

***DEUS QUI HUMANAЕ
SUBSTANTIAE DIGNITATEM:***
**A LATIN LITURGICAL SOURCE CONTRIBUT-
ING TO THE CONCEPTUALIZATION HISTORY
OF HUMAN DIGNITY**

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Abstract. This article explores the history of the prayer *Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem* as a contribution to the conceptualization history of human dignity. It is argued that the prayer can be traced back to pre-Carolingian times, that it forms part of an early tradition of reflection on human dignity, and that it was adapted to use at the offertory, such that an association was made between human dignity and the holy exchange of gifts. In this way, the prayer significantly shaped the Christian concept of human dignity as the holy 'place' of commerce with God.

**I.
Introduction**

In the contemporary world, human dignity is close to being regarded as a fundamental principle; as much is testified to by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and by the role played by the concept in the human rights tradition. Granted the pluralism that prevails in today's world, it is nevertheless not surprising to find that more than one idea of human dignity is current. One can argue that several distinct conceptions of human dignity are at work in the Western tradition, which all however reflect the same universal intuition of the fundamental value of the human being.¹ The present study concerns the formation and propagation of the Christian conception of human dignity. We shall argue that it was both expressed and formed substantially by the prayer *Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem*, which we find rising to prominence at the heart of the Christian liturgy since before the Carolingian reformation. The prayer proclaims that God exchanged himself for the human being, such that the dignity with which the human substance was marvellously endowed in

1. See Mette Lebech, *On the Problem of Human Dignity: A Hermeneutical and Phenomenological Investigation* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2009).

creation was still more marvellously restored through Christ's Incarnation and redemption. It is handy to identify this prayer as the centre of a family of prayers expressing the same idea because it rises to unmistakable prominence, of which there is still evidence in today's liturgy. This family of prayers in turn seem to inspire (and/or be inspired by) the earliest known treatise-length discussion of the nature of human dignity. The reason for tracing the history of this prayer is thus heuristic: it allows for an easy identification of a Christian tradition that clearly teaches the dignity of the human being in the celebration of the liturgy and in the literature inspired by this. Rendering this tradition visible by documenting it is necessary so that it can take its rightful place as a significant source of the conceptualization of the idea of human dignity. It is in fact frequently argued that the idea of human dignity is a modern creation, and sometimes that the ancients, and in particular the Stoics, were the first to articulate it, but that the idea suffered an eclipse during the Middle Ages.² The prayer with its related prayers and texts proposed here for discussion shows that this is a misconception: human dignity was an idea so central to Christian thought that it found its way to the heart of the liturgy of the Church, and eventually might have been so completely identified with the mystery of the divine exchange that the wording relating to human dignity (but not to the holy exchange) disappeared after the human rights tradition had made of human dignity its basic principle. Its inclusion in two recent anthologies of texts on human dignity goes some way to recognize its importance.³ However, here we shall attempt to outline and discuss it in more detail.

We shall do this by first considering the textual evidence of the prayer in the Tridentine missal together with its related versions. We shall then look at the origin of the prayer in the manuscripts testifying to its use and its related versions. This allows us to make a link between the prayer and early medieval thinking on the subject. The prayer's location in the Mass at the offertory as explaining the significance of the ritual mixing of water and wine is then discussed, before we tie up the ends of the history of the prayer by addressing the use of elements of it in today's liturgy.

The point we want to make is not one pertaining to the history of the liturgy, nor one relating to sacramental theology or indeed any other theology, but rather one pertaining to the history of ideas, a philosophical discipline finding its evidence in all types of cultural manifestations expressing ideas, liturgy included. Insofar as the contemporary expression 'human dignity' can be traced back to earlier times, the safest way of doing this is to point to linguistically related expressions that are documented in texts testifying to the currency of the

2. See, for example, *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, ed. by David Krezmer and Eckhart Klein (The Hague: Kluwer, 2002).

3. See *Texte zur Menschenwürde*, ed. by Frantz Josef Wetz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2011), p. 57, and Mette Lebeck, *European Sources of Human Dignity: A Commented Anthology* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), pp. 69–70.

expressions. Since both *dignitas humanae substantiae* and *dignitas conditionis humanae*, with which we deal here, are linguistically related as well as expressing the idea of human dignity, they should be studied in their textual occurrences as contributing to the conceptualization history of the idea of human dignity. The currency of these expressions is beyond question, since they were used every day in the liturgy throughout the Western Church for more than a millennium, even if at various times said quietly by the presiding priest in Latin.

II. The Prayer

In the Tridentine Roman missal (1572) the prayer reads as follows:

*Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem
Et mirabiliter condidisti et mirabilius reformasti:
Da nobis per hujus aquae et vinae mysterium
Eius diuinitatis esse consortes
Qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps.*

O God, who wondrously created the dignity of the human substance and still more wondrously restored it, grant, through the mystery of this water and wine, that we may come to share in the divinity of him who humbled himself to share in our humanity.⁴

According to the *ordo missae*, it was said after the priest had poured wine into the chalice, and while he made a sign of the cross over the water to be mixed with the wine.⁵

This is not the only prayer of the Roman Missal to invoke the idea of human dignity, but it is the most significant because for many centuries it was prayed at the offertory of the Mass throughout the entire Latin patriarchate. Notably, the prayer identifies the seat of dignity not in actions nor in office but

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4. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the authors. For the Latin text quoted here, see *Missale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti concilii Tridentini restitutum, Pii V. Pont. Max. jussu editum, et Clementis VIII. primum, nunc denuo Urbani Papae VIII. auctoritate recognitum* (Dublin: Typis Patritii Wogan, 1804), p. 201 and p. xlv. See also Pierre Le Brun, *Explication littérale, historique et dogmatique des prières et des cérémonies de la Messe*, vol. 1 (Paris and Lyon: Librairie catholique de Périsse Frères, 1860), § III, art. 6, p. 274, and Jean Deshusses and Benoît Darragon, *Concordances et tableaux pour l'étude des grands sacramentaires* (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1982–83), 3 vols in 6 parts, vol. 1, p. 72. The prayer is no. 1032; for variations see nos 1010 and 1011.
 5. See *Missale Romanum* (1804), p. 201 and p. xlv: 'Deinde [. . .] accipit calicem [. . .] et ponit vinum in calicem. Deinde eodem modo tenens calicem, producit signum crucis super ampullam aqua, et dicit: Deus qui humanae substantiae, [. . .]'

in the very ‘substance’ or nature of the individual human being created by God and subsequently redeemed and restored, or ‘re-formed’, by him. The intersubjective setting of the idea—that dignity somehow seems established through its recognition and solidifies into a status if conferred by a recognized, legitimate, and superior power—here finds a natural expression in a prayer to the One who is believed to both create and restore the dignity of human beings. The prayer, in turn, expresses the grateful acceptance and commemoration of these marvels and thus affirms and proclaims human dignity by praising its Maker and Restorer for his infinite graciousness, and for making himself one of us.

A different prayer, but one that likewise gives voice to the idea of inherent human dignity in need of restauration, has a different accent, compared to *Deus qui humanae substantiae*:

*Praesta, quaesumus, omnipotens Deus, ut dignitas conditionis humanae, per immoderantiam sauciata, medicinalis parsimoniae studio reformetur.*⁶

Grant, we beseech you, almighty God, that the dignity of the way the human being was made, gravely wounded through neglect of measure, may be re-formed by concentration on the medicine of abstinence.

The sources of this prayer predominantly identify it as a collect for the Saturday of the third week of Lent; the ‘medicinal abstinence’ has dietary and ascetical overtones. This is also an ancient prayer, being attested in a series of sacramentaries in numerous manuscripts (sixteen in all; the prayer is witnessed in the Leonine collection, the Gregorian/Hadrian and the Gelasian (Gellone) sacramentaries).⁷ The language of the ‘dignity of the human condition/making’ suggests a link with the *Dicta Albini*, which we shall discuss below. Although the first prayer situates the ‘dignity of the human substance’ in relation to creation, incarnation, and redemption whilst the second focuses attention upon its wounded state by calling on God for it to be healed, both prayers are linguistically related and similar in idea. Their similarity and distinctive wording allow us likewise to link both to early medieval thought as expressed in *De dignitate conditionis humane*, incorporating the *Dicta Albini*.

III. Origin

Although it does not seem possible to assign a precise date of origin to the prayer *Deus qui humanae substantiae*, it can be traced back at least to the sixth century. In the so-called Leonine Sacramentary it opened section XL of the

6. *Corpus orationum*, ed. by E. Moeller, J.-M. Clément, and B. Coppeters 't Wallant, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 160 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992–2004), vol. 7 (orationes 4335–4954), no. 4486.

7. See *ibid.*

month of December.⁸ There it figured as a prayer for the feast of the Nativity. The prayer appears in the *Corpus orationum* as one among numerous *orationes* with the incipit in the vocative, ‘Deus qui . . .’⁹ The edition enables one to follow the prayer back to the codices witnessing its text. It is thus possible to identify our prayer as witnessed in a total of seventeen manuscripts containing a variety of sacramentaries:¹⁰ (1) St Gall, *Stiftsbibliothek*, MS. 350 (8th century); (2) Paris, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, MS. lat. 12048 (end of 8th c.); (3) Cambrai, *Bibliothèque municipale*, MS. 164;¹¹ (4) Munich, *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek*, MS. clm 6333;¹² (5) a fragment at Freising, copied from (4); (6) Trent, *Museo Provinciale d’Arte del Castello del Buonconsiglio*, MS. 1590 (9th c.); (7) Paris, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, MS. lat. 9428 (mid-9th c.); (8) Paris, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, MS. lat. 12051 (Corbie, 2nd half of 9th c.); (9) Cologne, *Bibliothek des Metropolitankapitels*, MSS. 87 and 88 (end of 9th or beginning of 10th c., made for the cathedral); (10) Göttingen, *Universitätsbibliothek*, MS. Theol. 231 (c). 975); (11) Rouen, *Bibliothèque municipale*, MS. Y6 (AD 1013–17); (12) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. 579 (2675);¹³ (13) Zurich, *Zentralbibliothek*, MS. C.43 (from St Gall, AD 1010–1030); (14) Trent, *Museo Provinciale d’Arte del Castello del Buonconsiglio*, MS. 1587/a (*olim* 15.465) (the missal of Bishop Udalrico, mid-9th c.); (15) Braga, *Biblioteca Publica*, MS. 1000 (AD 1130–1150); (16) Vienna, *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, MS. Ser. Nov. 206 (12th c.); and (17) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawlinson C. 425 (N.C. 12277) (from Westminster).

The missal, a one-volume vademecum of the year’s Masses, gradually replaced the sacramentaries.¹⁴ In Carolingian times it was common for some material from one sacramentary to be copied into another, producing mixed forms. Thus, the seventeen manuscripts in which the prayer *Deus qui humanae substantiae* is found witness various strains and partial combinations of the main sacramentaries. These include the strains known as ‘authentic *Hadrianum*’ (MS. 3) and ‘mixed authentic Gregorian’ (MS. 8 is the oldest and most important of

8. See *Sacramentarium Veronense*, ed. by Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, 2nd ed. (Rome: Herder, 1966), p. 157 (no. 1239).

9. See *Corpus orationum*, vol. 2 (orationes 881–1707), no. 1692c.

10. See *ibid.* Also see Placide Bruylants, *Les oraisons du missel romain. Texte et histoire*, vol. 1: *Tabulae synopticae fontium missalis romani, indices*, Études liturgiques, 1 (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1952), p. 7.

11. This was the sacramentary of Hildoard of Cambrai (AD 811–812), copied directly from a Roman original.

12. This manuscript comprises four fragments (palimpsests) of Benediktbeuern origin (after AD 800).

13. Originally from Arras, this manuscript reached Exeter cathedral between 1050 and 1072.

14. Accurate summary information on the various types of sacramentaries can be found in Deshusses and Darragon, *Concordances et tableaux*, vol. 2: *Tableaux synoptiques*, in particular pp. 6, 7, 57, 129, 191, and 321.

its kind), while MS. 10 is an important witness to Gelasian influence on the Gregorian sacramentary (or perhaps vice versa). MS. 7 illustrates mixed authentic Gregorian and Ambrosian influences; MS. 10 exhibits mixed Gregorian with Gelasian influences; and MS. 13 brings together the Gelasian, Gregorian, and Ambrosian sacramentaries while correcting them (this results in a 'mixed authentic English Gregorian' sacramentary). It emerges clearly that the earliest of the seventeen manuscripts dates back to the eighth century. But our prayer, or at least one wording of it, is older than that.

In the *Corpus orationum* the prayer is printed in four forms, each of which differs from the others by a few words only. The first of these variants makes mention of the name *Jesu Christi filii tui* ('of Jesus Christ your son'), where the other forms simply have *eius* ('his').¹⁵ This first form goes back to the Leonine collection in a manuscript of the sixth or seventh century and seems to represent the oldest recorded form of the prayer;¹⁶ it is found in five further witnesses. The Leonine Sacramentary is the earliest surviving book of Mass prefaces and prayers according to the Roman rite. Its attribution to Pope Leo (d. 461) may not be supported, although it is known to incorporate earlier material. A connection is nevertheless clearly supported by the similarity between our prayer and a passage from Pope Leo's Sermon 27:

Expergiscere, o homo, et dignitatem tua agnosce naturae. Recordare te factum ad imaginem Dei, quae, etsi in Adam corrupta, in Christo tamen est reformata.

Wake up then, o friend, and acknowledge the dignity of your nature. Recall that you have been made 'according to the image of God'. This nature, although it had been corrupted in Adam, has nevertheless been re-fashioned in Christ.¹⁷

Leo's better known wording from Sermon 21 has often overshadowed this and thus drawn attention away from human dignity to the dignity of the Christian:

Agnosce, o Christiane, dignitatem tuam, et diuinae consors factus naturae, noli in ueterem utilitatem degeneri conuersatione recidere.

15. *Corpus orationum*, vol. 2 (orationes 881–1707), no. 1692a.

16. The manuscript in question is Verona, *Biblioteca Capitolare*, MS. LXXXV [80], a collection of Roman *libelli Missae* of various ages. The rubric of the prayer places it on the morning of Christmas; the other codices place it on the vigil, or again on January 8th; or, rather unexpectedly, make it a prayer *super sindonem*, i.e. regarding the cloth in which Joseph of Aramathea wrapped the body of Jesus (Matt. 27:59).

17. Leo Magnus, *Tractatus*, ed. by Antoine Chavasse, *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, 138 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1973), p. 137. English translation: Pope Leo I, *Sermons*, trans. by Jane Patricia Freeland C.S.J.B. and Agnes Josephine Conway S.S.J., *The Fathers of the Church*, 93 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 114.

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Realize, o Christian, your dignity. Once made a 'partaker in the divine nature', do not return to your former baseness by a life unworthy [of that dignity].¹⁸

It is possible that the assembling of the material for the Leonine Sacramentary was done as late as the sixth century; that is as far as the prayer *Deus qui humanae substantiae* can be traced back in time.

The second form of the prayer (1692 b) has the variant *eius efficiamur in divina consortes* ('may we become his sharers in divine things').¹⁹ The third form, known in five manuscripts, diverges from the others:

*Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitatis tuae gratiam contulisti, da nobis Iesu Christi filii tui divinitatis esse consortes, qui fragilitatis nostrae dignatus est fieri particeps.*²⁰

God, you conferred the grace of your dignity on the human substance, grant that we may become sharers in the divinity of your son, Jesus Christ, who deigned to share in our fragility.

Here, the dignity of the human substance is conceived as a participation in the divine dignity, and as received by the mediation of the Son; for Jesus Christ deigned to become a sharer in our fragility. This particular strand of the prayer seems to be no longer in use.²¹

The fourth form, the prayer in the precise form in which it eventually entered the liturgy of the Mass as one of the *orationes super oblata*, is much more commonly witnessed than are the other three forms, although the rubrics vary significantly.²²

The textual evidence thus indicates, clearly and without any variant in the three main forms taken by the prayer (1692 a, b, and c), and indeed even with the variant (1692 d) included, that up until Vatican II the idea of the dignity of the human substance was expressed in the liturgy at all Masses, particularly in the prayer said *super oblata*. It is most remarkable that the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council should have blurred that reference, given the rise to prominence of the concept of human dignity with the human rights tradition after the Second World War. An explanation for this seems not to be at hand,

18. *Tractatus*, p. 88 (trans., p. 79).

19. *Corpus orationum*, vol. 2 (orationes 881–1707), no. 1692b. The rubric describes the prayer as *alia oratio de Natale Domini* ('another prayer for Christmas').

20. *Ibid.*, 1692d.

21. Thomas C. O'Brien, *A Lexicon of Terms in the Missale Romanum* (a private compilation that Dr O'Brien prepared for the International Commission on English in the Liturgy) does not mention the prayer under the entry *dignitas*.

22. *Corpus orationum*, vol. 2 (orationes 881–1707), no. 1692c. Most codices have *Alia oratio de Natale Domini* ('another Christmas prayer').

for example in the explanatory text by Antoine Dumas, who headed the study group that revised the sanctoral.²³

IV. Traces Left in Medieval Literature

It is not necessary to find evidence for the influence of a liturgical prayer upon those who pray it, and thus on the history of ideas, since this is manifest from the central place that they assigned to it in the liturgy. It is possible, however, to indicate its influence on the literature of a period through references made to it. Such references can be identified in texts that were copied from before AD 800 and continued to be copied down to Renaissance times, before they were disseminated in the printed literature of the sixteenth century.

A writing on human dignity attributed variously to St Ambrose, St Augustine, and Alcuin of York (d. 804) retained a significant phrase from the prayer and made it central to its reflections on the concept of human dignity. In the oldest manuscript witness (from c. 800) the work in question is called *Dicta Albini de imagine Dei* ('Albinus' was the pen name by which Alcuin was known within the Carolingian court circle)²⁴ The short work is the first free-standing (small) treatise on human dignity. It reflects on Gn 1.26, 'let us make the human being to our image and likeness', and locates the dignity of the human being not only in the image, but also in the fact that the entire Trinity pictured as a council ('us') collaborate in the making of the human being. It continues to conceive of human dignity on the model of the Trinity: the mind is one although possessing the three capacities (*dignitates*) of knowing, willing, and remembering, just as the Trinity is one, although consisting of three Persons. The human being is thought to have a threefold dignity in this image, a dignity that urges and obliges it to conform in nobility to its archetype. The writing of Pseudo-Alcuin knew a wide diffusion during the Middle Ages. In its final lines the *Dicta* uses the language of our ancient prayer. God, according to the *Dicta Albini*, 'in the first Adam made him [the human being] marvellously to his likeness, and in the Second even more marvellously reshaped him' (*mirabiliter ad similitudinem suam in primo Adam condidit, mirabiliusque in secundo reformauit*).²⁵

23. See Antoine Dumas, 'Les oraisons du nouveau missel romain', *Liturgiques*, 25 (1971), 263–70 (English version: 'The Orations of the New Roman Missal', trans. by Lauren Pristas in 'The Orations of the Vatican II Missal: Policies for Revision', *Communio*, 30 [Winter 2003], 621–53).

24. Edition in *Patrologia latina* (PL), vol. 100, cols 565–68; translation: Mette Lebech and James McEvoy with John Flood, 'De dignitate conditionis humanae: Translation, Commentary, and Reception History of the *Dicta Albini* (Ps.-Alcuin) and the *Dicta Candidi*', *Viator*, 40:2 (2009), 1–34.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The text of the *Dicta Albini* appeared in more than one form in the manuscript literature of the twelfth century. In the ninth century it had been copied with an interpolation, the *Dicta Candidi* (Candidus was a pupil of Alcuin), to form a composite text, and this was put into circulation as a treatise entitled *De dignitate conditionis humanae*, cast in the form of a letter.²⁶ An anonymous Cistercian compilation on themes of psychology, known as *De spiritu et anima* and widely attributed to St Augustine, included the entire text of the *Dicta Albini*. The *Dicta Albini* became chapter 35 of *De spiritu et anima*, and was renamed as ‘The Dignity of the Human Condition. Man as made to the image of God. Again how the image of God [is] in the soul. How far the soul may bear the likeness of God.’²⁷ This adaptation was to enjoy with the anthology a notable success during the first half of the thirteenth century, up to the time when its pseudonymous character came to be recognized, largely through the critical sense of Philip the Chancellor and St Thomas Aquinas (unfortunately, *De spiritu et anima* has not yet received a critical edition). Even after its recognition as a pseudepigraphon, it continued to be influential. Among the late readers of the Cistercian compilation was, probably among a good number of others, Robert Grosseteste, who is among the medieval writers most specifically interested in the notion of human dignity.²⁸

Chapter 35 of *De spiritu et anima* closes with the following lines, very similar to those of the *Dicta Albini*:

*Quapropter quisque diligentius attendat primae conditionis suae excellentiam, et venerandam sanctae Trinitatis in se ipso imaginem agnoscat, honoremque divinae similitudinis, ad quam creatus est, nobilitate morum, exercitatione virtutum, dignitate meritorum habere contendat: ut quando apparebit qualis sit, tunc similis ei appareat, qui mirabiliter eum ad similitudinem suam in primo homine condidit, mirabiliusque in secundo; id est in se ipso reformavit.*²⁹

Wherefore let each one pay more diligent attention to the excellence of his original making, and let him acknowledge as something to be revered in himself the image of the Holy Trinity. Let him struggle by nobility of conduct, by the exercise of the virtues, by the dignity of his merits, to possess the honour of the divine likeness, to which he was created; so that, when it may appear what he is, he may appear like to him who *in the first human being*

26. PL 17:1105–08 (inter opera S. Ambrosii).

27. PL 40:805 (inter opera Augustini): *Dignitas humanae conditionis. Homo quatenus ad imaginem Dei. Rursus quomodo imago Dei in anima. Quatenus anima gerat similitudinem Dei*. See also PL 40:1213–14, where the same text is listed (as a work of Augustine) as *Tractatus de creationi primi hominis*.

28. See Mette Lebeck and James McEvoy, ‘Robert Grosseteste’s Understanding of Human Dignity’, in *Robert Grosseteste and His Intellectual Milieu: New Editions and Studies*, ed. by Joseph Goering, John Flood, and James Ginther, Papers in Medieval Studies, 24 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2013), pp. 34–63.

29. PL 40:806.

made him astonishingly to his likeness, and in the Second, *i.e. himself*, even more astonishingly reshaped him.

The only two differences with the *Dicta Albini* are put in italics; for the first Pseudo-Alcuin had 'Adam' (not 'the first human being'), and for 'i.e. himself' he had nothing, that is, the qualification is newly inserted. The last interpolation may be significant in that it testifies to influence from the adaptation of the prayer for use *super oblata*, which we shall discuss in the next section.

The compilation on the spirit and the soul was by far the most influential literary (as distinct from liturgical) text in circulation concerning human dignity in medieval Europe. The catalogues of the English monastic libraries which are being edited for the British Academy, and whose series is not yet complete, have been searched for copies in circulation by the fifteenth century, complete or partial, of the *De spiritu et anima* and no fewer than 94 have been identified.³⁰ This number gives a rough estimate of the copies that have actually survived in England alone, but it is sufficient to indicate the unusual popularity of the compilation. The offertory prayer mentioning human dignity was thus underlined by the very popular compilation which was *De spiritu et anima*.

From these indications, we can conclude that our prayer enjoyed a real presence in medieval literature, due to the impact made by Pseudo-Alcuin's thought and the various adaptations through which it was disseminated. That the prayer continued to have influence on literature after the Middle Ages is beyond doubt, but an analysis of this lies outside the parameters of the present study. As an illustration a very late echo can be found in Elizabeth Anscombe: 'This lack of reverence, of respect for that dignity of human nature so wonderfully created by God, is a lack of regard for the one impregnable equality of all human beings.'³¹

V.

Location in the Mass at the Offertory: The Significance of the Ritual Mixing of Water and Wine

In copies of the Gelasian Sacramentary and the Gregorian (*Hadrianum*), the prayer *Deus qui humanae substantiae* retained its original form as a Christmas

30. See Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues, published by the British Library, 16 vols to date. The authors are grateful to John Flood for having made this compilation.

31. G. E. M. Anscombe, 'The Dignity of the Human Being', in *Human Life, Action and Ethics: Essays by G. E. M. Anscombe*, ed. by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally, St Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs, 4 (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), pp. 67–73 (p. 72). See also *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Ethics by G. E. M. Anscombe*, ed. by Mary Geach and Luke Gormally, St Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs, 8 (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008), p. 266.

prayer. In the Germanic adaptations of the Roman rite, which took place in the ninth century (the ‘Germanic incrustations’), the prayer was located at the presentation of the gifts, at the moment of the preparation of the chalice. It was adapted to this emplacement through the addition of a reference to the mixing of water and wine, as well as by the invocation of the name of Christ. It is possible that this placement could be associated with the same literary environment as the treatise referred to in the previous section—the circle around Alcuin at the court of Charlemagne.³² Some more recent opinion favours Benedict of Aniane, the contemporary of Alcuin, as the editor of the sacramentary.³³ The late Dom Bernard Botte offered the following summary of the adaptation:

With Charlemagne, the Roman liturgy spreads into Gaul and Germania, and the Roman canon, which had already penetrated there with the Gelasian Sacramentary, will impose itself definitively with the Gregorian, sent by Pope Hadrian. It is nevertheless a particular edition of this sacramentary, which will become generalized: that of Alcuin.³⁴

However, Pierre Le Brun attributed this adaptation to the earlier Fourth Council of Braga in 675.³⁵ At solemn High Masses in some locations, the deacon or sub-deacon used to pour the wine into the chalice, adding a little water. At those occasions, the deacon said the prayer.³⁶ This admixture accorded with the practice of some ancient peoples of adding water to wine. Jungmann claimed that the admixture ‘was not, indeed, a native Palestinian custom, but a Greek prac-

32. See Bernard Botte and Christine Mohrmann, *L'ordinaire de la Messe. Texte critique, traduction et études*, Études Liturgiques, 2 (Paris: Cerf; Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1953), p. 24.

33. See Deshusses and Darragon, *Concordances et tableaux*, p. 321.

34. Botte and Mohrmann, *L'ordinaire de la Messe*, p. 24: ‘Avec Charlemagne, la liturgie romaine va se répandre en Gaule et en Germanie, et le canon romain, qui y avait déjà pénétré avec le sacramentaire Gélasien, va s’y imposer définitivement avec le Grégorien envoyé par le pape Hadrien. C’est cependant une édition particulière de ce sacramentaire qui va se généraliser: celle d’Alcuin.’

35. See Pierre Le Brun, *Explication littéraire*, p. 271.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 273. See also Edmond Martène, *De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus libri*, 2nd ed. (Antwerp: Typis Joannis Baptistae de la Bry, 1736), liber 1, cap. 4, art. 4, X, cols. 375–76: ‘In ecclesia Ambianensi [i.e., Amiens] dum sacerdos in missa sollemni legit epistolam, quotidie diaconus stans ad ministerium sive parvam mensam, quae est a latere epistolae, vinum et aquam miscet in calice, illumque benedicit dicens orationem *Deus qui humanae substantiae* etc., quam orationem sacerdos omittit ad offertorium. Qui quidem ritus communis fuisse videtur pluribus Gallicanis ecclesiis.’ Also col. 392 (art. 6, XIII): ‘Diaconus acceptae a subdiacono aquae modicum refundebat in calicem, dicens *Deus qui humanae substantiae*, quam non dicebat celebrans, uti videre est in missa Illirici et in Rituali ms. ecclesiae Suessionensis, utque etiam nunc Ambianensis habet in usu.’

tice which was observed in Palestine in Christ's time.³⁷ According to him, it was mentioned as early as by St Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–200). St Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) emphasized the symbolism of the admixture, explaining it as signifying the union of Christ and the Church, and the unity of the Christian people. Jungmann summarizes Cyprian's meaning:

Just as the wine receives the water in itself, so has Christ taken to Himself us and our sins. Therefore, the mixing of the water with the wine symbolises the intimate union of the faithful with Him to whom they have bound themselves in faith; and this union is so firm that nothing can sever it, just as the water can no longer be separated from the wine.³⁸

Amiot points out that other liturgies saw in the mixing of water with the wine a symbol of the blood and water that flowed from the side of the crucified Christ.³⁹ The Lyon liturgy, for instance, expressed this meaning in the accompanying prayer: 'From the side of Our Lord flowed blood and water.'⁴⁰

Jungmann commented as follows upon the significance of the Frankish adaptation of our prayer for use in the daily rite of Mass:

Thus the Christmas thought, which hardly ever came under discussion in this connection in the literature of the foregoing centuries, the thought of man's participation in the divinity through the Incarnation of the Son of God, suddenly comes into prominence. It is a concept which presupposes and, to some extent, comprises both the oriental interpretation of the admixture rite, the human and divine natures of Christ, and the western interpretation, our own union with Christ.⁴¹

Dom Bernard Capelle likewise saw in the prayer that interests us the idea of the two natures united in Christ and of the communality created between him and the believers through the Incarnation.⁴²

37. Joseph Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, trans. by F. Brunner (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1950), vol. 2, p. 38.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

39. See François Amiot, *History of the Mass*, trans. by Lancelot C. Sheppard, An Angelus Book (New York: Guild Press/Golden Press, 1960), p. 83.

40. *Ibid.*: 'De latere domini nostri Jesu Christi exivit sanguis et aqua.'

41. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, vol. 2, p. 63.

42. Bernard Capelle, *Pour une meilleure intelligence de la Messe*, 2nd ed. (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1955), pp. 52–53: 'L'idée exprimée par ce beau texte est celle de la coexistence, dans le Christ, des deux natures, et celle de la communauté parfaite—divine et humaine—créée par là entre lui et nous. S. Cyprien ne rappelait pas autre chose en disant que le Christ nous portait en lui et qu'il n'est jamais sans son peuple.'

The word *mysterium* (Greek *mysterion*) in the addition—‘through the mystery of this water and wine’—is significant, given its biblical background⁴³ and rich meanings in Christian Latin, including those of symbol and sign, Paschal mystery, sacred mysteries, and sacrament.⁴⁴ It expresses in its entirety the exchange effectuated between God and the human being in Christ’s Incarnation (*theōsis*). St Athanasius’s ‘For He became human that we might be made divine’⁴⁵ has a parallel in the famous dictum often attributed to St Augustine: ‘God has become man, so that man might become God’,⁴⁶ as well as in St Thomas: ‘The only-begotten Son of God, wishing us to be participants in his divinity, assumed our nature in order that having been made human he might make human beings gods.’⁴⁷ The Christian thought of the *admirabile commercium*, relying as it did upon the Incarnation, was at a far remove from the ancient ideal of divinization (or becoming immortal) through philosophical wisdom (*homoiosis theō*). It rather understood God to have taken the initiative to become ‘one of us’, and indeed to substitute himself for us, so that, in this exchange, we in turn would become divine, not through any activity of ours, but through his deigning to unite human and divine natures in himself through his Incarnation.

It is possible to conceive of this exchange as the reason for the restoration of human dignity and thus to interpret the prayer as a prayer for the restoration of human dignity through the mystery. This interpretation pours the entire wealth of the Christian tradition into the idea of human dignity, and makes of the latter the condition in and through which we have intimate commerce with God. This interpretation seems more meaningful than the one which in our prayer sees only the *association* between the mystery of the divine exchange and the cre-

43. In Mark 4:11 Jesus speaks of ‘the mystery of the Kingdom of God’. St Paul associates with *mysterion* the hidden wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:7, cf. Col. 1:26, 2:12) now revealed in Christ (Rom. 16:25). Cf. Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 13:2; Apoc. 10:7, 17:5; and in the Old Testament Dan. 2:28.

44. See ‘Mysterium’, in Albert Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), pp. 547–48.

45. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 54:11–12, in *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. by Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 268–69.

46. Pseudo-Augustine, *Sermo* 128: *In Natali Domini XII*, 1: ‘Factus est Deus homo, ut homo fieret Deus’ (PL 39:1997). The phrase may have its origin in Eucherius of Lyon, *Sermo* 1, ed. by Clemens Weidmann, ‘Zwei Weihnachtspredigten des Eucherius von Lyon’, in *Edition und Erforschung patristischer Texte. 150 Jahre CSEL. Festschrift für Kurt Smolak zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Viktoria Zimmerl-Panagl, Lukas J. Dorfbauer, and Clemens Weidmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 111–38 (p. 127).

47. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusculum* V: *Officium de festo corporis Christi*, lect. 1, in: *Opera omnia*, vol. XV: *Opusculua theologica* (Parma: Typis Petri Fiaccadori, 1864), p. 254: ‘Unigenitus siquidem Dei Filius suae divinitatis volens nos esse participes, naturam nostram assumpsit, ut homines deos faceret factus homo.’

ation and restoration of human dignity. The latter interpretation occasions the two elements to be separated in the liturgical reforms surrounding Vatican II.

During the centuries where only the Eucharistic prayer was fixed, the celebrant added prayers on either side of it according to regional usage. There was then no guarantee (although there was likelihood) of our prayer being in use for the offertory. In the Missal of the Curia (thirteenth century), however, the Roman *ordo* of the Mass became fixed in the form that eventually would be imposed by Pius V in 1572. Our prayer with the association of the divine exchange with the dignity of the human substance had its assured place in the offertory from at least the thirteenth century to the liturgical reforms of the 1960s, since which time it was split, such that the Carolingian adaptation of the Christmas prayer to be said *super oblata* was undone.

It may be possible to see the following phrase from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* directing the liturgical reforms as a reason for the decoupling:

For this purpose the rites are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance; elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded.⁴⁸

One could regard the repetition of the Christmas prayer at the offertory as ‘duplication’, although repetition occurs in many places and seems to be of the essence of ritual. Considering it as an ‘addition with but little advantage’, however, would seem to disregard the meaning of the *mysterium* as the reason for, or the reason for the restoration of, human dignity. The decoupling could therefore hardly be argued to be an innovation ‘genuinely and certainly’ required by ‘the good of the Church.’⁴⁹ Nevertheless Paul VI, in his Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum*, writes that the above simplifications apply ‘above all in the rites of offering the bread and the wine, and in those of the breaking of the bread and communion.’⁵⁰

As a good number of other prayers would have been said over the gifts, it is not clear, however, that our prayer is specifically intended. Maybe the conciliar document *Dignitatis humanae* on religious freedom, in conformity with and in prolongation of the human rights tradition, so underlined the intrinsic nature of human dignity that reference to its restoration through salvation (to which our prayer also makes reference) was felt to be awkward.⁵¹ Given the inconclusive

48. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963), chap. 2, no. 50 (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html).

49. *Ibid.*, chap. 1, IIIA, no. 23.

50. *Apostolic Constitution Missale Romanum: On the New Roman Missal* (3 April 1969) http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-vi_apc_19690403_missale-romanum.html).

51. See *Declaration on Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae: On the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious* (7 Decem-

reasons for uncoupling human dignity from the mystery at the heart of the liturgy, it may be hoped that the prayer will be restored in its Tridentine integrity to the liturgy at some point in the future. This would seem to be in accordance with the stated purposes of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

VI.

Current Use of the Prayer

The reforms introduced from 1965 onwards thus let the part of our prayer which refers to human dignity revert to its use as a Christmas Day collect, uncoupling it from the mystery expressed by the mixing of water and wine:

*Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitatem
et mirabiliter condidisti, et mirabilius reformasti,
da, quaesumus, nobis eius divinitatis esse consortes,
qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps.*

O God, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature
And still more wonderfully restored it
Grant, we pray,
That we may share in the divinity of Christ,
Who humbled himself to share in our humanity.⁵²

In the divine office for the feast of the Nativity, the reference to human dignity figures prominently, although it is barely recognizable in the not very elegant and unnecessarily sexist current English translation:

God, our Father, our human nature is the wonderful work of your hands,
made still more wonderful by your work of redemption. Your Son took to

ber 1965) (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).

52. *The Roman Missal. Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II. English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition* (Dublin: Veritas, 2011), In Nativitate Domini, Ad missam in die, Collecta, p. 160. See also Fer. IV post domm. II, IV et VI Paschae, Collecta hebdom. II, p. 318: *Annua recolentes mysteria, quibus per renovatam originis dignitatem humana substantia spem resurrectionis accepit* [. . .] ('Recalling the annual mysteries by which, through the renewed dignity of its origin, human nature received the hope of the resurrection [. . .]') and Fer. V post domm. II, IV et VI Paschae, Collectio hebdom. IV, p. 319: *Deus, qui humanam naturam supra primae originis reparas dignitatem, respice ad pietatis tuae ineffabile sacramentum*, [. . .] ('O God, who repair human nature beyond the dignity of its first creation, look upon the unsayable sacramental mystery of your faithfulness [. . .]'). These two last prayers are used on three annual occasions, on weekdays.

himself our manhood, grant us a share in the godhead of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.⁵³

The Book of Common Prayer of the Church of Ireland also includes a Christmas collect, this time well crafted, which echoes the ancient Latin prayer but omits the reference to human dignity:

Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ: Grant that, as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share the life of his divinity; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.⁵⁴

Already in the first 1549 edition there is no trace of the prayer over the gifts, which is replaced with Scripture sentences sung or spoken quietly and with an exhortation. The other half of our prayer now forms a prayer of its own in the revised Catholic rite, which is said at the offertory:

*Per huius aquae et vini mysterium eius efficiamur divinitatis consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps.*⁵⁵

By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

This sums up the incarnational meaning of the earlier prayer, but without any mention of human dignity, creation, and redemption. The prayer gives expression to the mystery that Christ came to partake in human nature in order that, by means of the redemption, we might be made sharers in his divinity. The gesture of mixing water with the wine still symbolizes, as it did in the Tridentine Mass, the uniting of the water of our humanity with the 'rich wine' of divinity. Likewise, through this prayer accompanying the mixture of water and wine, the consecration of the bread and wine can still be thought of as a sacramental extension of the unrepeatable Incarnation, through which divine and human natures were brought together into the unity of one person.

However, what one no longer comes to see is that human dignity is a result of this divine exchange, being miraculously rooted in creation and still more miraculously restored through redemption. That thought is left just outside the

53. *Morning and Evening Prayer with Night Prayer. From the Divine Office* (London: Collins; Sydney: E. J. Dwyer; Dublin: Talbot, 1976), Concluding Prayer for Evening Prayer II, Christmas Day, p. 59.

54. *The Book of Common Prayer for the Church of Ireland* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2004), Collect Two for the first Sunday of Christmas, p. 247

55. The prayer is no. 24 in *Missale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum Ioannis Pauli PP. II cura recognitum*. Editio typica tertia, reimpressio emendata (Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 2008), p. 514.

picture. If one knows it was there, one might just glimpse it. Maybe the Christian tradition is in need of reclaiming it. Reaffirming it cannot be an affront to anyone, and could well be done on behalf of all, including those who would not consider redemption to be for them.

VI. Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to show that a prayer praising God for having established the dignity of the human being in creation, and for having restored it through redemption, occupied an increasingly central place in Catholic liturgy from before the Carolingian renaissance. It rose to prominence as a result of being adapted to be said over the gifts to accompany the ritual mixing of water and wine. It was included as such in the missal of the curia, and later in the missal of Pius V. Human dignity was thus proclaimed and shaped over many centuries by the close connection with the mystery of *theōsis*, effectuated in the Eucharist. The prayer also had an influence on the literature on human dignity in the Middle Ages, and must have continued to inspire thinking on human dignity right up to the Second Vatican Council, where it was simplified in such a manner as to separate the reference to human dignity from the ritual mixing of water and wine. Tracing the influence of the prayer beyond the Middle Ages through modern times would be a task for another study. In the present article, we have established that the prayer forms the liturgical background to the history of human dignity, sounding, like a note in the chord defining it, continuously since the time of St Leo.

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Note: Professor James McEvoy passed away on 2 October 2010. The manuscript of this article, which he co-authored with Dr Mette Lebech, remained unfinished at the time of his death. Dr Lebech is responsible for its final version.