the individual is embedded. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, responsibility for life in society is made to rest as closely as possible with citizens.

A dependent interpretation of the concept of human dignity assigns a relational interpretation to European values. Freedom is not being free *from* ties, but being free *to* serve one's neighbour. Equality is not a threat to my identity but a recognition of the diversity of the created reality. Justice results from following God's good commandments, specifically the Ten Commandments. Citizens thrive in communion through connections involving family, associations and churches. Authority in society is based on the will of God and the government's purpose is to serve society as God's servant. The table below provides an overview of the different interpretations of values.

European cooperation is legitimate when it comes to justice, peace, freedom and prosperity. Here, biblical values and standards are an indispensable guide, hence the call: Europe, return to your roots! Return to a Christian dependent interpretation of the concept of human dignity. This gives direction to European values and cooperation. In the words of former MEP Leen van der Waal: 'The Christian political stance (...) is guided by an integrated vision of humans, the world and society that is supported by the awareness that world history exists in the context of the coming kingdom of God and the notion that humans have been created by God and have an eternal destiny. In accordance with God's plan, this Kingdom will cut right through earthly developments, that

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is to say the advance and decline of civilisations, the rise and fall of powerful empires. Christian politics is not about making a desperate attempt to establish a heavenly kingdom in this world, if that were even possible. It does, however, seek to be of service to the coming of the Kingdom of God. That is why, in European politics too, the main focus must be on combating injustice and realising a social order that allows space for free preaching of the Gospel.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Van der Waal, 2014, p. 59.

**Table 1.** Orientation and interpretation of values <sup>76</sup>

Values	Humanism & Enlightenment	Bible & Reformation
Human dignity (humanity)	The foundations for human dignity lie in humans themselves; they have the right to individual self-determination	All humans are unique creatures of God and have dignity as the bearers of God's image; they have a personal responsibility to God and to fellow humans
Freedom	Individual freedom; being free <i>from</i> ties (exercise of freedom rights on condition that other people are not harmed); humans are autonomous vis-à-vis God and their fellow humans	Nobody lives for himself or herself; being free to serve (promoting the well-being of one's neighbour); humans are dependent on God and serve their neighbour
Equality	Treating like cases equally; non-discrimination; no consequences are to be attached to differences	Every human has unique qualities. All humans are equal, but every human has a specific vocation and gifts
Community/solidarity	Conditioned and motivated by clearly understood or calculated self-interest	Conditioned by the Ten Commandments and motivated by God's love and mercy towards all humans
Justice (rule of law)	Legislation adopted by or on behalf of the people is the source of law and a guideline for life and coexistence	God is the source of all law; the Ten Commandments are a universal guideline for life and coexistence
Diversity	Utilitarianism dominates the treatment of diversity. Rationality and belief in progress down-play respect for identity and historically based reality	Diversity is the hallmark of the created reality; respect for the identity of humans, peoples and historically based reality
Democracy	Government is based on absolute popular sovereignty, puts the person at the centre of its policies; right of peoples to self-determination	Government and the people recognise God's sovereignty over everything. Government is there to serve its citizens; the influence of the people on public administration is positive

<sup>76</sup> Values that stem from or are partly based on Christianity have acquired a different, secular interpretation due to the influence of Humanism, the Enlightenment and current liberal thinking. Although the names have remained the same, values are constantly being reinterpreted and re-explained. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the main values and presents their different interpretation and explanation. Adapted from Van der Waal et al. 2003, p. 111.

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