THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

A THEOLOGY OF HUMAN DIGNITY:

THE ACT AND THE BODY OF THE POOR AND BLACK PERSON IN BRAZIL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

VINICIUS PINTAS MARINHO

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MARCH 2024

For João Cassiano and Lauryn.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I have been fortunate enough to receive guidance from a body of accomplished and generous scholars. First, I wish to thank Prof. Dwight N. Hopkins, my advisor and mentor, for his longstanding and multifaceted support. Among other invaluable lessons, he has patiently taught me how to think and write with clarity about things that actually matter. I am also grateful to Prof. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, whose intellectual acumen and human responsiveness have illuminated my journey from the outset. From him, I have learned the importance of doing diligent and rigorous research. Prof. Kristine A. Culp's keen comments have substantially enhanced my way of tackling a handful of anthropological conundrums. Her diagnostic feedback has helped me lay the foundations for my argument. I also wish to thank Dean Mimi Maduff, Dean Anita Lumpkin, Prof. Sarah Fredericks, Ms. Americia Huckabee, and Ms. Nathelda McGee for their careful assistance with administrative questions.

In every step of my journey I could count on the support of the HTI, the Hispanic Theological Initiative. This exceptional institution welcomed me into a vibrant scholarly community, granted me a dissertation fellowship (HTI/Lilly), and offered me professional training. Special appreciation is more than due to Ulrike "Uli" Guthrie for her superb editorial assistance and encouragement. I am also thankful to João Chavez, Suzette Aloyo, Ángela Schoepf, and Joanne Rodriguez for their support.

The following is a list of other scholars with whom I have honed my ideas in many conversations: Guilherme Almeida, Sylvia Amanda, An Yountae, Raymond Anthony, Leora Auslander, Seth Auster-Rosen, Dain Borges, Cesar Braga-Pinto, Peter Casarella, Aslan Cohen, Ebenezer Concepción, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Paul Crowley, Jeremy V. Cruz, Carlos Decena, Conceição Evaristo, Paul Robeson Ford, Elmer Guzman, Aaron Hollander, Iris Hollister,

Thomas C. Holt, Kévin Irakóze, Joya John, Caine Jordan, Matthew Katz, David Latimore, Christina Llanes, Néstor Medina, Glauber Mizumoto, Dhruv Nagar, Valentina Napolitano, Antony Sean Neal, Hyein Park, Barnabas Pusnur, Diego Soáres Rojas, Eric Santner, Santiago Slabodsky, Dilara Üsküp, Lis Valle, Héctor Varela-Rios, and Matthew Vega.

Above all, I am thankful for the nourishing love of my wife Lauryn and my son João Cassiano.

An early version of Chapter One was published in the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 21, No.1 (Winter, 2022), under the title "Thomas Aquinas Body-Soul Dualism and the Hierarchy of Human Dignity in Brazil: The Theological Origins of a Nation's Hierarchical Self-Understanding."

Introduction

1. "Getting Milk out of a Stone:" A Recipe for Human Dignity

"God, help Edu's dad leave the jail and quit stealing." It was during a church service in Guarulhos, São Paulo that the eight-year-old boy finally discovered his father's occupation. As Eduardo Lyra's family prayed, the boy nevertheless had a thousand reasons to follow his father into a life of crime. One night, the boy was sitting alone in a corner when his mother showed up and asked him what he was drawing on paper. He answered that he was planning a bank robbery. Eduardo grew up amid two opposing forces. On the one hand, he knew that "our place of birth and social position typically determine how far we can go." On the other, he heard from his mother that "our origins cannot define who we are."[1] A decade later, Eduardo and his community began challenging the paralyzing social hurdles surrounding them.

Living under the poverty line in the Nova Cumbica favela, Eduardo's Black family experienced material duress and senseless violence. The Lyras usually had only one meal per day. In their shanty house, the floors were made of dirt and the bathroom had neither a shower nor a flushing toilet. Throughout his childhood, the boy had had to sleep in a blue plastic infant bathtub. Violence and crime were ubiquitous. Several of his uncles and cousins had been murdered. Innumerable friends and neighbors had departed prematurely, initially to join criminal organizations, then forever. From the ages of four to ten, Eduardo regularly visited his father in prison. His mother's strategy of pretending that the jail was his father's "workplace" did not avert the obvious harm. Eduardo bitterly remembers the humiliation he and his mother had to

[1] Plenae, "Eduardo Lyra em 'Sua Origem Não Define Quem Você Será." https://plenae.com/para-inspirar/eduardo-lyra-em-sua-origem-nao-define-quem-voce-sera/.

undergo every time they arrived at the "correctional" facility. He never understood why every family member had to suffer in their flesh for a crime they did not commit.[2]

A few years later, God responded to the family's prayer. Still in jail, the father converted and became a religious man, then regained his freedom and quit his previous "job." A faithful conversion is one of the very few acceptable excuses for somebody to leave Brazil's most powerful and dreaded criminal organization, the PCC,[3] alive. Unsurprisingly, however, the Lyras' life became even more grim thereafter. For in a socially hierarchical and racist society, who would hire a formerly convicted Black man? State violence and crime, racism, and economic oppression are inseparable and structural problems in Brazil.

Now, Eduardo's stigmatized and unemployed father had to walk a tightrope in order to feed his family: for several years, every evening they went out to visit a different friend and have dinner with them. As a teenager, Eduardo believed his father was so popular that they were constantly invited to dine at his friends' homes. He only discovered the truth years later—that his father deliberately visited all of his acquaintances precisely at their dinner time so that they would feel compelled to break bread with his son and wife. Father, mother, and son gradually started their lives afresh by launching a small bottled water business, which finally gave them some dignity. During this period, the teenager worked closely with his father and absorbed a great deal of the wisdom that he had gained over the course of his defiant life.[4]

[2] Plenae, "Eduardo Lyra em 'Sua Origem Não Define Quem Você Será;" "Café Brasil" LíderCast 051. https://portalcafebrasil.com.br/lidercast-051-edu-lyra/.
[3] "Primeiro Comando da Capital."
[4] Plenae, "Eduardo Lyra." "Café Brasil" LíderCast 051.

His father taught Eduardo how to "get milk out of a stone,"[5] as we say in Brazil. But as much as he learned from his father on how to live with a measure of dignity, it was his mother who really infused him with a profound sense of self-reliance and worth. If it had not been for her, he admits, he would not have gone anywhere but into the bank vaults, courtrooms, and jails of Rio.[6] Disregarding their material calamity, she had the audacity to encourage him to dream of a dignified life, and to act for its concretization. She always told him, "what matters is where you're going, not where you come from." Eduardo gradually adopted his mother's fearless and faithful spirit, and through it he discovered his life's call: to increase his community's wellbeing. Her courageous faith helped him to transform their pain and humiliation into the motivation to develop a sense of human worth.

Things really took off when Eduardo decided to write a book recounting the biographies of young and poor Brazilians who resisted the malignant allure of organized crime activity and instead acted to transform their communities. Initially, he raised some money by partnering with small businesses operating inside the favela. On a budget, Eduardo traveled around the country and collected fifteen stories of social resilience, cooperation, and innovation, which he abridged in *Jovens Falcões* (Young Falcons). Then, he convinced fifty young adults from the community to help him sell his independently published book for R$9,99.[7] With the revenue generated by the five thousand books sold in only three months, he launched Gerando Falcões (Generating Falcons), a small non-profit focused on the favela's economic, social, and political empowerment.

[5] "Tirar leite de pedra" is equivalent to the American saying, "to find a way out of no way."
[6] "Café Brasil" LíderCast 051.
[7] Roughly U$2,00.

Because criminal organizations *de facto* occupy the role of the state in poor and Black neighborhoods, poor children have very few life options. Eduardo's non-profit aims to replace the insidious and arbitrary control that those organizations have upon the poor with technology, social entrepreneurship, and civic activism. The organization's goal is quite deliberately to form and recruit the favela's most talented youth, who can eventually "give back" to the community instead of being coopted by crime.[8]

Quickly, Eduardo's dream generated more and more attention. He was invited to speak at the World Economic Forum, where the co-founder and vice-president of Brazil's wealthiest financial conglomerate approached him. The seed investor readily volunteered to sponsor a large-scale project at Gerando Falcões. Amazed and perplexed, Eduardo could not believe what he was hearing from the investor's mouth: one of the very banks that his father had robbed was going to sponsor one of his projects to eradicate poverty. The banker offered him seed money, visibility, proper training, a network of cutting-edge mentors, advisors, and partners, and many other resources.[9] From that day onward, the Falcões grew exponentially.

Now, twenty years after his father's conversion, the organization employs two hundred people and is indirectly present in more than five thousand favelas, through established partnerships with a thousand other NGOs. Over 700,000 members of poor and predominantly Black communities have directly benefited from the educational and cultural programs being offered for social and economic development, in addition to "citizenship" (human) rights.[10] Gerando Falcões enables poor and Black people's initiatives for living with a minimum of

[8] Gerando Falcões, main page. https://gerandofalcoes.com/; Plenae, "Eduardo Lyra;" "Café Brasil" LíderCast 051.
[9] "Café Brasil" LíderCast 051.
[10] Gerando Falcões, main page. https://gerandofalcoes.com/; Plenae, "Eduardo Lyra em 'Sua Origem Não Define Quem Você Será;" "Café Brasil" LíderCast 051.

dignity. It does so by integrating and testing their incipient ideas among a collaborative web of agents who plan and strategize ways to attain decent housing, health care, quality education, women's empowerment, cultural dynamism, sports, income generation, and micro finance.[11]

2. At Stake: The Challenge and The Wager of Material Dignity

Working against all social and economic odds, the poor and Black agents of Falcões not only "produce" their own dignity but their initiatives challenge our standard view of such dignity. In what ways? First, by interrogating the political and humanist principle grafted onto Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has become the supreme meta-juridical principle of several modern constitutions, including that of Brazil.[12] The UDHR and the Constitution tell us that all human persons are ends in themselves because they are endowed with reason; thus, they have an innate, inviolable, and intangible dignity which is universally and equally enjoyed: "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." However, stories like Eduardo's show that poor Brazilians know that their "rational humanity" does not automatically grant them either material or immaterial dignity. They are not actually "born equal in dignity and rights," even though they are valuable human persons "endowed with reason and conscience" and even though they habitually "act towards one another in a spirit of fraternity." Being "endowed with reason and conscience" does not guarantee a dignified life.

[11] Gerando Falcões, "Accesse o Relatório Favela 3D." https://gerandofalcoes.com/favela3d/.
[12] Art. 1, III. Human dignity also grounds and organizes the Mexican (1917), Cuban (1940), South African (1997), and German (Basic Law, 1949) constitutions.

Likewise, the Christian conception is also challenged by the poor's collaborative transfiguration of their material and spiritual reality. Partaking of the spirit of the twentieth-century's declarations, theologians of various traditions usually reaffirm dignity's universality, inviolability, and intangibility, only adding to its list of qualities the divine touch—that God is the creator and origin of human dignity. We generally affirm this based on our interpretations of the *imago dei* and/or our innate capacity for moral reasoning. Yet, in a hierarchical society like that of Brazil, where Black and Indigenous communities struggle to find some dignity, it may signify something totally different: the totality of one's socioeconomic status; the actual "value" someone has according to the person's economic power, but also, one's race and gender, origin, sexuality, and other factors. The "value" of a person really depends on the hierarchical relations that constitute the social fabric, and these can determine one's social location. In a word, dignity is socially ascribed, and given this fact, it is selective rather than universal; materially instantiated rather than intangible; and relative rather than inviolable or absolute.

The Catholic rationalist and dualist view of personhood imparts the *de facto* "hierarchical" understanding of dignity in Brazil. The Church's view of personhood is dualist[13] and grounds the principle of dignity, which is the cornerstone of all Catholic Social Thought.[14] To say the least, modern Catholic Social Teachings have been heavily influenced by the interactions—or "correlations"—between the tumultuous political events of the twentieth century and Thomistic anthropology and natural law, which rely on a metaphysical gap. For

[13] "He [Jesus] was far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world. Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel." *Laudato Si'* papal encyclical by Francis.

[14] As Pope John XXIII says, all Catholic social thought is ruled "by one basic theme—an unshakable affirmation and defense of the dignity and rights of the human person." Pope John XXIII, "A Preview of Mater et Magistra" in *The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John XXIII* (Washington, DC: TPS, 1964), 233.

Thomas, because the soul is rational, its "weight" or importance is far superior to the body's in the order of divine creation. Pope John Paul II, a leading enthusiast of innate, universal, inviolable, and intangible dignity, declared that "The Image of God,' consisting in rationality and freedom, expresses the greatness and dignity of the human subject who is a person."[15] Even the widely celebrated Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudim et Spes*, re-affirms its universality and intangibility, regardless of the material deprivation and violence on Earth.

The Church's position is explicitly built upon Thomas Aquinas's adaptation of the Aristotelean idea that the human soul is the only thing that has "value in itself." For him, we humans are the only intrinsically valuable beings because our souls reflect the divine image in our intellectual capacity to know God. The soul is sacred. But how about the body? Thomas and the Catholic tradition believe in the sacredness of the body but not in its intrinsic dignity, since it is a tool for the soul, which gives it human status or worth. For Thomas, a person is the "unmixed compound" of a body or a matter and a soul or a form, which are different substances, with different metaphysical values in the order of creation. Thomas's reason may be philosophically sound but it is theologically unverifiable: because it lacks the capacity for reason and cannot know God cognitively, the sacred body (which is a matter) does not directly reflect God's image and is not made in God's likeness. Hence, for Thomas and the Church Teachings, since only the soul truly reflects God's image, its metaphysical weight—*dignitas* literally means "weight"—is superior to the body's.

[15] *Dominium et Vivificantem*, papal encyclical by John Paul II, May 18, 1986.

Yet narratives like Eduardo's interrogate both the political-humanitarian and the Catholic conceptions of dignity and personhood by showing that dignity has a material constituent and plenty of material implications; it actually has a lot to do with one's physical, economic, social, and political situation; it reflects one's material or physical origins, opportunities, purposes, choices, and interactions. Assuming that the body is the way through which humans exist physically, intellectually, spiritually, and interactively,[16] and since the human existence is the supreme piece of the entire divine creation,[17] the human body must be more than a mere tool for the soul. Contradicting the UDHR, the Constitution, Thomas, and Catholic doctrine, the poor show that the human dignity cannot correspond entirely to the assumedly superior metaphysical "weight" of the soul. Also, dignity is not universal and inviolable since countless humans bodies that have been forced to live without it are nonetheless able to create the conditions for a dignified life.

The challenge of poor and Black Brazilians leads us to the central wager of this dissertation: either they "have" dignity, but it is materially irrelevant, or they do not "have" it at all; or —a third possibility—dignity means something completely different from the traditional conception. Assuming the traditional view—that dignity is a divinely given, universal, intangible, and inviolable value—then "having" it implies either the enjoyment of minimum material wellbeing and spiritual comfort, or, instead, most Brazilians actually lack dignity, which shows that it is instead particular, tangible, and violable. If "having" dignity actually means nothing to the poor, then the entire discourse of human rights and the Catholic declarations of social justice constitute a purely "declarative discourse"—a formal and unilateral communication

[16] "Relationally," as Ivone Gebara proposes. See Chapter 3.
[17] "Created in the image and likeness of God."

of ideas that lack any empirical correspondence. On the other hand, if dignity includes a minimum of material security, then it cannot be a universal, intangible, and inviolable value. The affirmation of dignity would require a nihilist attitude in the first case and a hypocritical one in the second.

Assuming, however, that dignity has a material constituent and implications, and that it is not a universal, intangible, and inviolable value, then what is it? In other words, "What is dignity for Black and poor Brazilians who are forced to live without it?" Before formulating an answer, we must avoid the traps of hypocrisy and nihilism from the outset. In Brazil's hierarchical culture, a hypocritical stance is sadly the norm. The talk goes like this: "Since we believe in God's and humanity's intrinsic goodness, we must insist that dignity is a an essential element of all humanity (universal, inviolable, and incorporeal), regardless of harrowing poverty, racism, violence, xenophobia, etc." Nowadays, nihilism is also on the rise. Those who seek shelter behind the feeble walls of pessimism or fierce skepticism are too easily prone to denounce the flaws of dignity "discourses." After a brief encounter with material and moral devastation, the moderate nihilist usually considers all talk of dignity redundant at best. For them, words such as "wellbeing," "honor," "respect," "pride," "decency," and "worth" are interchangeable, and their power is merely rhetorical. With a sleight of hand, they advocate the (impossible) historical suppression of the linguistic, intellectual, and cultural legacies of the Enlightenment, as though this were an option. The radical nihilist goes a step further and condemns not only the idea of dignity, but also the tradition of human rights altogether. For the radical, they form a void intellectual and moral workout; at worst, they are subverted and actually deployed against those whom they purport to protect.

As Eduardo's testimony shows, the "idea" of dignity really matters for those who are Black and poor, and it is their "faith" in dignity that leads to its materialization. Since it does matter to them and since its materialization is possible, its preemptive dismissal would be a crass mistake.

3. Dignity as Human Act: Hypothesis and Project Outline

Instead of a hypocritical or nihilist stance, the quest for the "actual" meaning of dignity in Brazil demands a critical posture. Accordingly, the first chapter investigates dignity in light of the social and economic disparities. The chapter's driving question is, "Why there is a gap in human dignity?" As above explained, the material consequences of theological dualism illuminate my entire research. The first chapter exposes the historical complicity of Thomist dualism in the ideological foundations of a hierarchical culture. Since colonization, dualism has fertilized the political and theological imagination of the Brazilian elite, and this has likewise given rise to hierarchical institutions that work to maintain social disparity. A Thomist faith in the metaphysical superiority of the rational soul in relation to the body corroborates the colonialist idea that only the so-called "rational races" (Europeans) had the natural right to rule the so-called "bodily races" (African and Indigenous peoples) and to monopolize the common good.

In other words, religious conceptions of human personhood and dignity have participated in the formation of Brazil's social and cultural notion of dignity. One particular strand of Thomism,[18] which radicalized Thomas's dualist anthropology and natural law, provided the theological tools needed to organize an authoritarian society. Religiously, dignity was conceived

[18] For details, see Chapters One and Five.

as the God-given value that the rational soul enjoys in the order of creation. As Thomas believed, a person is a soul and a body, the soul being a form and the body matter. A form, which is an intellectual being, creates matter, which it uses in its pursuit of knowledge. Since all matter serves a form, Thomas believes that the body exists in order to serve the soul in its quest for knowing God cognitively. Accordingly, the intrinsic dignity of the body is that of a tool. Rather than being an end in itself, the body's human worth is entirely received from the soul, upon which its existence depends. As a result, Thomas posits two fundamental modes of human existence: embodied and disembodied. Above all, he believes the disembodied soul can know divine things in a way that resembles angelic knowing, which is greater than the embodied way of knowing. While embodiment is natural for humanity, the disembodied existence is in this way "supernatural," and thus also superior on the metaphysical scale. As a result, there is only one form of human dignity, but its "value" changes according to the soul's embodiment and disembodiment.

Over the centuries, Brazilian intellectuals, publicists, and theologians have taken advantage of the Thomist metaphysical gap between the rational soul and the material body. With some adaptation, they believed that the same dualist logic could be applied to the social organization of the colony, and then the nascent Republic: since dignity is one in nature but varies in degrees—according to the soul's embodiment/disembodiment—it can represent the relative value someone has because of their position in the economic, social, and political orders. Roughly speaking, it represents the total "sum value" of a person, computed within interpersonal and hierarchical relations that define one's social status. Thus, the Brazilian social valuation of human persons has benefited from the Thomist ontotheological and dualist personhood and

dignitas, not least after the hyperboles that influential Jesuit commentators produced, starting in the sixteenth century.

Because I assume a critical stance, I take the perspective of poor and Black Brazilians starting in the second chapter, which raises the central question of the dissertation: "What is human dignity for people who live without it?" Certainly, poor and Black communities have been among those most affected by the concrete consequences of dualism. Yet, the undignified of Brazil have in fact built and sustained their country, along with other marginalized people, and they have done so with their bodies, faith, culture, and traditional knowledges. If we assume that they do not know the meaning of their own hard-earned dignity, we must conclude that no other Brazilians do. Poor and Black people consider their dignity to be neither a value of the rational soul (Thomas), nor the total sum of one's interpersonal and hierarchical relations. For them, "real" dignity cannot be satisfactorily described, explained, or conceptualized by using either the theological or the socio-cultural notions discussed in chapter one. Instead, I claim, they believe that dignity is a redemptive and rebellious human act with immediate material implications for the community.

In the favelas, people discover and affirm their dignity in cooperative initiatives like Eduardo's, initiatives that increase the wellbeing of their communities. For them, dignity represents something much closer to an act than to an incorporeal and inviolable human value, constituent, attribute, essence, or substance. Dignity is something to be "done," achieved, built, or retrieved, rather than "possessed." "Dignity as an act" is the fruit of a realistic and communitarian attitude, which assumes a preexisting but resolvable social and economic gap. In Black Brazilian culture, the more an idea is assimilated into the collective experience as being

favorable to people's welfare, the more it is considered "real." In contrast to the hierarchical mentality, in the favelas one's social and personal situation—"reality"—is not understood as something to be naturalized or considered irreversible. Instead, the Black understanding of life is open, fluid, and even "evolutive," precisely Black communities understand human life to reflect the divine image. God's supreme act of creation is of life, not of the soul. Black Brazilian Christians thus believe that they reflect God with the (embodied) deeds and general "relations" that compose one's life.

Insofar as any notion of dignity presupposes a view of the person, chapter three outlines a dignity-oriented personhood. Because a theology of human dignity in Brazil must take seriously the Black critical insight that dignity is a human act, it asks: "What is a human person who affirms dignity with action? And what is the significance of such action for the person?" To ask the meaning of dignity is to investigate the reason why persons "have" a human value, weight, or worth in the first place. Whatever it may be, such a reason is part and parcel of both the person and their dignity. It is the grounding motive of dignity that shall guide the definition of the human person and reveal their dignity. Accordingly, any concept of personhood that emerges from the poor's understanding of "dignity as an act" must be likewise act- and dignity-driven. The Black view indicates that the capacity for action (agency) is the underlying "reason" why a person who has been living in poverty can nevertheless live a dignified life.

Above all, my vision of personhood depicts an agent of liberation whose body and soul stand in a dialectical, rather than a hierarchical, relation. I construct this dignity-seeking, corporeal, and soul-full person with the ideas of the Brazilian theologians Leonardo Boff and Ivone Gebara. Partly relying on Gebara's notion of "fundamental bodily relatedness," which

grounds her eco-feminist anthropology, I claim that the body is the entire way in which humans exist, always in relation. With Boff's cosmological-Christological insights and his poor-centered interpretation of Pauline anthropology, I propose that the soul is a set of life-affirming capacities which are part of the body.[19] The body and the soul are not two separate being and they represent two aspects of one and the same person. However, in my conception, the body has relative prominence since it represents the totality of our personal interactions, which form our persons. Basically, we are conscious bodies in continuous interaction with one another.

A body (full person) who interacts with another in order to generate material and spiritual dignity for poor communities acts for liberation. I conclude chapter three by suggesting that the more someone promotes the dignity of the poor, the more they become a "spiritual-body." However, in my creative appropriation of the Pauline expression, *soma pneumatikus* is not a being, for it represents a way of living according to the Spirit. Hence, a "spiritual-body" is a full person (or body) who uses their consciousness and other soul-driven capacities for the affirmation of the poor's dignity through action.

Chapter four restates the "relational" and "interactive" origins of my concept of dignity as an act. It does so by searching for its location in human-human relations. Basically, I claim that there are two types of dignity, depending on how we interact. "Intrinsic dignity" is perceptible inter-corporeally, i.e., in the physical space formed between two human persons who meet in pure relation. As the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber teaches us, divine presence gives a "meaning" to two persons who meet in full reciprocity (I-Thou). Such "meaning," Buber continues, is transformative and received as a "presence as strength, in the[ir] being." The divine

[19] For him, the human person is the Earth's "consciousness of matter."

presence invites the participants to acknowledge the integral, individuated, and intrinsic dignity of one another. Even though "intrinsic dignity" is a God-given, innate human attribute, its perception and effects depend on a human act of mutual acknowledgment. When the moment of pure relation ceases, dignity immediately becomes relative, extrinsic, and fungible, a value among others. Likewise, human persons cease to be ends in themselves.

Yet, I claim, two persons can dialogically renew the lost "intrinsic-ness" of dignity through love and dialogue. Buber tells us that the divine meaning keeps calling the participants to "enact" it, through dialogue, in the sphere of instrumental relations, where humans are treated as objects. Thus, I suggest that intrinsic dignity can be renovated through dialogue. Such renewal is a way to "actualize God in the world." Since it is enacted in the dynamics of dialogue, I call it "dialogical dignity." The dialogical enactment of the divine meaning is in practice a dignity-restoring movement.

After discussing the "why," "what," "who," and "where" of dignity in chapters one through four, I conclude with an abridged and illustrative list of items that can indicate a dignified life nowadays. The concluding chapter asks the "with" and "when" questions: "What does it mean to live with dignity today?" The time of dignity is always now!, but its enactment requires more than a personal decision. While my suggested list by no means exhausts what could possibly "constitute" dignity in contemporary Brazil, it does denote a minimum level of recognition and protection experienced in different areas of life.

Like the previous chapters, the final one also offers a response to dualism. While every soul aspires to plenitude and infinite happiness, every body demands a minimum of dignity, simply by virtue of being alive and existing in interactions. Against the theological-

anthropological grain that prevails in the scholarship about dignity, spiritual growth and realization imply a realized body before anything else. Not only is life embodied, not only does it pose specific material and immaterial demands that can only be fulfilled through human relations, spiritual life itself is the collective adventure of bodily, soul-filled persons. Individual demands are bodily needs that, if unfulfilled, can pose a terminal threat against *all*. Inspired by the force of this theological and humanist "truth," I build my list with the body in mind and itemize the signs of fundamental dignity into six categories: the healthy body, the financially stable body, the economically participative body, the politically participative body, the joyous body in the family and in community, and the thriving cultural body.

4. A Theology of Human Dignity: Four Revisions

My research concludes that the poor believe that dignity is an act, since we are agents who reflect the divine image in our lives' interactions, and that we thus have the power and the responsibility to "enact" our God-given, intrinsic dignity (chapter two). Such enactment transforms us by further potentializing and integrating the two aspects of personhood, which the Christian tradition nonetheless continues to separate and calls "body" and "soul" (chapter three). The enactment of dignity can take place in the space formed between two persons who meet in pure relation and through dialogue (chapter four). In Brazil, the pervasive dualist idea of human life has facilitated the creation of hierarchical social, economic, and political institutions that perpetuate an actual gap of dignity. Poor and Black communities reject the theological and the likewise hierarchical politico-humanitarian conception.

My re-conception comprises four contiguous revisions which could potentially form a "theology of human dignity." Such contributions are offered to liberation theology, including the Black and Black-feminist branches, theological anthropology, and the interdisciplinary scholarship on the Jewish philosophy of Martin Buber. No other theological engagement with Black and Black feminist theologies has yet insisted that dignity is a human, redemptive, and rebellious act. Likewise, no other published theological-anthropological study advocates a dignity-driven and body-centered concept of personhood. To my knowledge, no other research has advocated for the two "places" of dignity (inter-corporeal and dialogical) according to Buber's dialogical philosophy. In the liberation theology field, no other work has yet analyzed the historical and intellectual linkages between dualism and the absence of human dignity, either in Brazil or in other countries. Nor has any other theologian thus far provided a focused and persuasive response to the fundamental problem of dignity: its material absence.

It appears that the Argentinian-Mexican philosopher and theologian Enrique Dussel was the first to call our attention to dignity's conceptual insufficiency and ambiguity in a situation of oppression.[20] In a short but illuminating piece, he claims that the politically oppressed discover their dignity through its denial. The poor's "denial of the denial"[21] is the affirmative way through which they realize their own dignity. However meaningful, Dussel's point is fully a response to Kant's influential but inherently flawed conception, which is not religious. For Kant, human dignity is the "absolute value" of a being who is "an end in itself" because of its capacity for morality. The value of humanity is thus a reflection of us being ends in ourselves and of us

[20] Enrique Dussel, "Dignity: Its Denial and Recognition in a Specific Context of Liberation" in Elsa Tamez et al., *The Discourse of Human Dignity* (London: Concilium-SCM Press, 2003), 93.
[21] For Dussel, dignity is discovered in the "denial of the denial" of one's humanity. Dussel, "Dignity," 93.

having the capacity to do good. In a few pages, Dussel explains that Kant's idea is an oxymoron since all value is relative. An "absolute value" is a fantasy of pure reason. Furthermore, the only being who can create a value—the human—cannot possibly "have" a value, for the creators of all value stand outside of their invented valuation systems.

Hence, Dussel's valuable contribution does not confront the theological problem of dignity directly, not least because it does not discuss the *imago dei* or any another religious fundament. Nor does Dussel suggest that human acts can constitute dignity, as I claim. Rather, he thinks it depends on an affirmation, which he calls the "denial of the denial." Dussel is correct that in a situation of oppression dignity can be "perceived" through its denial and subsequent affirmation. However, in his brief article Dussel does not tell us what dignity is, nor does he suggest the ways through which it can be materialized, nor does he discuss the theological question.

More recently, the Black American philosopher Vincent Lloyd has given us another valuable contribution in his *Black Dignity: The Struggle Against Domination*.[22] My point in this dissertation differs even more substantially and formally from his than from Dussel's, first, because I do not propose a concept of "Black dignity," as he does, even though I do engage the ideas of Cleusa Caldeira and James Cone; and second, because I argue that it is an act, rather than a "struggle" or an "action." For Lloyd, dignity is essentially political praxis and/or activism, especially perceived in the form of performative protest. For me, however, it is not intrinsically political, and it can thus not be an "action in the struggle against domination." No doubt dignity has plenty of political implications, but these have much more to do with communal wellbeing

[22] Vincent Lloyd, *Black Dignity: The Struggle Against Domination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022).

and human purpose than organized protest and activism. Dignity is more than that, so let it be said, time and again, that it is political, but not fundamentally so. Therefore, while Lloyd reframes it in relation to the political category of "struggle," I reconceive it in relation to the anthropological notions of "body" and "act." Third, as nearly all US Black thinkers do, Lloyd draws heavily from the Black US canon, which he knows so well. Here and there, on his way to a US Black dignity, he also engages some ideas of European critical theorists. In contrast, my study draws primarily on scholarship produced in Brazil. Fourth, we use very different methods. Lloyd's ideas move toward a Black dignity by virtue of his likely secular intention to advance a philosophy for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which is indeed a non-religious phenomenon.[23] In his book, the meaning of Black dignity emerges from within the input received from that social movement. Lloyd organizes the whole book around BLM's key hashtags: "rage," "love," "family," "futures," and "magic." My method, on the other hand, is decidedly theological and modulated by Paul Ricoeur's "dialectical hermeneutics" and David Tracy's "conversation as interpretation." Predominantly theological-anthropological themes compose its four-fold structure: body-soul dualism (chapter one), human act (chapter two), personhood, the body, and the soul (chapter three), and human encounter and dialogue (chapter four).

The quest for dignity prompts the intellectual question, and both become even more urgent in an increasingly atrocious world. As a great portion of humanity undergoes the consequences of yet another global wave of authoritarianism, including state-inflicted violence and scarceness, virulent polarization, escalating international armed conflicts, and the abject use of new technologies for the increase of political and economic dominance, we pray that the

[23] "I name these ideas the philosophy of Black dignity." Lloyd, *Black Dignity*, 34.

victims and the powerful of the world realize that their dignity is interdependent. May the world "leaders," who are leading us toward mayhem and are remorselessly trading widespread pain for capital, learn from the subjugated peoples the meaning of their own taken-for-granted humanity.

Above all, may the humble and humiliated have the last word, and may my flawed construal add to their enacted prayer of dignity. May it bring our scholarly attention to dignity's visceral, material, dialogical, and innovative virtues. And may our proposed revisions eventually collaborate on behalf of the improvement of the global ideas about a dignity that predominates in the UN's assemblies and Church pulpits but remains absent in impoverished countries, favelas and hoods, penitentiaries, refugee and migrant prisons, war camps and, especially, in the bodies of the poor.

5. Dignity-Talk: Dialectics and Conversation

My mode of analysis is a twofold interpretative approach which I have tailored using elements derived from Paul Ricœur's "dialectical hermeneutics" and David Tracy's "interpretation as conversation." Ricœur's "hermeneutics," which I access via Tracy's informed interpretation, frames the theological-anthropological problem of dualism. And Tracy's model for conversation informs my organization of the interdisciplinary discussions involving different authors.

Ricœur's general approach to false opposites enlightens my analysis of the roles of the two basic aspects of personhood. As his method implies, in several of his theological and philosophical works, seeming opposites or binaries can in fact hide a relation of inter-complementarity, rather than an antagonism. While I do not advocate the notion of the inter-

complementarity of the body and the soul, I formulate a response to Thomist dualism by exploring an alternative dialectical understanding of them. Because these two anthropological ideas are historically soaked in dualist jargon, the meanings that they evoke are often imprecise and in opposition to one another. Indeed, my dialectical view represents a moderate effort to reduce such historical shortsightedness. In this dissertation, they are symbols that refer to different basic aspects or qualities of the one single human person. Although they are not properly in "inter-complementary" relation, since they refer to the same being, they can nevertheless form a dialect in which our understanding of the material aspects of life inform our view of the immaterial and vice versa. Because I approach them hermeneutically (as "symbols") rather than ontologically (as "beings"), though they cannot *be* "inter-complementary" they can nonetheless be understood through their dialectical relation. Hence, they form a hermeneutical dialectic rather than an onto-theological dualism. Also, the meanings evoked by the body-symbol "precede" the meanings of the soul-symbol, since in my scheme the former represents the total way in which a person exists, in interactions, and the latter represents the capacities of the body. Again, Ricœur's dialects enables my non-oppositional articulation of such ambiguous notions.

In addition, Ricœur's reverential and dialogical mode of engagement with theological texts from different traditions has inspired my approach to the reminiscences of African religion in Black Christianity from Brazil and my reading of Buber's Jewish philosophy. In this regard, Ricœur's fondness of the dialogical method is very aiding. Embracing his interreligious reverence, I formulate my own dialogical frame with which I sustain that the African concept of dignity has interacted with the Christian ideal of redemption: human dignity has gained a redemptive connotation in poor and Black Brazilian communities. Finally, Ricœur helps me sift

the universal elements of Buber's philosophy of dialogue from those that do not readily resonate in Brazilian culture. Buber's dialogical view of human life, in particular, provides a suitable frame for my search for the two types and places of dignity.

While Ricœur's "dialectical hermeneutics" informs the organization of my anthropological claims, Tracy's conversation offers me a blueprint for my interpretation of the different texts. In brief, my constructive effort is more influenced by Ricœur's dialectical approach, while my reading of the authors is more significantly modulated by Tracy's conversation.

For Tracy, theology is a deliberatively interpretative endeavor aimed at the development of "critical correlations" between the "contemporary experience and the Christian tradition."[24] These are the two "constants" of all theology. Hence, to theologize is to interpret our experience and the Christian tradition in light of one another. Of the many ways to correlate the two constants, Tracy prefers the method of conversation. Under Gadamer's influence, Tracy has developed an interpretative method that uses conversation for the theological understanding of religious phenomena. Because theology assumes religion in the first place, the opening question any interpreter must ask is the nature of the phenomenon to be interpreted.[25] Tracy advocates that the decisive criterion is the capacity to "provoke some fundamental existential question for the human spirit." The topic of dignity is a bottomless existential well, filled with ambiguous meanings and problems that can evoke existential questions, for example, the significance of

[24] David Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time: Selected Essays* vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 137; electronic version.
[25] Tracy, *Fragments*, 132; electronic version.

living without dignity, the assumed reasons for its lack, the meaning of personhood in view of its absence, and the worth of a life lived for the attainment of dignity.

Since the existential questions that touch the human spirit are considered "religious," the meaning of dignity forms the first "constant." In this study, it is chiefly constructed with the theological ideas of Cleusa Caldeira, Ivone Gebara, Leonardo Boff, and Martin Buber. On the other hand, inquiries that emerge essentially from the practical areas of life can be considered "experiential." In this study, the "contemporary experience" constant is primarily represented by different analyses of what I call the "gap of dignity," meaning the brutal social and economic disparities that poor and Black people experience. I use representations of such "experience" from a range of sources, including Marilena Chaui's sociological and political analysis of Brazilian authoritarianism, census and sociological data, personal narratives, the news, poetry and literature, and even painting.

The two "constants" cannot be entirely separated. Instead, the "experiential" and the "religious" meanings are connected because the faith in and quest for dignity are one and the same for people who lack it. In other words, the meaning of dignity in the "Christian tradition" and the meaning of the "contemporary experience" of living without it are intertwined, for its actual lack imparts its theological meaning. Said in a Tracyan fashion, the two constants are in "permanent correlation."

Correlation always implies a presiding logic and an interpretative norm which will coordinate the postulation of some theological truth, in our case, the meaning of dignity for the poor. The norm guides the entire interpretative and correlative process, while the logic translates the type of relation that exists between the two constants. The context within which the topic

arises prescribes the most appropriate norm and logic. Since a better understanding of dignity should emerge from the experience of living without it, the most appropriate norm for the correlation is liberation and the most productive logic is retrieval. Hence, liberation facilitates and modulates all of my claims involving the meaning of dignity for the poor; And retrieval is the general purpose which defines the internal relation between the Christian faith in innate and universal dignity and the human experience of living without it.

In particular, the selected theological resources and my reading of them abide by the liberation norm. Caldeira, Gebara, Boff, and Buber have committed themselves and their scholarships to the tasks of social reform and liberation, and have done so in the formats that their times and places demanded. *A priori*, they also agree that something fundamentally human and sacred is lost in a situation of material deprivation and political oppression.

Yet, while my interpretative norm is liberation and the logic is retrieval, each chapter is further organized in order to satisfy the requirements of their specific sub-topics.[26] A critical inflection is more present in chapter one, where I outline an ideology-critique of Brazilian authoritarianism with the help of Chaui's intellectual and social history of "theological-political power" and Boff's ecclesiology of liberation. In the spirit of Ricœur, we may call it a "hermeneutics of suspicion," after all, it seeks the "repressed" meanings behind traditional discourses of dignity and their reliance on body-soul dualism. The constructive intention predominates through chapters two to five and we may call it a hermeneutics of retrieval since it aims at the reformulation of three points: dignity, personhood, and the place of dignity. Finally,

[26] More details can be found in the introductions to each chapters and the conclusion.

for purposes of clarity, I use the format of question-answer throughout the text. Each chapter raises a specific question whose answer participates in my view of dignity as an act.

Chapter 1

Body-Soul Dualism and The Hierarchy of Human Dignity in Brazil[1]

1. Brazil: One Soul with Varied Degrees of Human Dignity

"The powerful commands, the prudent obeys"[2] is an old and popular Brazilian proverb. It synthetizes, in two clauses, the dominant value of the Brazilian political culture: hierarchy. This chapter claims that the Brazilian cultural conception of human dignity is hierarchical and premised on a Thomist ontotheological and dualist conception of the human person. Brazilians have a hierarchical understanding of themselves as a people and of the individual person. The Brazilian people has one soul but varied "modes of existence," each with a different value. Brazilians also understand that the human person is formed in relationship and has the capacity to overcome given or imposed social limitations. That is, a person has agency in their interactions. It is from relationships based on unequal social and economic positions that the Brazilian notion of human dignity emerges. The Brazilian culture defines dignity as the value a person has according to the person's "mode of existence." There are, *a priori*, natural or embodied and supernatural or disembodied modes of human existence. The former is inferior to the latter. Unequal actual existences define a person. Hence, Brazilian culture also projects an idea of the person. The person exists as a unit within two types of hierarchical relations. Because the person has a relational existence, human dignity is the result of comparisons and is calculated on the basis of social modes of existence. The soul's plural "mode of existence" has facilitated

[1] An early version of this chapter was originally published as an article: "Thomas Aquinas Body-Soul Dualism and the Hierarchy of Human Dignity in Brazil: The Theological Origins of a Nation's Hierarchical Self-Understanding" *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 21, No.1 (Winter 2022).
[2] "Manda quem pode, obedece quem tem juízo."

the invention of institutions that affirm that people exist to one another in hierarchical ways. Thus, the dignity of the human person is single in nature but variable in degree.

St. Thomas Aquinas's hierarchical view of the person is a major theological ally of Brazil's hierarchical notion of human dignity. Thomas posits a twofold hierarchy when he postulates that the human soul is a "substantial form," with one nature and two modes of existence. The soul is a mode of existence metaphysically superior to the body; its disembodied life is superior to its embodied counterpart. Thomas's double dualism is a remnant of his incorporation of Aristotle's hylomorphism and *natura* into Christian thought.

Dualism has had several implications in the formation of Brazilian culture. One of them is the belief that God wills and nature shows that a society ought to be hierarchical because the person is hierarchical. The soul's superiority lies in its superior nature, which is intellectual or "rational" and foregrounds Thomas's theological anthropology and natural law. Because of its intellectual nature, the soul enters a super-natural existence when the body dies—hence, the soul's two modes of existence. Thomas's embrace of Aristotle's *natura* contrasts with the Pauline "spiritual-body" concept and grounds a hierarchical understanding of the common good. Because it is hierarchical, the Brazilian conception requires revision.

To ask what is the dignity of the human person is to ask three questions: "What is human dignity? What is the human person? And why do persons have human dignity?" The third question drives the entire inquiry because it is a constitutive element of the other two. I assume that the reason that human persons have a special dignity is theological. And whatever reason it might be, it is a constituent of the human dignity and person. Thus the concepts of dignity and personhood are theological too. Hypothetically, any notion of dignity implies the idea of personhood and vice versa. Dignity, person, and the rationale for dignity interact to sketch a

tentative theological definition of the dignity of the human person within some minimally cohesive human environment. The Brazilian "people" and "culture" compose such a nominally shared semantic "environment"[3] in this chapter.

There are two further implications in the statement that the reason humans have a special dignity is a constituent of the human person. First, such reason is defined relationally because the person is a social conceptualization of the human existence. If the person is relationally conceived, then the person's dignity is too. Second, the person is defined transcendentally because theological concepts of human dignity presume the human capacity to overcome social limitations. So, the human dignity and person are defined relationally and assume agency.

To interrogate this double hierarchy, I mobilize resources from two scenarios. The first segment presents three theological efforts to define the Brazilian people. The second analyzes the conception of the human person that reigns in Brazil and in St. Thomas's thought. His premise of the single nature of the soul and its dual mode of existence underpin both segments because it participates in Brazil's national self-understanding and view of the person. It projects cultural and political institutes that require actual relations based on command and obedience.

The first segment presents the Brazilian people's hierarchical self-understanding in three major theological endeavors to define the people and the culture. Each attempt has implanted a hierarchical understanding of the nation. Together, they show that hierarchy is the founding value of Brazilian political culture. The hierarchical culture formulates a unifying idea of nation with sociopolitical and racial hierarchies, making a "unity-in-hierarchy."

[3] Despite its fragmented and disjointed reality. David Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time: Selected Essays* vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Cultural Disjunctions: Post-Traditional Jewish Identities* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

Each definition of Brazil also defines human dignity according to "naturalistic" comparisons among human "modes of existence." The first one is the Jesuit definition of the dignity of the Indigenous peoples. The Jesuits employed the Thomist and natural-law concept of dominion to justify and normalize the belief that the Indigenous peoples were in a "state of nature" and had the "option" to sell their freedom. The second definition ascertains unequal positions within and in relation to the Church. The colonial Church in Brazil was Roman in structure and Thomist-Scholastic in doctrine. It apportioned degrees of dignity based on the sacred authority of the clergy and the unacknowledged Church of the Poor. With the principle of *sacra potesta* and the *mater et magistra* attitude, it proclaims itself as the exclusive mediator of the Reign in the World. These powers sustain a pyramidic and dismembered body, united through ligaments of command and obedience. The third definition uses a racial narrative of Brazil's democratic vocation to disguise the inferior dignities of Black and Indigenous people. While it recites their participation in the national culture, it camouflages their inferior social statuses. Though the myth cherishes the democratic virtue of "mixture" over the Thomist "inflexibility," it veils the violent origins of the radical social disparities of Brazil.

The first section employs analytical tools from Leonardo Boff's liberation theology and Marilena Chaui's sociology of knowledge. Chaui's systematic and historical critique of Brazil's authoritarian culture and ideology derives from the Dutch-Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza's "theological-political power."[4] Brazil's authoritarianism is distinctly hierarchical because, claims Chaui, it develops from theological ideas about "nature." Such ideas vindicate the allegedly natural character of political tyranny, social hierarchy, and injustice. Boff's critique of ecclesial

[4] Marilena de Souza Chaui, *Manifestações Ideológicas do Autoritarismo Brasileiro* 2nd ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: Perseu Abramo, 2013).

hierarchy complements Chaui's critical method. He dissects the Church's obsession with hierarchy in Brazilian history. Their approaches intersect in three ways: in that Brazil's political culture has theological roots; in that the hierarchical ideas derive from an overriding concept of nature; and in that an alternative, horizontal model of interpersonal relations is urgently needed.

Two comments on "the people" are due. First, this is not some kind of "short history of the Brazilian people." Rather, I am merely pointing out the roles that dualist ideas have attained in the national self-understanding, and their immediate consequences to human dignity. Second, "the people" serves a heuristic and analytical function. It is an ambiguous concept because it inevitably assumes false homogenizations through correlate notions such as sovereignty, representation, consensus, and public reason. Yet "the people" is helpful as an analytical instrument because it links political and cultural ideas through theological arguments.[5]

The second section lays the foundations for a theological re-conception of the human person, which the third chapter will further expand. It describes Thomas's view, in which the soul is metaphysically superior to the body and the soul's disembodied existence is superior to the embodied life. The soul and its supernatural life are superior because the soul has a cognitive nature and capacity. The superior status of the soul impart the person and the human dignity. Because of the nature of the soul, every person has a dignity but not to the same degree. Relations of command and obedience actually define one's specific degree of dignity in society.

The argument evolves from a macro to a micro analysis of dignity in culture and theology. The person exists only in terms of moral, social, and political connections and the

[5] I assume that "the Brazilian people" is a demos that assumes an ethnos. An ethnos is representation of a community united through cultural values. A demos is a representation of a political community, associated through consent and for the common good. Cicero, *De Re Publica Frontonis*, 1. 25, 62, 44; Marilena de Souza Chaui, *Cultura e Democracia: O Discurso Competente e Outras Falas* 8th ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: Cortez, 2000).

"standards" of human relations only obtain shape and content within a culture. Culture mediates all human relations. From this great proxy, ideals and institutes emerge, and these organize moral and political affairs.

I conclude that Brazil's national unity demands a hierarchy of human dignity. "Unity-in-hierarchy" begets relations based on command and obedience. And hierarchical relations forge a hierarchical human person and dignity. Compared and calculated, unchosen and undeserved factors decide one's actual level of dignity. Furthermore, one's particular social existence determines one's personhood. That is true for a people that is united-in-hierarchy and that understands the person hierarchically. The doubly unequal status—individually and collectively considered—exist to satisfy intrinsically imbalanced relations. As the body obeys the soul, so the inferior obeys the superior.

This conclusion suggests three implications. First, the dignity of the human person is always relative and particular, when not exclusive. Relative, because it is calculated comparatively. And particular because of each persons' specific social relations. Second, the problem of human dignity is at once theoretical and empirical. A people's view of the human person and dignity is an *a priori* for the realization of dignity. Third, hierarchical relations satisfy the impositions of a false notion of the common good. The common end of a hierarchical nation is the maximization of inequality.

2. Human Weight in a Naturalist Culture

Brazilian children learn early on that Brazil is a "gift of God and nature."[6] Since 1834, the topics of nature and nation have been merged in the public school's curriculum.[7] Children learn to feel proud of Brazil while learning about the country's natural riches. They hear that God has spared their land from natural catastrophes and blessed the people with unsurpassed natural abundance. The national anthem boasts that Brazil is a "giant by nature," with more abundant skies, flowers, and life than the other nations. In 1997, a nationwide poll confirmed that "nature" is the most common reason Brazilians feel proud of being Brazilians.[8] About fifteen percent were proud because of the "character of the Brazilian people;" eleven percent because of the culture, and thirty-four percent because of "nature," including "human beauty.

Brazilians also commonly define themselves as a "natural" people. One remarkable example is Emiliano Di Cavalcanti's painting *Nú Deitado*.[9] It portrays the curvy body of a Brazilian mulata within the perspective of a chain of mountains. Her body and the mountains have similar shapes, suggesting the intimate connection between the country's topography and the woman's body. Di Cavalcanti also painted his naturalist view in *Mulher Deitada com Peixes e Frutas*.[10] This piece displays a mulata, fish, a horse, and harvested fruit. Her curves and skin tone reflect the forms and colors of those other "natural" beings. A more recent example is on the cover of Martinho da Vila's CD. The cover, signed by the artist Lan, is of Rio's most iconic mountains, the Sugarloaf and the Corcovado, but it is painted to suggest a mulata's body.[11] Di Cavalcanti's mulatas are proud of themselves, but likely not because they resemble the country's

[6] Marilena de Souza Chaui, *Brasil: Mito Fundador e Sociedade Autoritária* (São Paulo: Perseu Abramo, 2000), 8.
[7] José Murilo de Carvalho, "O Motivo Edênico no Imaginário Social Brasileiro," *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 13, n. 38 (1998).
[8] de Carvalho, "O Motivo Edênico."
[9] Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, *Nu Deitado*, 1930-1935, wood, Museus Castro Maia, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, .
[10] Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, *Mulher Deitada com Peixes e Frutas*, 1956, oil on canvas, 110 x 195 cm, private collection, https://www.wikiart.org/en/emiliano-di-cavalcanti/mulher-deitada-com-peixes-e-frutas.
[11] Martinho da Vila, *Rio: Só Vendo a Vista*, (Rio de Janeiro: November, 2020).

topography or the forms of tropical fish. People only feel pride for something they consider integral to themselves. Pride implies an intimate and personal bond to something that genuinely expresses the human person. *Superbia* is above all an expression of hyperbolic self-esteem.[12]

Too many Brazilians are proud of something they did not create. Nature was "already there." Brazil's most revered writer, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, never understood how a people could be proud of something it had not created, such as the Amazon. The *pays féerique* sentiment belittles the human hand in a people's history and culture.[13] A century later, another writer revisited the lingering question. Nelson Rodrigues ironically defined Brazil as a landscape.[14] More recently, the historian Antônio Cândido has argued that two words synthetize the ways in which Brazil understands itself—"law" and (natural) "evolution."[15]

The thrust of Machado de Assis', Rodrigues', and Cândido's critique is the misuse of "nature" as a constituent of the Brazilian people's self-identification. In a very real sense, many Brazilians feel they are the collective fruit of natural events and processes. Naturalism is ingrained in the culture and can diminish or occlude human accomplishment. Understandably, this has had an effect on the country's view of human dignity. In the eighteenth century, Brazilian jurists had a dominant role in defining the state and economic organization in Brazil. In the second half of the nineteenth century, biological evolutionism took over. The so-called "natural" truths of human society, such as natural order, hierarchy, and race, interacted with juridical schemes to formulate new ideologies.[16] The incoming biological ideas helped minimize the national tensions between the victims of colonization and slavery and the desire for progress.

[12] Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1955) 3.26; 102.
[13] Machado de Assis, crônica, *A Semana*, August, 20, 1893.
[14] Nelson Rodrigues, *A Cabra Vadia: Novas Confissões* (São Paulo, Brazil: Cia das Letras, 1997).
[15] Antônio Cândido, "A Sociologia no Brasil," *Tempo Social* 18, No. 1 (2006): 271–301.
[16] The *jusnaturalismo* and *juspositivismo* movements are good examples.

For example, Fausto Cardoso claimed that the "biological and physical world" shows that social units are "complex aggregates."[17] Alberto Torres went further, conditioning any constitutional change to a "social evolution" ensuing from human adaptation to the natural environment.[18]

Nature is relevant in definitions of dignity for two reasons. One is the differentiation between human and other natural beings. The other is the human capacity for transcendence. Both assumptions refer back to nature and human nature. They go hand-in-hand for theologians and humanists who believe that some distinctive and intrinsic aspect of the human life, existence, or being qualifies all of humanity as intrinsically or inherently superior to other natural beings. No less frequently, theologians and humanists also propose that humanity has the capacity to overcome social limitations. Human beings are agents of change, which implies the potential to transcend imposed and given limitations through solidarity, self-determination, the intellect, etc. Though social transcendence does not necessarily presume a supernatural power, it does suggest that the human being is formed in relation.[19]

Because human nature is undefined, there are multiple valid representations of the human person, purpose, and value or dignity. Without denying the universality of dignity, theologians attach different meanings to it. Dignity is first a religious and cultural precept and only then a juridical imperative. On the "ground," it refuses the uniformity and absoluteness that legal and philosophical theorists envision for it.[20] For example, a superficial survey shows that

[17] Fausto Cardoso, *Estudos de Taxionomia Social* (1898); *A Concepção Monística do Universo* (1894).
[18] Cândido, "A Sociologia no Brasil."
[19] Leonardo Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo* 11th ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2007).
[20] Elsa Tamez et al., *The Discourse of Human Dignity* (London: Concilium-SCM Press, 2003/2).

South Africans and Germans perceive the content and contours of dignity differently, even though dignity is the constitutional meta-principle of both countries.[21]

The Brazilian culture has a special way of defining dignity in the ambiguity of natural difference and similitude. The dignity of some persons is grounded in commonalities between nature and humanity. The dignity of others emanates from "self-evident" differences between humanity and the natural world. Certain people resemble other natural beings more than do other people. Some are more capable of overcoming natural limitations. Brazilian culture perceives human dignity comparatively, like Thomas, Pico, and Kant do. But it also measures dignity through interpersonal relations. The comparative phenomenon, which can emphasize either difference or similitude, is ambiguous and shifts according to the person's social "mode of existence." The next section presents three formative episodes of the Brazilian cultural and racial hierarchical conception of dignity. Each of them establishes relations of command and obedience.

2.1 The Jesuit Endeavor to Define the Brazilian Soul with St. Thomas Aquinas's Natural Law: the State of Nature and Voluntary Servitude of the Indigenous People

The state of nature of the Indigenous peoples is a theological construct which seeks to eliminate the differences between Christian and Indigenous cultures and to validate slavery. It postulates that Christians and the Indigenous people have the same human nature but unequal human statuses. The first Jesuit Providential of Brazil, Manuel da Nóbrega, affirmed that the

[21] Drucilla Cornell, *Law and Revolution in South Africa Ubuntu, Dignity, and the Struggle for Constitutional Transformation* (New York: Fordham, 2014); Michael Rosen, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning.* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

Indigenous souls had the human faculties of understanding, memory, and will.[22] Yet, he alleged, they lived in an "primitive" way. Their natural mode of existence indicated to him that their souls were good and innocent, but subject to the Portuguese juridical *dominium*. Above all, their state of nature was evident in their lack of faith in a disembodied God. "Faith" signified a normative system with a supernatural sovereign. The state of nature espoused a colonial "national" project by prompting the need for salvation through conversion or voluntary submission. Either way, the gentiles should acknowledge their natural relation of voluntary servitude to Christians.[23]

The state of nature, however, would become an obstacle to conversion. A people without a king, a law, and a faith (Nóbrega said) did not know how to obey God, and a forced conversion is void in Canon Law. So the Jesuits sought an alternative to state and enacted the Indigenous' submissive status. They debated the meaning and reach of the natural-law institute of *dominium* in St. Thomas's theology, whence a person may lawfully gain control over another in extraordinary situations. Nóbrega and others decided that the Thomistic natural law allows human persons to "sell" their freedom whenever their lives are endangered by the potential buyer because such a decision is "rational."

"All is worthwhile if the soul is not small." [24] The great poet Fernando Pessoa at once glorifies and bemoans the Portuguese seafaring voyages. Portugal could have been the greatest Modern empire, but the sea explorations were a heavy burden on the population. Portuguese children and women lost their brave husbands, sons, and fathers to the sea. Their tears made the

[22] Manuel da Nóbrega, "Diálogo Sobre a Conversão do Gentio" in *Cartas dos Primeiros Jesuítas do Brasil,* ed. Serafim Leite (São Paulo, Brazil: Comissão do IV Centenário da Cidade de São Paulo, 1954), 332.
[23] Leonardo Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização* (São Paulo: Ática, 1992), 11.
[24] Fernando Pessoa, "Mar Português" in *Mensagens* (Lisbon, Portugal: Antonio Maria Pereira, 1934).

seawater salty. “Was it worthwhile?,” Pessoa asks. Yes, he insisted, “all is worthwhile if the soul is not small.” No ordinary soul could cross the Atlantic, dominate new lands, and civilize and enslave other peoples, the Portuguese believed. Only great souls, guided by a supernatural power, could discover a New World.

The New World was “new” to the Portuguese because it was “original,” in the biblical sense. It was found, not discovered. The Portuguese thought they had found the Edenic Paradise.[25] Already in 1503 Américo Vespúcio wrote the famous *Mundus Novus* letter telling the Portuguese King that the “earthly paradise might actually exist” and “be not too far away.” The invasion of the “New World” signified to the voyager the desired opportunity to return to the “original” nature of Adam and Eve. The Paradise which theologians had always visualized in the Bible sea explorers actually saw through their physical retinas. The navigator’s monocular telescope showed extraordinary vegetation, sealike rivers, feral and exuberant beasts, pure air, and an “eternal Spring.” Over the centuries, this Edenic idea gained traction.[26] In 1576, Pero de Magalhães Gandavo announced that Brazil’s pristine nature was the ideal place for human life.[27] In 1730, the historian Rocha Pita also portrayed Brazil as the “Terreal Paraíso.”[28]

Brazil was also the earthly *topos* of the heavenly Garden because it hosted an innocent people. The Portuguese never really questioned the Indigenous peoples’ humanity because the originality of the new land lay also in the untainted soul of its inhabitants. Pero Vaz Caminha, the first to arrive in Brazil in 1500, compared the Indigenous innocence to Adam’s: “this people

[25] Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, *A Visão do Paraíso: Os Motivos Edênicos no Descobrimento e Colonização do Brasil* 2nd ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: EDUSP, 1969).
[26] Sílvio Romero, Olavo Bilac, Manoel Bomfim, Afrânio Peixoto, Rocha Pita, and Afonso Celso.
[27] Pero de Magalhães Gandavo, *Tratado da Terra do Brasil e História da Província Santa Cruz* (São Paulo, Brazil: Itatiaia/EDUSP, 1980), 81–82.
[28] Sebastião da Rocha Pita, *História da América Portuguesa* (Lisbon: José Antônio da Silva, 1730), 3–4.

are as innocent as Adam,"[29] he declared. The Jesuit Simão de Vasconcelos compared Brazil to the place "where God had placed Adam."[30] Americo Vespuci admired their material generosity.[31] The Jesuit Manuel da Nóbrega initially suspected that their lack of interest in the material was a sign of their obedience to natural law. Later on, Nóbrega changed his mind. A people who eat human bodies, indulge in luxurious habits, lie frequently, and cannot worship anything actually despises the natural law.[32] Still, in a time when the Iberian nations were so enticed by the lofty aspirations of the Renaissance, the conquest of a pristine land signified nothing short of a ticket to humanity's rebirth.[33]

The "primitive state" of Brazil's original souls reinforced the perception that Brazil was a Paradise. A debate ensued on the Aristotelean belief that tropical lands are torrid, thus inhospitable for the human soul.[34] Manuel Fernandes Tomás negated the assumed nobility of the land by affirming the primitivity of its beings, who were "wild, uneducated," living on "a land of monkeys, blacks, and snakes," with "gatherings of little blacks fished in the African Coast."[35] Frei Vicente de Salvador challenged the Aristotelean assumption that tropical lands are torrid, thus inhospitable for the soul.[36] But the Portuguese "Cantino Planisphere" of 1502[37] is a stronger example of the winning argument, i.e., that the Indigenous "primitivity" reiterates the Edenic

[29] "A Carta de Pero Vaz de Caminha," http://objdigital.bn.br/Acervo_Digital/livros_eletronicos/carta.pdf
[30] Simão de Vasconcelos, *Crônica da Companhia de Jesus do Estado do Brasil* (Lisbon: Henrique Valente de Oliveira, 1663).
[31] Americo Vespucci, *Mundus Novus* (1503).
[32] da Nóbrega, "Diálogo," 100; 344–45.
[33] Luís Filipe Barreto, *Descobrimentos e Renascimento: Formas de Ser e Pensar nos Séculos XV e XVI* 2nd ed. (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1983). Also, the missionaries brought with them Joaquim de Fiori's millenarian hopes. Boff, *América Latina*, 12; Chaui, *Brasil*, 46.
[34] Vicente do Salvador, *História do Brazil: 1500–1627* 7 ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: Itatiaia/EDUSP, 1982), 61–62.
[35] Manuel Fernandes Tomás, *Reflexões Sobre a Necessidade de Promover a União dos Estados de Que Consta O Reino-Unido de Portugal, Brazil, e Algarve* (Lisbon: Antonio Rodrigues Galhardo, 1822), 467.
[36] do Salvador, *História do Brasil*, 61–62.
[37] Cantino Planisphere, Biblioteca Estense, Modena, Italy, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_Renaissance#/media/File:CantinoPlanisphere.png

theory. The Planisphere acknowledges the South American continent but effaces its peoples and cultures, reflecting the Christian naturalist perception of Brazil's original peoples. They were so primitive that they were virtually indistinguishable from the other natural beings of the land. Manuel da Nóbrega summarized the conflation of land and people: "this land is at once our enterprise and the World's foremost Pagan."[38]

The primitive people and its land confirmed that God did not send the Portuguese caravels to Paradise in vain. Caminha's first letter from Brazil, written in 1500, suggests that the sailors only discovered the meaning of their maritime mission after anchoring in Bahia. Immediately after the first mass in Porto Seguro, a priest began explaining to the Natives the divine significance of the Portuguese presence among them. God had a magnanimous plan for the Portuguese to save the Indigenous souls, he said. An innocent and primitive people, ruminates Caminha, would easily become Christian because they lack a faith.[39] The mission was the conversion of the Indigenous people.

The indigenous soul needed salvation because it lived without faith, so maintained the Catholics. Being human and good was insufficient. Caminha heightens their innocence at the expense of their lack of faith. Here, to "lack of faith" means to live "naturally" or "primitively." By faith, Caminha refers to a hierarchical and normative civilizational system. Although the Portuguese did not speak Tupi, they could apparently somehow tell that the Tupian peoples lacked "faith."[40] In 1500, faith had nothing to do with some inward "trust," bestowed by divine grace. Rather, faith was something much more similar, in structure and effects, to the law—a totalizing normative system with immediate social and political repercussions, thus absolutely

[38] da Nóbrega, *Cartas do Brasil* (São Paulo, Brazil: EDUSP, 1988), 179.
[39] "A Carta de Pero Vaz de Caminha," 1500.
[40] de Holanda, *A Visão do Paraíso*, 181.

reinforced "from above."[41] José de Acosta's *de Procuranda* confirms the idea. It classifies the Indigenous of South America as heathens of the third class. This type lives like wild beasts, and lacks human feelings and a written knowledge. Therefore, such being ought to be converted by force, concludes Acosta.[42] Faith was the superimposed dominion of a people by a heavenly sovereign.

To the Portuguese, the Indigenous lack of faith implied a lack of law and king. It was difficult to convert a people who did not believe in a superior and supernatural sovereign. Manuel da Nóbrega rapidly realized that the greatest obstacle to conversion was not an opposed doctrine, but a set of what he understood as barbarian habits.[43] Another Jesuit, José de Anchieta, the founder of the São Paulo city, believed in the primacy of the indoctrination of children, whom he should first teach how to read, write, and chant.[44] A society without a sovereign king and a law would also lack a faith because a faith needs a political-juridical system, which was a synonym for Civilization. Nóbrega conceptualized the primitivity of the Indigenous as being the result of their threefold lack.[45] It was no coincidence that Nóbrega, the first Provincial of the Society of Jesus for Brazil, arrived there in 1559 together with Brazil's first appointed governor-general, Tomé de Souza. The mission was simultaneously civilizational, political, and spiritual.[46]

Jesuitical letters of the period report that the Tupinambá people could not understand, even less obey, a disembodied deity.[47] The Jesuits thought the Tupinambá appreciated the

[41] Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro, *A Inconstância da Alma Selvagem* (São Paulo, Brazil: Cosac y Naify, 2002).
[42] José de Acosta, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* ed. L. Pereña et al., vol. 2 (Madrid, Spain: CSIC, 1984), 108.
[43] da Nóbrega, "Diálogo," 328.
[44] José de Anchieta, "Cartas," in *Obras Completas*, ed. Hélio Viotti (São Paulo, Brazil: Loyola, 1984), 2.
[45] "If they had a king they could convert, or if they adored something; but, since they do not know how to believe and worship, they cannot understand the preaching of the Gospels." da Nobrega, "Diálogo," 320.
[46] Antônio Blásquez, *Carta aos Padres e Irmãos em Coimbra,* July 8, 1555.
[47] Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro, "O Mármore e a Murta: Sobre a Inconstância da Alma Selvagem" *Revista de Antropologia* 35 (1992): 21–74.

Eucharist because they practiced cannibalism and that they accepted the immortality of the soul because they believed that the soul reincarnates in animal and vegetal bodies. But the Tupinambá refused to abide by the Christian laws because they did not know how to obey someone whom they could not eat, smell, hear, touch, see, and so on.

How could a disembodied God exist, given that all souls have a body? Because they could not worship a disembodied God, the Tupinambá could not obey that God either. Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro convincingly shows that the Jesuits attached the "primitive" tag to the Indigenous soul because of the Native belief that deities are consubstantial with humans.[48] Where God is not the sovereign, the Christian dogmas have no effect. The supreme human-divine hierarchy was the foundational rule of a political society.

When Caminha's letters arrived in the hands of the clergy, missionaries and theologians began elaborating sophisticated justifications for converting the Indigenous souls. They found a compelling reason in the natural law *statu innocentiae*.[49] The "state of nature" conveys a primitive condition and a situation of moral incorruptibility. Primitive people are *prima facie* incorruptible because they lack a conscience. Thomas Aquinas defined "conscience" as the application of knowledge to human action.[50] He classified this kind of knowledge as "synderesis," the natural inclination of the soul by which the human person understands the basic and natural rules of behavior. "Always do good," for example, is a basic principle of synderesis. The human conscience applies this basic natural rule to concrete instances. So, conscience ultimately serves the human duty to conform to the natural law. The Jesuits adopted Thomas's perspective in order to claim that the Indigenous lacked conscience but not synderesis. The

[48] de Castro, *A Inconstância da Alma Selvagem*, 30.
[49] Chaui, *Brasil*, 63.
[50] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.2.1.

Jesuits claimed that the Indigenous know what is fundamentally good but that they often miscomprehend right conduct according to the good. As Thomas wrote, "it is not the universal but only the evaluation of the sensible which is not so excellent, which is dragged [down] by desire."[51] The Jesuits understood that the Native had an abridged capacity to evaluate the sensible (facts) and act according to the good because they lack a faith (rule). Since they cannot perfectly assess the right according to the good, they cannot be fully responsible for their actions. They are innocent, the Jesuits thought.

But their *statu innocentiae* became an obstacle to conversion. Initially, salvation conditioned Jesuits' introduction of Indigenous to civilization through faith, law, and king. Many missionaries felt tempted to convert and evangelize "by force." The Jesuit José de Anchieta, for instance, felt that "There is no better teaching for this people than the sword and the iron bar."[52] But a forceful conversion is null, according to Canon Law, for conversion requires the free, spontaneous change of will. The key theological question then became, "Are the Indigenous souls free enough to convert or do they need to submit?"

To solve the impasse, some Jesuits proposed an adaptation of the Aristotelean-Thomist institution of voluntary servitude. The state of nature impelled the conclusion that the innocent soul shall voluntarily submit to those living by the Christian faith. After all, they said, Christians had been encumbered with a duty to save the gentiles for the latter's good. This implies that the Christian had spiritual and juridical dominium over the Native souls. Thomas Aquinas's natural law previews two lawful ways for a person to obtain dominium over another: by winning a just war, and by consent. Dominium became the fulcrum of the Jesuitical debates on the enslavement

[51] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* trans. C. I. Litzinger (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1964), 7.3.1352.
[52] de Anchieta, "Cartas," 197.

of Indigenous people. The meaning and application of Thomas's concept of dominium was not only the crux of the Sepúlveda-las Casas disputations: it was also at the heart of the lesser known quarrel between the Jesuits Manuel da Nóbrega and Quirício Caxa.

The governor-general of Brazil, Mem de Sá, issued the first regulation of Indigenous voluntary enslavement in 1566. The document recognizes the juridical validity of the Native consent to enslavement. People had the right to sell themselves as slaves.[53] A new set of laws called *Monitoria* sanctioned another opportunity for the Portuguese to obtain dominion over Indigenous persons. Personal dominion was legal either if a person becomes a captive in what the Jesuits deemed to be a just war or by consent in exceptional cases of "extreme necessity."

The Jesuits therefore discussed whether the Portuguese had in fact won a just war. Thomas followed the *ius gentium*, compiled in the Roman *Digesto*, on the matter. It said that a war captive is not "naturally" a slave, but can become one by virtue of the winner's natural right.[54] Such dominion comprises the natural right to kill. Alternatively, the *ius gentium* gives the winner the right to enslave the conquered.[55] Also, both the Roman Law and Thomas classify as "just" a war that ensues from a prior offense, includes a declaration by a just authority, and has a just cause.[56]

Manuel da Nóbrega, who embraced Thomas views, refuted the automatic dominium of the Portuguese over the Indigenous, either because of the latter's state of nature or on the basis of so-called just captivity. Nóbrega did not find in the Portuguese invasion the three just war prerequisites. Again following Thomas, he also rejected Juan Gines de Sepúlveda's adaptation of

[53] "*Resolução da Junta da Bahia Sobre as Aldeias dos Padres e os Índios*," July 30, 1566.
[54] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2.2.57; 3.2.
[55] *Digest of Justinian*, 1.5.4.
[56] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.2.57.3.

the Aristotelean *natura servi*, i.e., the belief that some people are naturally slaves. The Indigenous were primitive—but not slaves by birth.[57] Nóbrega and Francisco de Vitoria conceded that the Indigenous mode of existence violates the natural law, but disapproved of condemning them for ignoring the natural law. Nóbrega, Sepúlveda, las Casas, Vitoria, Anchieta, Vieira, Vasconcellos, and virtually all other Jesuits believed St. Thomas the Apostle had himself preached to the original inhabitants of South America. Still, Nóbrega opted to follow the teachings of the other Thomas. Thomas Aquinas had taught that evangelization was always mandatory because many gentiles had likely never heard the gospel. Nóbrega thus concluded that it would be unfair to punish the Natives for not following a faith which was not in their "conscience."[58] And he invoked Thomas to affirm that the first human beings were not slaves, but pursued their own good autonomously even though they lived in a "primitive" state. For Nóbrega, it was a contradiction to say the Indigenous were at once in a state of nature, like Adam and Eve, and natural slaves. Instead, they were neither war captives nor natural slaves.

Consent is the other way a person may lawfully gain dominium over another. The Jesuit Francisco de Vitoria's *Relectio De Indis* (1539) was the first to examine the need for consent for a person to be enslaved in South America. He proposed that the Spanish had four lawful ways to occupy the New World: First, to exercise their natural right of communication and association. Second, to exercise their *ius predicandi*—the right to preach the Christian religion.[59] Third, to protect the innocent from tyranny and the converted from the pagans. And fourth, the Spanish could obtain the primitive's consent. Vitoria developed his fourth point in tandem with Thomas's

[57] Juan Gines de Sepúlveda, *Democrates Alter* trans. Angel Losada (Madrid, Spain: CSIC, 1984).
[58] Simão de Vasconcellos, *Notícias Curiosas e Necessárias das Cousas do Brasil* (Lisbon: Da Costa, 1668), 132.
[59] Luis N. Rivera Pagán, *Evangelización y Violencia: La Conquista de América* (San Juan: CEMI, 1991), 82.

Summa.[60] He agreed with da Nóbrega that the state of nature does not imply automatic enslavement. But both agreed with Thomas that consent is a lawful way to obtain control over a person.

It is telling that Vitoria debated the consent for domination in terms of land occupation. The Spanish could occupy the new land subject to Indigenous consent. At the basis of the theological and juridical institute of *dominium* rests the idea of control, whether over a person or a thing. In Roman Law, dominium referred to the absolute ownership and control of corporeal property by a person, subject only to state power and inclusive of the rights to use, enjoy, take profit therefrom, and dispose. A Roman citizen displayed these privileges of private property by placing a hand (*manus*) on his property.[61] In Old English, *mund* meant hand and guardianship or protection. As in Rome, Thomas accepted two exceptional kinds of dominium: the natural right to appropriate the things that belong to others and are essential for human life (*dominium utile*), and the natural right of the superior to control the inferior allegedly for the latter's benefit.[62] The exceptional right to steal Thomas condoned because it allegedly restores the human's natural condition. In the state of nature, everyone has access to the means for survival.[63] And the value of human life is always above things. Now, the kind of dominium that the superior person exercises over the inferior is different but conversant with the dominium of property. Parental and proprietary forms of dominium exist to ensure the good of the dominated and the owner. The difference is that children and other "inferior" persons have freedom, though only to a limited

[60] Francisco de Victoria, *Relectio De Indis*, J.M.P. Prendes ed. (Madrid: CSIC, 1984), 76–99; Francisco de Victoria, *On Homicide & Commentary on Summa Theologiae IIa-IIae Q. 64 (Thomas Aquinas)* trans. John P. Doyle (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997), 160.
[61] Hence the etymology of "manumission" (*manumittere*).
[62] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.2.94, a5.
[63] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2.2.66, a7.

degree. Freedom is an inalienable and absolute human right. So, the law can easily justify domination over things but not so much over a free being.

The Jesuits then began asking whether human persons are sufficiently free to sell their share of the divine freedom. Sepulveda's claim for the automatic submission of the Natives would contradict their humanity because human freedom is inalienable. A wager on the automatic dominium hypothesis would implicate the failure of conversion because to be human is to be free. Conversion requires a "conversable," free human. To include the Indigenous in the Christian political community, the Jesuits had to acknowledge their freedom. But there was, some argued, space for the joint application of the two kinds of dominion in extraordinary cases. Albeit different in kind, the dominium over things and over persons have similar practical effects. The most remarkable similarity lies in the father's ability to sell his children, for their good, in rare cases. In some situations human necessity can abate freedom and children function as property. Also exceptionally, a person may steal the means for personal subsistence. The problem, then, is to measure and arbitrate what needs constitute such an "extreme necessity."

Quirício Caxa argued that the Indigenous were sufficiently free to sell their freedom in cases of "great" necessity. His justification was that Thomas connected the two exceptional kinds of dominium transference (property and children). Nóbrega insisted on the *stricto sensu* interpretation of "extreme necessity" and that it should be made evident in each case.[64] Extreme necessity implies a state of severe poverty or famine, leaving a father with no alternative but to sell his children.[65] For the Jesuits on both sides of the debate, the exceptionality which permits

[64] Manuel da Nóbrega, "Se o Pai Pode Vender a Seu Filho e se Hum se Pode Vender a Si Mesmo: Respostas do Padre Manuel da Nobrega ao Padre Quirício Caxa," in Serafim Leite, *Cartas do Brasil*, 391–401.
[65] William Warwick Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 402.

the violation of private property is the same which permits the violation of human freedom: life continuation.

Caxa went further and intentionally departed from Thomas. He postulated that for the Indigenous to be truly free, they have to have the freedom to sell themselves "because each one is the lord of one's own freedom so it is not unlawful to sell it."[66] This signifies that humans have direct dominium over their natural freedom, and consequently in the state of nature the institutes of *dominium* and *libertas* merge. Yet Caxa's conflation of freedom and dominium not only transforms freedom into a tradeable object, it also misses a legal nuance: that the natural right to appropriate goods in extreme cases does not include the right to sell those goods. The sick, hungry, naked, or otherwise endangered can appropriate objects to satisfy their subsistence only, just as the father can relinquish his dominion over his children only to keep them breathing.

Nóbrega responds to Caxa with Thomas Aquinas's rational consent. Nóbrega agrees that the central question is whether the person has a direct dominium over their individual freedom. He concedes that all persons living like slaves have somehow consented to sell or give up their freedom. He ponders, however, that the consent to sell one's personal freedom is only lawful when rational, for natural law protects the sale of freedom in life-threatening situations because it is rational that people sell their freedom to stay alive.[67] Thomas and Nóbrega place *reason above freedom*. The human soul can know a portion of the divine reason through the use of reason. Reason is inalienable by divine design. But freedom is inalienable on account of human reason. The first is unexceptionable, the second is not. And reason is more inalienable than freedom. While the sale of reason is absolutely unacceptable, the sale of freedom is exceptional. The

[66] Da Nóbrega, "Se o Pai Pode Vender a Seu Filho," 392.
[67] Da Nóbrega, "Se o Pai Pode Vender a Seu Filho," 406.

rational consent to dominium was the only way the Portuguese could lawfully control the Indigenous soul.

Nóbrega concludes with a quotation from Thomas, who says that human reason, not nature, distinguishes slavery from property. Reason can authorize the two kinds of dominium when it brings a beneficial counterpart.[68] Nóbrega's Thomistic conclusion affirms the individual right to sell one's freedom, even when the "buyer" is the one who poses the life-threatening situation that qualifies the sale as "rational." The Indigenous person can lawfully consent to the dominium of the Christian when the consent is rational. A rational consent is one that favors life over death even if the potential buyer of someone's freedom is also the cause of the life threat. In other words, violence can legitimate the loss of freedom.

The inclusion of the Native into the Christian community necessitates the rational argument for voluntary enslavement. The state of nature and voluntary servitude established a type of legal and violent relationship based on command and obedience. These two forcibly "united" people in the Christian faith through a human hierarchy. The Indigenous souls are human but had to overcome the state of nature by converting to a supposedly superior mode of existence. Alternatively, they could rationally consent to sell their freedom in order to survive, upon doing which they would become human persons—only without dignity. The institution of voluntary servitude creates human degradation rather than dignity.

2.2 The Ecclesial Endeavor to Define the Brazilian Soul: a *Summa* of the Colonial Church's Roman Structure and Thomist-Scholastic Doctrine

[68] "The distinction between property and slavery is not natural, but is introduced by human reason for the benefit of human life." Da Nóbrega, "Se o Pai Pode Vender a Seu Filho," 407.

This section shows how the Catholic Church asserts one unified body which is nevertheless dismembered and hierarchical in Brazil. I argue that the colonial Church was Roman in structure and Thomistic-Scholastic in doctrine. It built upon Baroque and Jesuitical communal visions,[69] two hierarchical expressions of the Scholastic faith. "Thomist ecclesiology" has indirectly laid the cornerstones of the Roman Church in Brazil. Not only was Thomas the Jesuits' highest inspiration, his *Summa* became the bedrock of the Jesuitical pedagogical statute, the *Ratio Studiorum*. Although Thomas never wrote an ecclesiastic treatise, his commentators reformulated the Catholic faith, education, and hierarchy with his doctrines, including that of papal infallibility.[70] The Jesuitical *Ratio* also uses Thomas's *unitas ordinis* to commend prudence and an attitude of voluntary submission for the good of the unified and hierarchical Church. Prudence and hierarchy served corporate and political cohesion. Thomas compared the *corpus Ecclesiae* to the human body. The single head rules all bodily members, like the soul commands the body.[71]

The Catholic Church is Roman in structure because it maintains unjustifiably disparate levels of human value, both internally and externally. An obtuse symptom of this hierarchy is the separation of the traditional Church from the Church of the Poor. Two theological constructs involving supernatural authority enact a double hierarchy. The first notion is the *sacra potestas.* Since 380, the Church has established institutional partnerships with the dominant powers and maintains an aura of supernatural authority. The second construct is the *mater et magistra* attitude, which undergirds the Church's exclusive right to interpret God's revelation and secures

[69] Celso Luiz Ludwig, "El Pensamiento Filosófico Brasileño de los Siglos XVI al XVIII," in *El Pensamiento Filosófico Latinoamericano del Carive y 'Latino,' 1300–2000*, Enrique Dussel ed. (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 2011), 115.
[70] Yves M. J. Congar, *Thomas d'Aquin: Sa Vision de Théologie et de l'Eglise* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985).
[71] Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, 9; *Summa Theologiae*, 1.2.138.2.3; 3.8.1.2; *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, 10; *Commentary on Colossians*, 1.1.2.4; *Commentary on Ephesus*, 4.1.5.

the pope's infallibility. The Church's "sacred power" supports its "mother and teacher" attitude. The dubious partnerships guarantee the effectiveness of the clergy's exclusive and personal authority to transmit God's salvation to the World through the sacraments and the *iuris diction.* The sacramental powers are exclusive, and the teachings infallible, because the Clergy purports to act on behalf of Christ in the world—hence, the Church's claim to a supernatural authority.

According to Leonardo Boff, the Church "is that portion of humanity which, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has explicitly welcomed the Reign of God in the event of the person of Jesus Christ, who incarnates in the reality of the oppressed, has a perfect memory of God's Reign, and announces it to the world."[72] Boff's definition springs from two complementary inspirations. The first is his experience of living in self-organized poor communities. The second is the early-Christian ideal of the commune or communal living.

During the highpoint of the liberation movement, Brazil had roughly seventy thousand Comunidades Eclesiais de Base (CEB).[73] The members of a base community meet at least twice a week to share and reflect on their own experiences and hopes, interpret the scriptures, pray, and make decisions. These CEBs operate horizontally. Each person has the right to direct and equal participation in the communal spiritual-political life. Together, people analyze their social conditions, share responsibilities, and mobilize for the common good. Thus CEBs are critical and cooperative laboratories where daily life and faith are one.

Boff argues that the CEBs are a new model of *communitas fidelis.* They embody a more democratic way of being *koinonia fidelis*. They exemplify the "re-born" church, endowed with a

[72] Leonardo Boff, *Igreja: Carisma e Poder* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Record: 2005), 26; *Eclesiogênese: A Reinvenção da Igreja* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008), 18.
[73] Boff, *Eclesiogênese*, 18.

fraternal and solidary spirit that inspires the fight for life.[74] Boff reaches this conclusion by means of comparison. He considers the CEBs and early Christian communities to be two historical manifestations of the same "God's Church."[75] The base communities incarnate in both praxis and ideal the early Christian family. Boff suggests that they perpetuate the same primary preoccupations of the Catholic communities that appear in the First Epistle of Clement,[76] and importantly that they subscribe to the Jewish emphasis on justice.

Eschatologically, this Church model is a genuine sign and instrument of God's Reign in the world. For CEB communities provide a foretaste of the Reign by trying to live up to the horizontal and communitarian values of the Gospels. The Church's purpose is to serve the world through justice for the oppressed, so realizing Jesus's *ipsissima intentio*.[77] The World is the *topos* of the Christian utopia. So, the Church is perforce *in* and *of* the World, which subordinates it entirely to Christ's desideratum of liberation. The CEBs better instantiate the *communitas fidelis* because they belong to the world. This church yields to the World and God's plan for it: in short, Reign > World > Church.

The official Church, however, operates according to quite another order. In Brazil, it acts as though it were the exclusive intermediary between the Reign and the World: Reign > Church > World.[78] The Roman Church conceives of the Reign in abstract terms, severing God's promises from human reality. Speaking *ex cathedra*, the clergy arrogates to itself the exclusive power to realize the Reign on Christ's behalf. This ecclesial model can easily self-identify with

[74] Boff, *Igreja*, 261; Boff, *Eclesiogênese*, 61–71, 87–88, 96; Puebla considered them a "locus of liberation and evangelization." "Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano III" (Mexico: 1979), n. 96; 262.
[75] Boff, *Igreja*, 258.
[76] Boff, *Igreja*, 171.
[77] Boff, *Igreja*, 25.
[78] Boff, *Igreja*, 29.

either the Reign or the World, whatever is the more convenient in the moment. For Boff, the unmediated identification of the Church with the Reign results in an abstract, idealist, spiritualized, and historically apathetic institution. By the same token, when the Church self-identifies with the World it becomes a mere instrument of power. Finally, a self-involved Church ignores both the World and the Reign.

Brazilian colonial ecclesiology grew from the Scholastic influence on the missions.[79] It incorporates two waves of Scholasticism. First, from 1500 to the 1550s there was the Baroque school of Pedro da Fonseca and Francisco Suárez. Suárez influenced several generations of Thomists and Jesuits. Second, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the arrival of the Society of Jesus in Brazil in 1559 inaugurated a second phase of Scholastic ecclesiology. This phase's most notable thinkers are the Jesuits Manuel da Nóbrega, José de Anchieta, and Antônio Vieira.[80] Their ideas drew from prominent Thomists[81] and defined the Church in colonial Brazil.

Quickly, Thomism became the heart of Catholic Scholasticism. Arguably, the "Scholastic Church" began in the Parisian condemnation of the "Radical Aristotelians" in 1277. Thomas was the main head in the so-called "Greco-Arabian Necessitatianism"—a derogatory way of expressing the Church's discontent with the reduction of God's freedom. Bernard McGinn explains that Parisian philosophers thought Thomas had "given away too much to Aristotle, especially on such issues as the substantial unity of the human soul and the philosophical demonstrability of the creation of the universe in time."[82] Thomas's chief ambition was to show

[79] John Lynch, *New Worlds: A Religious History of Latin America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).
[80] Ludwig, "El Pensamiento Filosófico Brasileño," 115–22.
[81] Like Francisco Suárez, Domingo de Soto, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Tomás de Mercado, and Albertus Magnus.
[82] Bernard McGinn, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 121.

the complementarity of philosophy and theology to a Church habituated to divorcing epistemic worlds.[83]

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the "Golden Age of Thomism" in the Church, with its most revered theologians setting forth their philosophy, theology, ethics, and politics through the famous commentaries on Thomas. In the second decade of the fourteenth century, argues McGinn, Thomism profited from the encounter of the commentarial tradition with Humanism.[84] This combination of historical factors made Thomas look even greater from the papal perspective. John XXII's fondness for Thomas Aquinas was clear in his personal library and his canonization of the Angelic Doctor in 1323, at which event he said, "He has illuminated the church more than all other doctors."[85] Now, Scholasticism and Thomism were inseparable. In 1567, Pius V declared him a doctor of the Church, a title thus far bestowed only on eight patristic teachers. Pio also ruled that Thomas's theological doctrine was superior to all others.[86] Leo XIII thought that Thomas had "inherited the intellect" of all other Doctors[87] and insisted that the open *Summa* rest on the altar, next to the Bible, during the Council of Trent.

The *Ratio Studiorum*[88] of the Society of Jesus evinces the Scholastic-Thomistic doctrinal basis of the colonial Church. Thomas Aquinas is the official teacher of Ignatius de Loyola's order. The very *Constitutions of the Jesuit Order* show a strong preference for Thomas.[89] Loyola, who was a soldier and not a theologian by trade, admired Thomas's discipline, rigor, and

[83] Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* vol 1. (New York: Harper One, 2010), 378–79, 433.
[84] McGinn, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa*, 136–43.
[85] McGinn, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa*, 134.
[86] Thomas Ripoll and Antonio Bremond, *Bullarium Ordinis FF. Praedicatorum*, vol. 5 (Rome: Mainard, 1733), 245.
[87] "Let carefully selected teachers endeavor to implant the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas in the minds of students." *Aeterni Patris*, papal encyclical by Leo XIII, August 4, 1879.
[88] *Ratio Atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Iesu* (Rome: In Collegio Rom. Eiusdem Societ., 1906).
[89] McGinn, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa*, 154.

doctrinal commitment. Between the 1560s and 1599, the Order elaborated a pedagogical rule: All Jesuitical literature produced in Brazil was eminently "pedagogical," including Nóbrega's dialogues, Anchieta's theater, and Vieira's poetry.[90] But the *Ratio* was the pedagogy of the pedagogues. It governed the Catechism and all educational institutions in minute detail. The Jesuit Leonel Franca and many others consider the *Ratio* a collection of positive norms and practical prescriptions compiled from two prior texts.[91] The first is the *Delectu Opinionum,* a large collection of propositions extracted from Thomas's *Summa*. The second, *Praxis et Ratio Studiorum,* taught the scriptures, scholastic theology, controversies, cases of conscience, philosophy, humanities, and Latin. For over three centuries, the *Ratio* ruled all Jesuitical institutions.[92] It forced Brazilian Jesuit colleges and schools to initiate a mandatory four-year long course on the *Summa*.[93] Philosophy and theology courses were exclusive studies of Aristotle's and Thomas's logics and metaphysics. The learning method, too, was Scholastic, based on casuistry and organized in *lectio, question,* and *repetitio*.

The *Ratio* uses Thomas Aquinas's *unitas ordinis* to prescribe an uncompromisingly hierarchical organization of Church teachings and human formation. A key premise of the *Ratio* was Thomas's conviction that the best form of government is absolutist.[94] Like Thomas, the *Ratio* defines the political and ecclesial bodies hierarchically, with analogies to the human body. In a hierarchical "unity of order," each member receives a specific function to match a specific nature. Everyone serves a hierarchy of ends for the good of the unity. Thomas never thought of

[90] Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, "Imagens de Índios do Brasil." *Estudos Avançados* 4, No. 10 (1990): 91–119.
[91] Padre Leonel Franca, *O Método Pedagógico dos Jesuítas: O Ratio Studiorum* (Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 1952).
[92] Franca, *O Método Pedagógico*, 43.
[93] Serafim Leite, *Breve História da Companhia de Jesus no Brazil, 1549-1760* (Portugal: Livraria A.I.), 39–58.
[94] *Manifestum est igitur regimen Ecclesiae sic esse dispositum ut unus toti Ecclesiae praesit*. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* 4.76.

the Church as a direct expression of the eternal life of God in the World, but as an order of visible means that ensure, over time, a bodily type of contact with Christ's Passion.[95] The ecclesial hierarchy is a "bodily" one because of the Church's sacramental vocation. The communication of the sacraments obeys a spiritual hierarchy. Likewise, the corporate unity serves a spiritual hierarchical order.

For Thomas, God has given the sacraments because human existence is bodily and the sacraments define the Church. They are, in this way, mediated from above.[96] After death, Thomas speculates, there will be no sacramental need. Like the angels, the disembodied human soul receives God's grace differently. And the future heavenly church will know only of the "essential spiritual hierarchy." No body, no sacramental need. Meanwhile, the "earthly" Church is "accidentally" hierarchical because humans have bodies.[97] The body and the Body are two signs of one spiritual hierarchy.

Thomas conditions the Church to the spiritual hierarchy and the missionary apostolate to the Church.[98] The *Ratio,* in turn, aimed to form prudent Christians who were supposed "freely [to] submit" their memory, will, and intelligence to the ecclesial-political head.[99] Prudence was the highest virtue. The *Ratio* also commends discretion, sharpness, honest dissimulation (rhetorics), and erudition. The Catholic ought to "freely serve" those who are superior according to the natural hierarchy. The student is below the teacher, who is below the supervisor, the principal, the provincial, the superior general, the pope, and finally Christ.[100]

---

[95] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3.61.1.1.3.
[96] "*Necesse est aliquam superiorem potestatem esse in Ecclesia alicuius altioris ministerii, quae ordinis sacramentum dispenset*." Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 4.76
[97] Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, 1.
[98] Aquinas, *Sentences*, 24.1.1, 1.3; *Summa Theologiae* 3.61.4.1; 63.1.1;
[99] Suárez defended the same idea in *Defesa de La Fé Católica y Apostolica Contra los Errores del Aglicanismo* vol. 4 (Madrid, Spain: Instituto de Estudios Politicos, 1970), 3.4.
[100] Hansen, "Ratio Studiorum," 35–40; 15.

Prudence and hierarchy served social cohesion. Hence, the *Ratio*'s use of Thomas's *unitas ordinis.* The "unity of order" required the curbing of desires and freedoms and an absolute obedience to authority. Obedience was so valued because it is a visible sign of prudence, the key virtue of a harmonious body. The *unitas ordinis* principle was so favorably embraced that Portuguese and Brazilian theologians discarded Machiavelli's permanent state of war and assumed a natural and common will for peace, harmony, and good.[101]

The *Ratio* documents the formative work of Thomism and Scholasticism in the colonial church. General ecclesial hierarchy, though, has even deeper roots. The Roman Church establishes external partnerships to secure its *sacra potestas* and teaches with the authority of a *mater et magistra.* The Natural Law provides the foundation for both institutes.[102]

i. *Sacra Potestas* and Personal Authority

Sacra Potestas is the natural-law principle of the supernatural origins of two episcopate powers.[103] The Church's *sacra potestas* operates in two formal modalities called "orders" and "jurisdiction." The power of "orders" validates sacramental acts and uses symbolic language. In canonical law, a sacrament is a divine sign which the law defines as "orders." *Iuris diction* is the power to convey the Word of God accurately and efficaciously. The Canon Law considers it a

[101] Giovanni Botero, *Della Raggion di Stato* (1589); Hansen, "Ratio Studiorum," 33.
[102] Boff, *Igreja*, 29.
[103] *Lumen Gentium*, papal encyclical of Paul VI (November 21, 1964), 27; Eugenio Corecco and Libero Gerosa, *Il Diritto Della Chiesa* (Vatican: Jaca/Amateca, 1995); Libero Gerosa, *Canon Law* (Münster, Germany: Lit. Verlag, 2002), 183.

divine sign and conditions its validity to priestly authority. *Iuris diction* operates under the logics of language.[104]

The Incarnation is the basic fundament of *sacra potestas*. The Canonical Code and Vatican II acknowledge that the sacramental and jurisdictional powers of the Church are in mutual relation because they convey the same substance—divine salvation. The Word makes its "supernatural" significance explicit in the sacramental formulas. And the sacraments give the Church's *iuris diction* its material effects.[105] Because God became incarnate as a human person, there is no Church without the Sacraments and the Word. The Incarnation of the Word, which is the axis of the economy of salvation, is the source of all sacramental and jurisdictional powers.

God's grace forms an indivisible "reality" in the Church. The Magisterium and the Canonical Law declare that God saves through the Church's sacraments and *iuris diction*, which are only conferrable to ordained persons.[106] The priest's consecration bestows such powers on behalf of the supreme pontifical authority. For this reason, there is no salvation outside the Church… authority.

Church authority is personal.[107] In the Roman civil law, *auctoritas* is the power to validate, make perfect, or augment the act by a person whose acts have no effects on their own and who is under the tutelage of the *pater familia*.[108] It also demands a pyramidic structure. The higher a person is in the hierarchy, the fewer are his superiors. The Church is so hierarchical and pyramidic in Brazil that the clergy commonly refer to bishops, archbishops, and the Pope as the

---

[104] Eugenio Corecco, "Natura e Struttura della 'Sacra Potestas' nella Dottrina e Nel Nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico," *Communio* 75 (1984): 24–52.
[105] Corecco, "Natura e Struttura della 'Sacra Potestas."
[106] Corecco, "Natura e Struttura della 'Sacra Potestas."
[107] "*comme la libertas, la civitas, la potestas, c'est un attribut attaché à la personne et originairement à la personne physique…*" Pierre Noailles, *Fas et Ius: Études de Droit Romain* (Paris, France: Les Belles Lettres, 1948), 274.
[108] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 91; Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 75–76, 80.

Hierarquia.[109] The *Hierarquia* is a group of physical persons, not offices. This group commonly demotes the laity from decision-making procedures and disempowers the local priests. Everyone is expected to accept the authority of the superiors with good will because doing so is part of the divine Will. If Christian "dignity" depends on the Church's *sacra potestas*[110] to convey the sacraments, it also relies on a hierarchical system. For the validity of the sacraments obeys the personal transmission of power. Christ delegated it to the Apostles, who in turn delegated it to the Pope.[111]

The Roman Church began in February 380, when Theodosius declared Christianity to be the official religion of Rome. Then Church authority became fully personal and pyramidic. The defining traits of the early communities, such as *fides, mysterium, ordo, plebs,* and *ecclesia,* became legal institutes. The Christian *fides* became *regula fides*. This juridical-political elevation granted Christianity an organizational role in the Empire. Conversion became a transference of juridical and cultural norms. Christian rites, prayers, and icons would simply replace their pagan "counterparts." Tertullian denounced how the partnership with the Roman government transformed *fides* into *lex*.[112] Ambrose, Prudence, and Magnus themselves introduced Christ as a state representative.[113]

The Roman Church partners with the dominant powers to become a *civitas Dei*.[114] The self-serving and imperialistic endeavor has been the perennial practical rationale of the Brazilian

[109] Boff, *Igreja,* 29.
[110] Corecco, "Natura e Struttura."
[111] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.76.
[112] Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum,* 24.1; 198.
[113] Boff, *Igreja.*
[114] Boff, *América Latina,* 27, 119, 125; Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2010), 27–28.

Church. It closest partner was King Henry, who even became Christ's official agent overseas after Pope Nicholas delegated to him the power to conquer and convert.

The Church's affiliation to the Brazilian Republic only grew in this regime of patronage. The Clergy negotiated with magistrates, lawmakers, and aristocrats over the construction of universities, schools, hospitals, and political parties. Boff thinks the "Republican Church" has built enduring civil institutions that cannot overcame the economic and political interests of their sponsors. In sum, the Roman structure of the colonial Church complemented its Scholastic-Thomistic doctrine.[115] The Church helped the empire with indoctrination and the Crown financed and protected the Church hierarchy. The Portuguese king acted on the pope's behalf and the missionaries acted on behalf of civilization. Scholastic Catholicism was the principal ideology of the colonial project. The Church is "engaged" when advantageous, and confessedly "apolitical" when convenient.[116] In either case, the hierarchical model continues to reign.

ii. *Mater et Magistra* and the Apostolic Tradition

The Apostolic Church claims the exclusive custody and infallible knowledge of Revelation.[117] The World needs a qualified interpreter and mediator of Christ's plan for it. So the encyclicals tell that the Apostles themselves established "bishops as their successors, handing over to them the authority to teach in their own place."[118] Thomas Aquinas believes the pope is

[115] Rioland Azzi, *A Cristandade Colonial: Um Projeto Autoritário* vol. 1 (Brazil: Paulinas, 1989), 227–29.
[116] Boff, *Igreja*, 30.
[117] "The task of authentically interpreting the word of God… has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." *Dei Verbum*, papal encyclical of Paul VI (November 18, 1965), 10; Also, *Mater et Magistra*, papal encyclical of John XXIII (May, 15, 1961), 10.
[118] *Dei Verbum*, 7.

the sole legitimate succedent of Peter.[119] The *Pastor aeternus* is the supreme teacher, who rules and speaks *ex cathedra* on all questions of faith and morality, because he is invested in the supernatural apostolic authority.[120]

The apostolic and personal transmission of supernatural powers should suffice to affirm the infallibility of the supreme teacher. But there is more. The Church also claims, with Thomas, that the Holy Trinity has personally founded it.[121] It tells us that God established the Church in Christ, who personally gave the Apostles the power of *iuris diction*, which they use with the inspiration of Spirit.

In order to safeguard the Church teachings, the Magisterium proscribes reflection on the human reality[122] and Scholastic theology guards the irrefutability of the ecclesial authority. As previously mentioned, Scholasticism has transformed Thomistic thought into a *Syllabus of Errors.*[123] The post-Trent Church transformed Thomistic theology into an auxiliar of the magisterium of the Church. The missions stressed systematization and eloquence, repetition and codification, for indoctrination. Boff denounces the predominantly sacerdotal and doctrinal tone in the homilies, Catechism, Magisterium, and papal documents for they leave little space for prophetic incursions.

The hierarchical Church needs an aura of supernatural authority with which to affirm the infallibility of the Magisterium. The *mater et magistra* attitude has helped the missionary Church to maintain that aura.[124] The power to tell what is sacred comes from that which is sacred *par*

[119] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.76.
[120] Vatican I, *Pastor Aeternus*, papal encyclical of Pope Pius IX (July 1, 1870).
[121] Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, 9.
[122] Boff, Igreja, 29.
[123] Addendum to *Quanta Cura*, papal encyclical of Pio IX (December 8, 1864).
[124] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*.

excellence. To depict a supernatural atmosphere, the Church isolates the sacred into the supernatural and claims full dominium over it. Boff shows that the Church falsely characterizes the Word as dogma and the law as Canon. These elevations keep the Sacred apart from human reality. By so doing, the Church's word on the Sacred appears eternal and universal. However, it also means that the sacred is not for everyone. Word and the law presuppose two highly specialized offices. A small and elite group of theologians and canonical lawyers becomes responsible for assisting the Clergy in examining the substance of Tradition and the Scriptures. Ordinary people are simply to absorb their dogmatism. And the hierarchy is pivotal in the supernatural theater.[125] The Church elevates its hierarchy to the status of a supernatural truth and divine will.

The actual "revelation" of the Roman-Scholastic Church is that God wills humans to live hierarchically, with varied degrees of dignity. Boff argues that this hierarchical and supernatural Christianity is "*Internalizou-se na alma popular*."[126] In short, it now belongs in Brazil's established order. If God has founded a hierarchical Body for humanity, God must have intended for humans to live hierarchically. The *sacra potestas* and *mater et magistra* enable the Church to refine his draconian idea to a significant level of self-coherence. All the while, the hierarchy oppresses the most vulnerable members of the ecclesial and national bodies.[127]

Another general consequence of the hierarchy is the impossibility of a genuine encounter with the poor. Boff laments that the "evangelization" project has failed spectacularly in Brazil. Indigenous, Black, and poor communities never truly learned of the Gospels from the

[125] Boff, *América Latina: Da Conquista à Nova Evangelização* (São Paulo, Brazil: Ática, 1992), 186, n. 26.
[126] Boff, *América Latina*, 125.
[127] Boff, *Igreja*, 178.

hierarchical Church. Evangelization requires mutuality in a human encounter.[128] But, he says, most of the evangelizers were landgrabbers and slaveowners. So the oppressed had to develop their own model of being Church. The fruit of their experiment, the CEBs, operate horizontally, follow participatory principles, and aim at social justice. The more the Church hierarchy suppresses the soul of Brazil, the more dismembered and hierarchical is the ecclesial body. The closer the Church is to the poor, the more perfect is its mission.

Nearness and distance from God is a criterion of differentiation between two qualitatively different modes of relations.[129] Martin Buber's dialogical philosophy has influenced a generation of Brazilian theologians, including Boff. Buber proposes that humanity oscillates between two "worlds." First is a world of subjective experience, perception, and objects which he calls "It." This world reinforces a mode or type of existence that tends to separate humans but is necessary for the recognition of the other's particularities. The other mode or type of existence is the world of actualization or Thou relations. Only in a Thou relation does one meets the Other in the Other's full humanity. The It relation signifies the persistence of the "primal distance" from which the Thou issues forth. In the Thou, the participants address each other spiritually, in the particularity of their existence.

The hierarchical Church exists in the It world. The Thou world is a "temple" in which the Church can be the Body of Christ. Although the It world provides the necessary distance for the recognition of the Other as such,[130] only in the Thou is there pure relationship. Only in the latter is God present. Thou relations tend toward a "pure connection" between humans, the world, and

[128] Boff, *América Latina*, 119.
[129] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 53, 60, 82.
[130] Martin Buber, "Distance and Relation," in *The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays* trans. ed. Maurice Friedman (New York: HarperCollins, 1960), 28.

God. The divine Presence in the Thou is the altar of "pure" relations. Otherwise said, the Thou encounter nurtures a kind of dialogue which is also sacramental. Because of the divine Presence, the Thou encounter suggests an alternative model of Church based on dialogue, which is sacramental because it communicates divine love.

No other institution speaks more authoritatively and recurrently on human dignity than the Catholic Church.[131] But the same Church which so often theologizes *dignitas* also ascribes an inferior value to poor, Indigenous, and Black Christians. It denies the sacrament of ordination to women and tries to control their bodies. It silences dissident priests. This same Church does not let the poor and other historically oppressed "be" the Church.[132]

2.3 The Racial Endeavor to Define the Brazilian Soul: The Racial Democracy Myth and Gilberto Freyre's Anti-Thomistic Sentiment

This section reconstructs the origins of the racial democracy myth. It underscores a particular inclination in Brazil's self-understanding. The first "official history" of Brazil describes a redeemed people born out of racial mixtures. The "history" has given rise to a myth—a racial democracy myth. This myth is a theological concern insofar as it became a commonsensical narrative of the alleged origins and destiny of all Brazilians. The story tells how the three races which form the national "soul" have mixed naturally and harmoniously. Such mixture, it alleges, is the sign of a new, modern, multicultural, and progressive democracy. It unites and deletes differences for the common good, elevating Brazil to an exemplar among democratic nations. Because it is so mixed, the myth says, Brazilians do not experience racial

[131] To mention only one of the latest addresses, Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* uses the word "dignity" fifty-seven times.
[132] Boff, *Igreja*, 88–89.

injustice. There is, it says, no structural racism in a land known for mixture, hybridity, or miscegenation—Brazil's defining virtue. But the narrative which conceives of race as a biological (natural) phenomenon with cultural and political overtones also camouflages a people's hierarchical and violent origins.[133] Brazilians continue to enjoy radically different social statuses on the basis of racial violence.

The arrival of the Portuguese Crown in Rio de Janeiro in 1808 initiated a political transformation. The process leading to independence in 1822 was at once "conservative and revolutionary." It maintained colonial rule but opened some space for a moderate distribution of power. Brazil was becoming a "modern colonial nation,"[134] a hybrid system with monarchical and republican traits. Brazil's agrarian and aristocratic elite began advocating the benefits of a national political-economy to increase production and reduce international competition. But the country still lacked a national culture. While calling Brazil a nation implies some degree of social cohesion and a unifying culture, the incipient bourgeoisie regarded the liberal ideals with disdain. How to unite a tiny ruling aristocracy, a wannabe bourgeoisie, and a multitude of freed people, peasants, and rural workers?[135] The Brazilian bourgeoisie, too, envisioned a "modern" nation with an absolutist government. It wished to incorporate the liberal values into the colonial structure. It wanted "freedom" for the political-economy and colonial rule for the people.[136] Since Brazil's national project grew in a slaveholding and patronizing culture, it was hierarchical for the poor and colored and "progressive" for the rich and white.

---

[133] Abdias Nascimento, *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro: Processo de Racismo Mascarado* (Brazil: Ipeafro, 2016).
[134] Florestan Fernandes, *A Revolução Burguesa no Brasil: Ensaio de Interpretação Sociológica* 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Zahar, 1976), 32–33; Cândido, "A Sociologia no Brasil," 271–301.
[135] Rebecca J. Scott et al., *The Abolition of Slavery and the Aftermath of Emancipation in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988).
[136] Fernandes, *A Revolução Burguesa*, 31–33.

The king of Brazil sought to maintain his centralized power by attending positively to some bourgeois demands. To that end, he launched a few institutions. The Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (IHGB) is one of them. Its purpose was to develop and propagate an official history of the Brazilian nation and, in this way, to "create" a culture. A divided society required a convincing narrative of common origins. A good story, the Instituto thought, could bring the classes together, minimize social hostility, and justify the political centralization of a constitutional monarchy. The IHGB then issued a public contest of essays on the question "How Should One Describe the History of Brazil?" The contest was so successful that it gave rise to a new field of study. The founder of academic Brazilian history was also the recipient of the essay's prize—the German botanist, Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, had penned the first official history of the Brazilian people.[137] Von Martius, who was anything but a historian by trade, had traveled around Brazil between 1817 and 1820 and had written treatises on vegetal morphology.

Von Martius's story harmonized Brazil's tropical nature with the natural "progress" of racial mixture. It integrated the races but acknowledged the Portuguese predominance for the purpose of keeping the colonial hierarchy.[138] From his perspective, the Portuguese men were clearly the conquerors and lords of the land. They defined Brazil's moral character. Von Martius painted a fluvial metaphor of Brazil's racial birth. The races met to form one wide and rapid river with two tributaries. Each river represents a race. Unsurprisingly, the amplest and greatest river is the "white" or Portuguese one. Not only that, it "cleans" and "absorbs" the other streams. The Indigenous river he depicts as impure and smaller; the African as the smallest. Von Martius also

[137] Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, "Como Se Deve Escrever a História do Brasil," *Jornal do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 24, No. 6 (Jan. 1845): 381–403.
[138] Chaui, *Brasil*, 31; Schwartz, *Sobre o Autoritarismo Brasileiro*, 21–22.

had to dissolve regional particularities and forcibly meld them into an invisible union. He used Brazil's vast territory and regional differences to postulate the adequacy of the constitutional monarchy.

The first official history of Brazil is a narrative of racial mixture for the purposes of national unity. Essentially what it says is that the races belong together for the "greatness of the white race,' which predominates in a "*hierarquia inquestionável*."[139] Over time, the naturalist-nationalistic idea gained even more popularity. Von Martius's naturalist spirit continued to resurface in stories that used racial mixture to affirm unity.[140]

But it was Gilberto Freyre's racial democracy thesis that finally "canonized" the narrative. Since his *Casa-Grande* & *Senzala* (1933), most Brazilians have understood that racial mixture is their most defining characteristic and virtue. The supposed naturalness of this mixture figured prominently in Freyre's alluring and freewheeling history of the people. *Casa-Grande* & *Senzala* was the first scholarly work to affirm that African slaves participated actively in the formation of Brazilian culture. Yet it suggested that the African and Indigenous contributions are primarily biological, i.e., sexual and "genetic."[141] Culture was "natural" for Freyre to the extent that the economy and the family are the loci of the human creative interaction with the environment. "Nature" so understood was the link between the aristocratic, monopolist, monocultural, and slaveholding economic system and the Portuguese patriarchal family.

The patriarchal family organized its private and public lives according to the colonial economy. *Casa-Grande* & *Senzala* was a complex study, filled with contradictions and

[139] von Martius, "Como Se Deve Escrever."
[140] Including Sílvio Romero's *Introdução à História da Literatura Brasileira* (1882), Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (1902), Oliveira Viana's *Raça e Assimilação* (1932), and Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1928).
[141] Freyre briefly flirted with "eugenics." "Manifesto dos Intelectuais Brasileiros contra o Racismo," 1935.

illuminating insights, but it plainly showed that the family and production were the powerhouses of Brazil's racial relations and culture.[142] This thesis, by the way, is the subtitle of the Brazilian edition "*A Study in the Formation of the Brazilian Family under the Patriarchal Economy*." The patriarchal family was also a slaveholding and aristocratic nucleus. In Freyre's account, the contributions of African people to Brazilian culture happened via sexual relations with the slave master. Though he considered the Portuguese "inferior" to the "sophisticated and knowledgeable" Western and Central African, the Portuguese "beat" them. They beat or exceeded their accomplishments in the "military and technical sense,"[143] not religiously, aesthetically, "genetically," and socially. Yet, despite their "victory" the Portuguese had to negotiate "genetic and social" changes. The scarcity of white women was, for Freyre, the major reason for this. He argued that it created "celebratory zones" between the white male "winner" and the colored female "loser." Hence, Brazil's celebrated miscegenation. To be sure, Freyre acknowledges the domestic and sexual violence of Brazilian miscegenation.[144] Regardless, he thought that this violent "celebratory zone" created a democratic nation because it bridged the big house and the slaves quarters. Because of it, "Every Brazilian, even the light-skinned fair-haired [one], carries in his soul, if not in the soul and the body, the shadow of the Indigenous and the Black peoples."[145]

Yet, the Portuguese slave master "owned" Brazil. He owned the land, the men, the women, and the houses—which were hefty, sturdy, and ugly, with deep foundations and

[142] *Casa-Grande* & *Senzala* mobilizes a human "ecology" of miscegenation, agriculture, property, and the family.
[143] Freyre, *Casa-Grande* & *Senzala: Formação da Família Brasileira sob o Regime da Economia Patriarcal* 48th ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: Global, 2003), preface, 33.
[144] Freyre, *Casa-Grande* & *Senzala*, 515.
[145] Freyre, *Casa-Grande* & *Senzala*, 367; preface, 44; Jessé Souza, "Gilberto Freyre e a Singularidade Cultural Brasileira" *Tempo Social* 12, No. 1 (2000): 69–70.

unnecessarily thick walls.[146] This Portuguese male also "overcame" the Church, claimed Freyre. That happened, in part, because the colonial Church was "Jesuitical." What did he mean by this?

Freyre had a distaste for Thomist-Scholastic inflexibility. He thought Jesuits' rigidity did not fit in Brazil. The expulsion of the Jesuits in the last quarter of the eighteenth century signified the Big House's victory over the Church. After that, Freyre suggested, the Portuguese slave master dominated Brazil by himself, without intermediaries. The Franciscans, he thought, would have been the ideal missionaries for an "intellectually rebellious" people with strong "communist tendencies." Franciscans were better for the Native and the African because they supposedly opposed "intellectualism" and "mercantilism," loved simplicity and the manual crafts, and were "almost animist and totemist" in regards to Nature. For example, the Tupinambá people detested the Jesuitical mnemonic and abstract instructions but loved the Franciscan selfless sharing of food, clothes, and tools.[147] In comportment and ideas, they were more Franciscan than Jesuit.

In a nutshell, the myth of racial democracy tells Brazilians they are a new people who have never seen racial segregation. Brazil is a blending democratic machine that loves and feeds on difference. In reality, the myth discloses Brazil's highest ideal. But at the same time it assumes a grave fallacy—that Brazilians are not racist. The racial democracy tales take advantage of a historical consensus to propose an ahistorical one. To be sure, fiction and fact have merged beneficially during the *Tropicalia* and other cultural movements. But Brazil is far from being a democracy, much more so from instantiating a racial democracy. Freyre later declared he had never intended for his thesis to become a myth. But he does say that racial hybridity is the democratic virtue of Brazil, which has never experienced structural and legal

[146] Freyre, *Casa-Grande & Senzala*, preface.
[147] Freyre, *Casa-Grande & Senzala*, 214–15.

racism. Although the book does not use the term "racial democracy," Freyre's Unesco article "*Brazil, Racial Amalgamation and Problems*" does.[148]

For too long the myth has convinced people that no one is racist if everybody is mixed, and yet Brazilians remain a hierarchical people today, disputing the truth of such a conviction. Despite the efforts by the Brazilian Black Movement to unmask the myth since the 1960s, colonization and slavery remain the pillars of the country's self-perception. Such pillars have naturalized relations of dominium in private and public institutions. Certainly, intellectual creativity is a necessary ingredient in the historian's attribution of nexus and meaning to facts and ideas.[149] But thought cannot justify violence. The caravels were not cruise ships, the Big Houses not love nests, and Brazil not a racial wonderland. A tale of redemption alone cannot heal the collective memory of the survivors of long processes of authoritarianism, subjugation, and marginalization.[150]

3. The Hierarchical Human Person in St. Thomas's Substance Dualism

St. Thomas's dualist view of the person has influenced the Brazilian culture as much as the biblical conception.[151] From relationships that actually sway between the poles of order and acquiescence grows a hierarchical notion. And a culture which embraces and perpetuates dominium raises actual persons who are prone to misunderstand the meaning of social improvement for the greedy conquest of economic and political dominance. The outcome is a hierarchical view of personhood and dignity, one that is forged in associations based on

[148] UNESCO, *International Yearbook of Education* 22, "Brazil, Racial Amalgamation and Problems" (1961).
[149] Paul Veyne, *Comment on Écrit L'Histoire: Essai D'Épistémologie* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1970).
[150] Marilena Chauí, "500 Anos: Cultura e Politica no Brasil," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 38 (1993): 51–52l.
[151] In the Bible, a person is a dialogical being, a hearer and respondent of God who exists in relations. See Chapter 3.

command and obedience. Relations that pre-establish unequal positions construct a person who always and necessarily exists in between unequal poles. In this way, hierarchy regrettably unites the nation and determines the person's dignity.

This section of the chapter shows that Thomas's view of personhood is hierarchical. His alignment with Aristotle on the matter obfuscates the biblical person. In St. Thomas's substance dualism, it is not Jesus who is the basic model of humanity, but Aristotle's rationalistic soul. Every physical being is a compound of form and matter. "Form" is the prior and more important entity which unifies a given matter, making of it a single object. A form "generates" and unites to a matter. The union of form and matter is a "compound." For Aristotle, that is true for physical objects, the human soul, and the polis.[152] Thomas accepts this basic premise in regards to the human person, whom he defines as a "substantial form." A particular matter always serves a form. Consequently the soul commands the body and can exist after its death. While body and soul are not opposed, they do exist in a natural hierarchy. The body exists exclusively for the satisfaction of the soul's purpose. The soul unites to the body because of the soul's intellectual or rational nature. The soul naturally seeks to know, and to know God above all. The same Aristotelean principle sustains Thomas's argument for the immortality of the soul. The soul survives the body because the former has one nature and two modes of existence. Embodied life is natural; disembodied life is supernatural. Although *praeter natura* does not signify "counternatural," the disembodied and supernatural existence of the soul is metaphysically superior to the embodied. Because of the double hierarchy—soul above body and disembodied life above embodied—the dignity of the human person is in the soul.

[152] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*; *De Anima*; *Politics*.

The Christian adoption of Classical rationalism is a traditional debate. Boethius defined the person as a *naturae rationabilis individua substantia*.[153] Centuries later, Richard of St. Victor thought the human being was an individual, singular, and incomprehensible form of existence.[154] This radically immanent anthropology tends to reduce the complexity of human life to an individual capacity, foreclosing the outward and open-ended notion of the person. This radical rationalism is prone to reduce the social and complex concept of personhood into a thinking being.

Thomas Aquinas's understanding flourishes within that tradition. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment is the incorporation of Aristotle into it. Since Thomas's substance dualism is a Christian version of Aristotle's hylomorphism, it ascertains different natures and capacities to the body and the soul according to the human purpose and nature. Thomas understands that the human purpose is the soul's purpose: to know God through the intellect or reason. The soul can and must know through the body, which the soul generates in order to learn of natural things. But while body and soul unite to serve the soul's purpose, they have divergent aptitudes. And different purposes indicate different natures.

Form (soul) and substance (body) have different natures because they have different purposes. All beings are either a form, a substance, or compound of the two. Matter is potency and form is an act.[155] Matter is the potency to exist or become; that which is not, as such, a particular thing yet. An actuality or form is the principle which animates, generates, and organizes the matter. A form is the force behind an object's existence. It includes both the actual and the potential being in a matter-form compound. Analogically, a song only exists when it is

[153] Boethius, *De persona et duabus naturis*, 2.
[154] Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity*, 4.6, PL, 196, 934.
[155] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, 2.1, 212–16.

sung. The song integrates its singing. The form of matter is like the singing of a song. It exists as singing and song. It gives existence to the sung as a form gives existence to particular matter.

The human soul is an extraordinary form, and has a unique nature. Forms can be purely intellectual or substantial. The angels are an intellectual form because they lack a material body. The human soul is a "substantial form" because the soul is essential, i.e., "substantial," for the body's existence[156] and the soul exists in the body. The body only exists because of the soul which creates and animates it.[157] As matter, the body as such is pure potency. It is only completed "in kind and in being" when it unites to the form (soul). Thus, the human soul is unique because it has an intellectual nature and a bodily existence. It is rational as the angels but lives in an "irrational" matter, as the beasts do. As a form, the soul never mixes with the body. Instead, they unite for the soul's purpose of knowing God.[158] The very character of human existence is intellectual, "to know." A soul necessitates and employs a body to know objects.

Since the soul gives the body its actuality, a body without a soul will disappear. It is as though the soul's "shape becomes actuality" in the body. Although the soul is the body's actuality and energy, they form an unmixed "composite."

Thus, the soul alone makes the human being a "person." The body is a tool for the soul to know God in the world.[159] The soul's intellectual nature qualifies the body as a human body and the body-soul union as a human person. In sum, that the soul is a "substantial form" gives the body its being and defines the person.[160]

---

[156] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, 2.1, 221–24
[157] The soul is "that by which a living bodily organism is alive," its primary act. Aquinas, *De Anima*, II, 1, 233.
[158] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.75, a2; I, q75, a5; I, q76, a1; I, q75, a. 3; I, q47, a2, ad 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 56; *De Anima*, II, 1, 227–29; 233; *Summa Theologiae*, I, q75, a. 3; I, q47, a2, ad 1.
[159] Aquinas, *De Anima*, 220; Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme. Introduction au système de Saint Thomas D'Aquin* (Paris, France: J. Vrin, 1922).
[160] Aquinas, *De Anima*, 2.1.225.

In short, Thomas conceives of a fragmented and hierarchical person whose body and soul hold different dignities. The dignity of the soul is superior because its mode of existence is superior. Each being has a greater or lesser dignity according to its degree of existence. Thomas believes that God is existence itself, the only self-existing being,[161] the *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. In consequence, the more a being exists, the higher is the being's dignity. The more plentifully something exists, the more it reflects its creator. A vegetable has a lesser degree of existence than an animal, which is lesser than a rational being, whose existence contains the other kinds. The human person is between the angelic and the animal kingdoms. The person is the lowest of the rational beings because the rational soul creates and unites with a body. But the person is above the animals, who lack a rational soul. The body is the highest kind of matter[162] because of the soul. If the soul elevates human dignity, the body drags it down. Body and soul therefore have unequal dignity.

Thus, the soul's intellectual nature[163] is the reason why the body-soul forms a *human* person and why its dignity is a human one. For Thomas, the soul's superior and intellectual nature constitutes the human person and dignity because only the intellect reflects the divine image.[164] So, the person is human and has a human dignity inasmuch as the soul is intellectual and superior to the body. Furthermore, because the nature of the soul is rational, it can exist in embodied and disembodied ways. They too form a hierarchy.

3.1 The Immortality of the Soul: One Nature, Two Modes of Existence

[161] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.2.3, ad. resp.
[162] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2.68.
[163] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences,* 1.23.1.1; 26.1.1; 10.1.5.
[164] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.46.2,

The immortality of the soul is the defining question of Thomas's substance dualism. Thomas's incorporation of Aristotle included the Classical dualist premise. Aristotle thought that the soul does not survive the death of the body. Contra Plato, he understood the bodiless soul as unable to continue existing because the soul has no activity apart from the body.[165] Aristotle departs from the premise that something which does not operate stops existing. A theologian, however, could not deny the Christian faith in the immortality of the soul. To accommodate Aristotle's substance dualism into the Christian faith, Thomas had to justify the conviction that the soul can operate without a body. But without the body, the soul would be a form without matter or an "intellectual form." And only the angels are "pure intellectual forms."

Thomas attends to the biblical faith by carving out a rationalist solution using the Classical understanding of the nature of the soul. Anton C. Pegis has convincingly argued that Thomas's adaptation of the Aristotelian concept of nature was an uneven process. By the time he wrote the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, his assimilation of Aristotle was still unfinished. The *Summa Theologiae* offers a new perspective on the nature of the soul. In *SCG,* 1.80 and 81, Thomas aligns with Aristotle, rejecting the subsistence of the disembodied soul. But he changes his mind in the *ST*, 1.89.1.[166]

In the *SCG*, Thomas proposes that the operation which is natural to a thing is the one that is natural to its mode of existence. A being's natural "mode of existence" is perceptible in the being's activity. Thus, the soul's nature is intellectual because the soul's operation is "to know." It is self-evident that humans operate both rationally and in the body. Yet, the human

[165] Aristotle, *De Anima,* 1.1.403, 3–25, 5–16.
[166] Anton C. Pegis, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in The Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), 168–80.

intellect is not a physical organ, which indicates that it is an operation of the soul only. Still, the intellect naturally needs the bodily organs to know.

The soul knows through the body's sensible perception, cognition, and memory. It relies on the bodily organs to capture objects qua objects of knowledge. Aristotelean epistemology grows upon the basic premise that the soul has only *intelligere* and *velle* or, logos, eros, and thymos. The soul knows with intelligence, by grasping conclusions about objects after it converts or refers them back to self-evident or "universal" principles such as mathematical truths. But the soul necessitates "phantasms" to know.[167] "Phantasms" are representations of sensible perceptions of objects to the intellect. The soul knows "phantasms" like the body knows by the senses. They feed the intelligence. Simply put, the soul knows the essence of the objects perceived through abstractions that are extracted from the "phantasms" which the body makes.

Without the bodily powers, the soul would cease to exist[168] since its prime activity is intellectual. Perception, cognition, and memory are "located" in the body; the intellect is not. The first ceases to exist after the death of the body; the second does not. Given that existence is activity, no substance can exist for too long without performing its natural operation. Integrally accepted, the Aristotelean premise negates Jesus's promise that the soul is immortal and that the body will resurrect.

Thomas approaches the problem with his famous adage "everything acts as it is." A being *is* according to its mode of existence. Because the soul's "operation" or "act" is to know, its mode of existence must be intellectual. But the disembodied soul exists (and "is") in a different way. While embodied, the soul knows through the bodily faculties. But the

[167] *Quamdiu anima est in corpore, non potest intelligere sine phantasmate.* Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 19.1.
[168] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2.81.5. Compare with Aristotle, *De Anima*, 1.4.408, 24–25; 3.5; 430a, 23–25.

disembodied soul can somehow also know independently from the body. Thus, the soul has two modes of existence because it can know (operate) in two basic manners. The embodied soul is in its natural mode because the soul naturally knows through the body.

Thomas thinks the soul is immortal because it can know, and thus also exist, without the body. Remember, the soul is a substantial form. That is the reason its operation is intellectual. Being rational, the soul must be able to operate without matter.[169] After leaving the body, the soul operates in a way that is similar to the angels. The disembodied soul temporarily adopts the operation of higher beings. It no longer receives the forms of objects and refers them back to the intellect. Rather, the intellect receives them "directly" from above.

The disembodied mode of existence and knowing is not "natural" to the soul. However, it is superior to the embodied mode because the disembodied soul knows more in a more "abstract and universal" way.[170] It is more "universal" because it more closely attains to the "intelligibles" above it. Each being receives its influence from another, which is above itself *per modum sui esse*. Higher "intelligibles" are superior to phantasms because the former contain more universal and unified forms. Thomas's underlying rationale is that the unified God bestows all knowledge and powers of knowing. God is the simplest and most universal being. Complexity, duality, and multiplicity pertain to the lower and embodied modes of existence. The higher the object, the more united and universal is its knowledge. The angels, who are superior and closer to God, obtain more universal forms—directly from God.[171] Like the angels, the disembodied soul has fewer but more powerful universals for understanding. By its intellectual nature, the disembodied

[169] *Sed propria operatio animae rationalis est intelligere*. *Ergo post mortem anima intelligit*. *De Veritate*, 19.1.
[170] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2.68, 3–6.
[171] Thomas calls the angelic mode of knowing "infused species." Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 19.1.

soul receives from God and the angels the form of knowable things and no longer needs phantasms to operate.

Such a "disembodied" mode of understanding signifies the superiority of its correlate mode of existence in relation to the embodied life. The more directly the soul can share in the knowledge of God, the more it fulfills its purpose, which is to know God in total abstraction and universality. Upon leaving the body, the soul approaches the higher and more universal substances.[172] Thomas believes the virtue of temperance can anticipate this mode of understanding proper only to the disembodied soul. Temperance promotes a relative detachment from the bodily passions, which is necessary for knowing the "infused species."

Now Thomas faces a greater—or perhaps higher—problem: Can the human soul really know, operate, and exist, like angels do? Recall that angels are purely intellectual substances whereas the human soul is a substantial form. The human soul is not an angelic being. Its natural mode of understanding must be corporeal, Thomas muses. Once again he returns to Aristotle: the body cannot be a detriment to the soul, for the body is actually beneficial to the soul. Matter exists for the sake of form, not contrariwise. Form animates and "generates" matter. Actuality enlivens potency. So the angelic mode of knowing does not suit the nature of the soul, which is defined according to the soul's embodied way of knowing. Otherwise, how to explain the purpose of the body? Thomas is convinced that the body exists for the soul to know God. God would have created a permanently disembodied soul if the soul did not need the body. Because the human *ex natura animae* necessitates the sensible perceptions, memory, and cognition, the soul cannot actually know exactly as the angelical beings do. Otherwise, humans and angels

[172] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2.68, 3–6; 81.3–7.

would have the same nature. Remember, "everything acts as it is." The nature of the soul is visible in its natural operation, which happens in the body.[173]

The disembodied soul exists as a different being which nonetheless has the same nature as the embodied soul—because they refer to one and the same person. The nature of the soul determines the possibility for the soul to exist without a body. While soul and body form the human "composite," the intellectual nature of the soul alone justifies its natural and supernatural existences. The soul unites with, departs from, and will return to the body because it is intellectual. The nature of the soul prevails upon the nature of the body.

A human soul exists in a super-natural mode after it leaves the body. It is "supernatural" because knowledge through a body is natural for the soul. Each being receives its influence from what is above it, *per modum sui esse*. God placed the human soul between a purely intellectual form (angel) and a matter (body). The being of material substances is received in the matter and the being of disembodied or intellectual forms is not. The human soul receives its being in matter, not because it is a material substance, but because it can exist in a "more universal" way.

Thomas thus proposes that the disembodied soul has a *praeter naturam* mode of existence because it can know abstract and universal intelligibles. Yet this power does not equate with human and the angelic natures. The soul's disembodied mode of existence does not mean it is "beyond nature"[174] or "against nature." "Super-natural" does not refer to an existence that is contrary or external to nature. It means, instead, an exceptional and superior function rather than a different order. It is exceptional and superior because it brings the soul "closer" to God's aid.

[173] Aquinas, *Quaestiones de Anima*, 15.
[174] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.89.1.

Natural and supernatural are two "formally distinct aspects of one reality."[175] Nature refers back to the concrete order but the capacity for transcendence is part of this nature. The soul has a "transcendental openness to God's grace," a *desideratum naturale* for the reception of superior knowledge. The exceptional participates in the natural by divine grace. Simultaneously, the supernatural knowledge is relatively natural for the soul, who can receive it. Superiority corresponds to an "external aid" to the soul. Not an order above nature, the supernatural existence is still superior to the natural in function. Thomas hints at this understanding twice. First he says that the soul's disembodied mode of existence is reversible. The body shall resurrect because disembodiment is not as natural for humans as it is for angels. Second, he says that the more perfect knowledge of the disembodied soul is not *as* perfect as the angelic knowledge.

The *praeter naturam* of the soul is reversible and temporary. Every soul needs a body, and nothing that acts against its own nature can be everlasting, teaches Aristotle.[176] Also, because the soul is everlasting, as the Bible teaches, the soul must reunite with the body. The soul can and must "return" to its natural existence. Disembodiment is therefore a temporary status. Likewise, the "supernatural" status is reversible.

The immortality of the soul is for Thomas a logical force pressing for a theological conclusion about bodily resurrection. More than a *regula fidei*, the resurrection is, for Thomas, a rational truth with an *evidens ratio* in the soul's intellectual nature.[177] The key point is that immortality does not signify disembodiment. The disembodied soul is immortal but the immortal

[175] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 173.
[176] Aristotle, *De Caelo*, 2.3, 286a; 17-18.
[177] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.79.

soul is not necessarily disembodied. In short, Thomas subsumed faith in the resurrection of the (mortal) body to the idea of the immortality of the (rational) soul.[178]

Also, this superior power to know, which Thomas called "infused" or "through infused species," does not signify that the soul can know as much universally and abstractly as the angels. Disembodied humans know in a way that is familiar but inferior to angelic knowledge. As an inferior kind of intellectual substance, the soul has the *capacitas naturalis* to receive forms from material things. Due to this capacity, the disembodied soul will receive the divinely "infused" forms in a lesser universal way than do angels.

Though Thomas did not permanently sever body and soul, nature and supernature, his commentators certainly do. As discussed above, Medieval Thomists have radicalized the body-soul split. A sharply dualist theology of nature and supernature dominated Catholic Scholasticism from the fifteenth century[179] until the *nouvelle théologie* and Vatican II. The previous section suggested that the Society of Jesus exported this kind of superior dualist Thomism to colonial Brazil.

"Nature" is so important because it stimulates the imagination with images and narratives that can potentially risk an explanation of the human origins and destiny. A being's *natura* connects to a creator and possibly indicates a final purpose. Thomas assumes that a natural creature exhibits, in its way of living, something that is essential to its creator and purpose. A being's specific nature is apparent in that being's purpose. And the purpose is clear in the being's spontaneous activity or "mode of existence." The purpose of the soul is evident in the soul's reflection of the divine reason in its naturally rational activity.

---

[178] Aquinas, III *Sentences*, 31.2.4 *apud* Anton C. Pegis, "The Separated Soul and Its Nature in St. Thomas Aquinas," in Armand A. Maurer ed., *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies* (Toronto: PIMS, 1975), 139.
[179] Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 178.

The Bible offers an alternative understanding. It equates "nature" with "human nature" and defines the human person in the body-soul union. Paul's notion of the "spiritual body" is critical because it has a concern for the integrity of the person. Paul said that body and soul meet in a non-oppositional and non-hierarchical dialect.[180] Indeed, the Apostolic Tradition forms a more "organic" person. Tertullian, for example, regarded the body as a unified organism. For him, the soul was an invisible but "concrete body" set in the shape of the spiritual body. Boff adheres to this Christological reading.[181] For him, the body and the soul are non-opposite and non-hierarchical aspects of the person, so the human dignity is at once "corporeal and spiritual." The spirit is corporeal and the corpus is a pneuma; the body is the spirit manifested and realized in relations, the "consciousness of human matter."

4. Conclusion: Unity-in-Hierarchy and Degrees of Human Dignity

The dignity of the human person is one in nature but plural in degrees because of a double hierarchy. The first defines and establishes degrees of dignity through Brazil's cultural and social self-understanding. It suggests that human dignity is the value a person has according to the person's undeserved and unchosen "mode of existence" within the sociopolitical hierarchy. The second establishes that the dignity of the soul is superior to the dignity of the body. The first hierarchy has been promoted by the second, which is grounded in Thomas Aquinas's substance dualism. The soul's superior dignity constitutes human dignity because of the soul's intellectual nature. The soul's intellectual nature is the reason why it creates and unites to a body, uses it, and then enters a supernatural existence. The assumed value of the soul in the

[180] Boff, *A Ressurreição*, 86–89; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 20th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 48.
[181] Boff, *A Ressurreição*, 100; see chapter three.

order of creation has facilitated the hierarchy of dignity. The body, the soul, and the person are human and have a dignity inasmuch as the soul is rational.

The person exists as a human unit in and because of the two hierarchical relations. The body-soul and natural-supernatural hierarchies define the person as such as well as actual human persons. A person is the "unification" of the disproportionate weights that someone has in the two hierarchical axes. Because the person as such is conceived dualistically—with a value gap between the soul and the body—the internal hierarchy presses for a numerical definition: the human person and dignity are quantifiable, calculable. They are the sums of the comparable measurements someone occupies in the natural-supernatural ellipse. Thus, human dignity varies in degree from person to person.

Brazil is a unity-in-hierarchy because hierarchy is Brazil's foremost political value. So the national unity demands a hierarchy of dignity. Unity-in-hierarchy begets relations based on command and obedience that are allegedly for the common good. Brazilians define the actual dignity of real persons in unjustifiable positions of subjugation. For one person's dignity to increase, another's must decrease.

From these conclusive remarks emerge three implications. First, the dignity of the human person is relative. It is the sum of comparisons among actual persons living in disproportionally valued "modes of existence." Second, the problem of human dignity is simultaneously theoretical and empirical, not a mere disjunction between theory and practice. A people's understanding of human dignity is an *a priori* condition for the possibility of actual dignity. Third, hierarchical relations satisfy a false notion of the common good, one that works to maintain unequal human statuses. In a hierarchical culture like Brazil's, the human end is the conquest of power.

Chapter 2

A Rebellious and Redemptive Act:
The Nature and Meaning of Human Dignity According to Black Brazilian Theology

In chapter one, I argued that body-soul dualism participates in Brazil's self-perception as a "unity-in-hierarchy." The belief in the metaphysical superiority of the soul in relation to the body has supported and indeed undergirded political economic institutions that promote the economic and racial gap. I claimed there that the metaphysical gap strengthens the empirical one, and that this can only happen because people have long accepted that their dignity lies in the soul, which can have inferior and superior "modes of existence" according to embodiment/disembodiment and social position. Consequently, dignity can function as an index of human "value." This social and economic reality of dignity sharply contradicts the traditional Christian view in which dignity is a divine gift bestowed on all souls indiscriminately. Presumably everyone has the same intrinsic, unchangeable, and universal value-gift, so hypothetically dignity should serve as a social equalizer.

So far, I have explored the correlation between the theological hierarchy of the soul and the body and the social hierarchy of dignity. This second chapter initiates a response to the social and the theological gaps of dignity, by people who live without dignity or who only enjoy small amounts of it. Their response is in fact a re-conception of dignity. I assume that they know best what dignity is because they actually create the conditions for a dignified life, since they have been forced to live without it. So, the chapter's driving question is "What is the theological nature and meaning of human dignity for people who are forced to live without it?"

This chapter has three sections. In the first part, I propose that Black and poor communities realize their dignity by creating it, rather than "possessing" it. The communities

believe that the more an idea, fact, or value can be assimilated into the collective experience as being assertive of their dignity, the more it can be considered "real." By themselves developing the material and immaterial conditions for their wellbeing, they "realize" dignity's meaning. Thus, they believe it is something closer to a human act than to a divine gift for all. While this Black epistemic sensibility originates in Africa, it has been adapted in Brazil with the Christian ideal of redemption.

In the second section of the chapter, I postulate that dignity is an act that carries a redemptive and a rebellious meaning. "Doing" dignity is redemptive because it is the presupposition for living with it, which is the divine purpose for the poor and marginalized, who reflect God in their lives. In the Black Christian understanding, Exodus, Genesis, and the Gospels convey a life-death dichotomy, rather than an opposition between the soul and body. In this understanding, the Bible is a document about life and death, and the possible choices we can make between the two. Genesis introduces the salvific plot of which the oppressed become the protagonists and redemption the end (in Exodus). Genesis and Exodus depict us as co-responsible agents in the unfolding story of creation. In it, we have been created (Genesis) and summoned (Exodus) by God to love and care for one another, particularly for the socially vulnerable. Likewise, these two books portray the divine image as reflected in human life and interactions, rather than in the soul. Dignity is also a question of life and death, insofar as the abundance of life is diametrically opposed to the undignified life and a life lived without dignity is an experience of death in life. Dignity is moreover a matter of human relations, since one's life depends on them.

The notion of "doing dignity" has a rebellious connotation because it defies the exclusivist regime of private property, which resonates with Brazil's founding value of

hierarchy[1] over time. Hierarchical institutions promote the "value" hierarchy, in so doing contributing to gruesome poverty, racism, and violence.[2] Such institutions typically determine each person's allotted amount of dignity according to race and wealth. In such a regime, human dignity has a pecuniary equivalence because life has a price, since it implicates financial costs and benefits.[3] In a hierarchical society, institutions reward and penalize persons depending on their inherent socioeconomic and racial status, instead of incentivizing or discouraging their actions.

Finally, I conclude by suggesting that the act of dignity strengthens the unity of the body and the soul. The Black response to Brazil's economic and racial hierarchy is also a response to hylomorphism. For Black theology, the body and the soul are two aspects of one and same person. The more one affirms one's dignity with action, the more the two aspects become integrated, the more apparent is one's reflection of the divine image. Rather than a higher status that the soul bestows on the body, dignity is what unites the body and the soul, the material and spiritual facets of one's life.

In what follows, I develop my argument through a conversation between Black, womanist, and Black feminist theologians from Brazil and the USA. The central discussion takes the shape of a critical dialogue between Cleusa Caldeira and James Cone, who debate the practical meaning of dignity in relation to liberation. The unifying motive of all Black liberation

[1] See chapter one's conclusion.
[2] The number of homicides in Brazil decreased by 12 percent in the decade between 2008 and 2018. But the number of homicides of Black Brazilian men increased by 11.5 percent (from 34 to 37.8 per 100,000 inhabitants) in the same period. Homicides of Black women also increased. Among all Brazilian women who suffered homicide, 68 percent of them were Black. Black Brazilians comprise 55. 8 percent of the country's population but are 75. 7 percent of the victims of deadly violence. The number of black victims is 2.7 times higher than the non-black. "Atlas da Violência" IPEA – Instituto de Pesquisa Aplicada, https://www.ipea.gov.br/atlasviolencia/ https://www.ipea.gov.br/atlasviolencia/filtros-series/3/violencia-por-raca-e-genero.
[3] Howard Steven Friedman, *Ultimate Price: The Value We Place on Life* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

theologies, including the womanist and feminist branches, lies in their shared purpose to support poor and Black communities in creating and retaining dignity all over the Diaspora.[4] And the particular bonding factor of the Caldeira-Cone conversation is both scholars' acknowledgment that the affirmation of the union of the body and the soul is essential for liberation and dignity. Spiritual liberation without material dignity is a theological swindle since the soul and the body are only two aspects of the one and same person.

1 Who Knows Human Dignity? The Practical Maxim of Black-Brazilian Theological Knowledge

The home of the largest Black population outside Africa is also the ninth most economically unequal country.[5] In 2019, the one percent of the richest persons in Brazil held 28 percent of the country's wealth.[6] That both in assets and income they held more than the poorest 40 percent makes patently clear that the conventional pathways to social mobility are no longer working. More: in the last decade, though the poorest 50 percent of people in Brazil achieved a 27 percent increase in educational level, they lost 26 percent of their income level. Not so the wealthiest 50 percent, who either maintained or augmented their income and wealth. In the same ten years, though Brazil's GDP has grown moderately, for most Brazilians this economic growth has resulted in only a few short-term opportunities. More people are living in poverty today—about 13 percent—than ten years ago. Most of them survive by doing precarious work, like food

[4] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 167–68.
[5] The World Bank, "Gini Index Brazil," https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=BR&most_recent_value_desc=true.
[6] Cintia Sasse, "Recordista em Desigualdade, País Estuda Alternativas Para Ajudar os Mais Pobres" *Senado Federal* March 12, 2021, https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/infomaterias/2021/03/recordista-em-desigualdade-pais-estuda-alternativas-para-ajudar-os-mais-pobres.

delivery. In 2022, about 27 percent of teens aged fifteen to nineteen are out of school and unemployed, whereas ten years ago that number was 21 percent.[7] During the COVID-19 pandemic, about 68 percent of the people living in the favelas lacked sufficient money to buy food, 93 percent had absolutely no savings, and 90 percent survived entirely on donations.[8] Still, the Brazilian poor are resilient, creative, and courageous. Today, they demand fair access to the means of production and the economic benefits of the social endeavor. Brazil's new poor and emerging class knows that social spending (through welfare programs and the like) is necessary but insufficient in an economic culture dominated by financialized monopolies[9] and experiencing near-slavery levels of labor expropriation.

Compounding such hardship, the economic gap is augmented by Brazil's vast racial abyss. The emerging and poor class is *parda/o* (Black) and *preta/o* (mixed Black). Roughly speaking, Black Brazilians constitute 75 percent of the poorest and "white" Brazilians constitute 70 percent of the richest of the population. In 2010, 56 percent of Brazilians self-identified as *preta/o* (Black) or *parda/o* (mixed Black). In 2011, 63 percent agreed that race or color "had an influence in people's lives."[10] Brazil's contemporary laws have partly adopted the US's "one drop" of blood stance.[11] Thus federal law 12.999/14 defines as *pardas/os* persons who self-

[7] Fernando Canzain, "Educação do Mais Pobres Dispara, Mas Crise Econômica Destrói Renda" *Folha de São Paulo* Oct. 4, 2021.
[8] Bruno Bocchini, "Quase 70% dos Moradores das Favelas Não Tem Dinheiro Para Comprar Comida," *Valor Investe*, March 13, 2021.
[9] Samir Amin, *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism* (New York,: Monthly Review Press, 2013), 15–16, 150, 7, 17, 40; *Délégitimer le Capitalisme* (Brussels,: Contradictions, 2015), 11–16; 39. Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society* (Chicago: Perseus Books, 2015), 7.
[10] IBGE-Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, "IBGE Divulga Resultado de Estudo Sobre Cor ou Raça" Jun. 22, 2011, https://censo2010.ibge.gov.br/noticias-censo.html?busca=1&id=1&idnoticia=1933&t=ibge-divulga-resultados-estudo-sobre-cor-raca&view=noticia.
[11] F. James Davis, *Who Is Black? One's Nation Definition*, 10th ed. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

identify as having any degree of African descent.[12] For purposes of affirmative action and demographics, *parda/o* has now the same status as *preta/o* (black). Of Brazil's wealthiest 10 percent of people, only 27 percent are *preta/o* or *parda/o* but 56 *percent* of Brazilians as a whole self-identify as either Black or mixed Black. In 2019, 32 percent of black Brazilians (*pretas/os* and *pardas/os*) lived under the poverty line, and almost 9 percent were under the extreme poverty line, while about 15 percent of whites were deemed poor and 3 percent extremely poor.[13]

Compounding these economic and racial gaps is the gender gap. The latest economic crisis started before the 2020 pandemic and particularly aggravated the situation of Black women. Before 2020, they earned 74 percent less than the average white Brazilian man and occupied only 2 percent of managerial and 0.5 percent of executive level jobs.[14] Today, they represent about 22 percent of the country's workers but hold only 18 percent of the jobs.[15] In 2020, 17 percent of them were unemployed in contrast to 10 percent of white men.

To bridge the economic, racial, and gender gaps, in 2020 four Black women launched a non-profit initiative that "fights for human dignity and racial and gender equality."[16] Aline Odara, Fabiana Aguiar, Iara Teixeira, and Mariana Pimentel created the Fundo Agbara, the first investment fund dedicated to promoting black and indigenous Brazilian women's "socioemotional emancipation," independent income, inclusion in the systems of production, and

[12] The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) accepts five racial categorizations: white, black, pardo, yellow, and indigenous. "Características Étnico-Raciais da População" (Brasília, Brazil: IBGE, 2008 https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv49891.pdf.
[13] Nathália Afonso, "Dia da Consciência Negra: Números Expões Desigualdade Racial no Brasil" *Folha de São Paulo*, Nov. 20, 2019, https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/lupa/2019/11/20/consciencia-negra-numeros-brasil/.
[14] Cida Bento, "Exclusão Fragiliza Responsabilidade Social," in *Perfil Social, Racial e de Gênero das 500 Maiores Empresas do Brazil* (Instituto Ethos-Banco Interamericano de Desenvolvimento), 26.
[15] Alana Gandra, "Estudo Mostra que a Pandemia Piorou Cenário de Emprego Para as Negras" *Agência Brasil* Aug. 8, 2021, https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2021-08/estudo-mostra-que-pandemia-piorou-cenario-de-emprego-para-negras.
[16] Fundo Agbara, accessed December 1, 2021; https://fundoagbara.org.br.

communal development. Agbara means "potency" and "strength" in Yoruba. It is the power to promote and experience well-being. In its inaugural year, this Fundo Agbara gave 51 micro grants to poor entrepreneur women and supported over a thousand others with business training programs and consultancy. The Black women who founded Agbara in 2020 defy the neoliberal faith in sheer competition, individualism, and accumulation by investing in the common and integral "independence" of women of color.

The fund is surely an innovation, but Black-Brazilian cooperative economics are hardly a novelty. In 1602, a few runaway slaves founded the largest *quilombo* (maroon) society of the Americas. In its almost century of existence, the Quilombo dos Palmares numbered up to three thousand members and resisted a dozen military expeditions aimed at dismantling it. The secret of the Palmares's resilience lay in its capacities to incorporate new members and to integrate itself into the local economy. Its community-centered culture attracted not only former slaves, but also indigenous people and peasants. Agriculture was the main activity, all of the land being collectively owned.[17] Historians and sociologists estimate that most Palmarinos partook of the risks and benefits of their work on an equal basis. No wonder then that the Palmares' economic independence and political "sovereignty" depended heavily on a culture of cooperation and freedom.[18]

Palmares and the Agbara fund have a lot in common. They are cooperative experiments that contest the predominant economic institutions of their respective periods. Although Agbara is a small social entrepreneurship initiative and Palmares a comprehensive social and political project, their stories shift our attention away from their protagonists' social "identities"— who

[17] Décio Freitas, *Palmares: A Guerra dos Escravos*, 3rd. Ed. (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Graal, 1978), 46.
[18] Clóvis Moura, *Rebeliões da Senzala*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: LECH), 88, 247–49. Freitas, *Palmares*, 125; Kabengele Muranga, "Origen e Histórico do Quilombo na África" *Revista USP* 28 (Dez.-Fev., 1995–1996): 56–63.

they "are" in the hierarchical structure and what they "have" in it—and towards what Black people *do* in order to live with dignity in a dehumanizing economy.

Black economic initiatives suggest that two "elements" are necessary for dignity: work to attain freedom from dehumanizing ties, and reliance on economic and social cooperative modes of interaction. Since the dehumanizing ties that they negate operate principally in economic institutions, such as slavery and entrepreneurship, the new cooperative modes of interaction that they create concentrate on economic independence. The fight for independence from oppressive ties necessitates new, consciously interdependent relations. Love is the virtue that can sustain more just social enterprises, for only through love can we fully perceive the value of our interdependence. Yet love cannot be socially demanded; it can only be commended.[19] Cooperation is the closest alternative. Like love, cooperation implies the parties' disposition to enter mutually supportive and trusting bonds which will operate at a minimally "horizontal" level. Obviously, that is not an easy task, for cooperation implies that people must be willing to abandon their self-destructive narcissism and construct institutions that will guarantee everyone a minimally equal share of the means of production and financial benefits.

Poor Black Brazilians pursue "independence" (freedom) "interdependently" (cooperatively). They know that the way to freedom is through social engagement. Most of all, because they know that engagement can never include subjugation, their pursuit of freedom must take social cooperation seriously. Ultimately, freedom and horizontal modes of social engagement endow one another. The more we eliminate intrinsically oppressive ties, the more we can design and enter into fairer relations with one another.

[19] Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Love, Accusative and Dative: Reflections on Leviticus 19:18* The B. G. Rudolph Lectures in Judaic Studies (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007).

The intensification of the dialectic between liberation and cooperative, mutually beneficial interactions reveals a certain "attitude," which could be called the "dignity attitude." Freedom from oppression and cooperative interaction, redemption and rebellion strengthen one another. Yet, for those who have no dignity, liberation from economic oppression is a redeeming experience, rather than a telos. A redemptive experience equates to living more independently, i.e., freer from intrinsically hierarchical bonds. For that reason, redemption does "happen" but it is piecemeal and only perceptible in small installments.

The initiatives by Palmarinos and the Agbara founders are thus better characterized as redemptive and rebellious than as "revolutionary." For the right historical reasons, liberation theology has basically connected the ideas of redemption and revolution with a sturdy eschatological rope. Take, for example, the famed association of "History, Politics, and Salvation,"[20] which was crucial in the early stages of the movement, when political power still controlled corporative and financial conglomerates. Though the word "revolution" has helped the Ecclesial Base Communities of Brazil articulate and live their faith politically, no true "revolution" has happened in Latin America yet. The lesson taken from the theoretical affiliation of "history, politics, and salvation" is that material change is in reality gradual, piecemeal, and programmatic.

The term "revolution" thus fails to convey the purposes of Black liberating experiments, and it assumes an unceasing hierarchy. Before it acquired a political meaning in the bourgeois revolutions, the English word "revolution" meant the trajectory of a celestial body that continually moves or orbits around another, heavier body. The Latin root *revolvere* means "to

[20] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973).

roll back" or "turn around" and the "predictable return to an original position."[21] So, scientific or political revolutions imply not only the gravitational force of a central body that controls the trajectories of all others, but also a cyclical return to an original position. In politics, while the central and controlling body is commonly represented by some notion of "the people," every abstraction of actual community entails generalizations. Such oversimplification is necessary but dangerous, for it may create the opportunity for different types of political manipulation, including radical nationalism and populism. In politics, the word "revolution" always assumes questions of (hierarchical) power. In a revolutionary situation, we must ask "Who decides who is a member of 'the people,' which members should have the prerogative to direct all others, and what legitimizes their authority?" Hence, although revolution implies a shift in direction, it cannot remove the intrinsically hierarchical presuppositions of a political system.

Rebellion is actually more significant than revolution anyway. After all, Brazilian history is saturated with rebellions and insurrections of all sorts. The slaves, the poor, and the working class have never made a revolution, but they know very well how to rebel effectively. A rebellious attitude amid the poor increases at the same rate of their indignation. Brazil is a different country today than it was in the last quarter of the twentieth century. There is an angry and rapidly growing sentiment amid the proletariat, the poor, and the working class. They demand equal opportunities and access to the means of economic independence.[22] This huge slice of the population, those who self-identify as *parda/o* and *preta/o*, know very well that social spending is insufficient in a hierarchical culture, so they justly demand access to quality

[21] Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, "revolution," accessed December 1, 2021; https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revolution.
[22] Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Depois do Colonialismo Mental: Repensar e Reorganizar o Brasil* (São Paulo, Brazil: Autonomia Literária, 2018).

education and the assets they and their ancestors helped to produce. For good or evil, the "entrepreneur of the self" spirit has flown from the Silicon Valleys of the North all the way to the Brazilian favelas and poor neighborhoods of the South. Now, the poor themselves are designing new pathways to economic dignity,[23] as shown by the founders of Agbara. The latest neoliberal conquest of Brazil dragged many people into a situation of economic calamity, forcing the poor to become "entrepreneurs of famine"—meaning they have to create "assets" without resources. Concomitantly, the "proactive" spirit has amplified Brazil's indignation because the "counterpart" of the neoliberal deal brings even more inequality. Perhaps accidentally, the neoliberal spirit has helped Brazil gain more awareness of its profoundly inequitable structures, which has generated more rage.

Indignation is a spiritual state. As such, it inhabits the entire person and spreads rapidly. Indignation is an "inward" phenomenon that manifests in ways which resemble the instinctive reflexes. Like hunger, fear, and anger, indignation is a response to the privation of or impediment to a life lived with little dignity. Although an absence of dignity can cause indignation, it can also be positive. For when it accumulates, this spiritual energy can feed a rebellion.

Rebellion is an outward demonstration of indignation. Perhaps for that reason, rebellion and rebels appear frequently in biblical stories and are etymologically rooted in the Latin "*rebello*"—to wage a war publicly against someone; "re" (against) "bello" (bellicose). A rebel is someone who "goes against the commands"[24] of another who holds a position of authority and whose orders are unjust in addition to potentially harmful. Indignation is the spiritual condition of the oppressed who defy the unjust orders or deeds which prevent them from obtaining

[23] Gene Sperling, *Economic Dignity* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 16–26, 30.
[24] Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, "rebel (against)," accessed December 1, 2021 https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/rebel%20%28against%29

whatever is considered basic for living with dignity—be it food, healthcare, quality education, or time for leisure. Thus deprivation leads to indignation, which can in turn generate a rebellious attitude.

Both revolution and rebellion imply prior hierarchical relations, but while revolution signifies a shift in the "direction" of a preexistent system, rebellion aims to eliminate the very presuppositions that sustain the hierarchical bonds which constitute that system. A revolution implies modifications in a preexisting system; a rebellion implies the complete overthrow of the hierarchy.

Christian rebels want to transcend the presuppositions that maintain (for example) a predatory economy, a biased judge, or the tyrannical orders of an inhumane God. For their courage, rebels are essential to the prophetic faith[25] and the Gospels. This biblical God of justice seems to love those who seek more than the replacement of governments or mere reformation because they have what it takes to carry out the divine plan for the marginalized to enjoy dignity. Rebellious Christians ask us to have the courage to live beyond the deeply rooted exploitative ties that corrupt all. In that sense, the founders of Agbara and the *Palmarinos* are Christian rebels: they channel their (spiritual) indignation to the creation of (material) dignity. As they use their indignation in the creation of the material conditions for a dignified life, they realize what dignity is. In other words, the (rebellious) transmutation of indignation into material dignity is a way of knowing it.

Black Brazilian theological knowledge grows in the encounter of the Black collective experience with the people's practical and positive responses to their contemporary challenges. As I will suggest below, the African view of dignity has played a formative role in Black

[25] The word appears in the King James version: Num 17:10, 20:10; Joshua 22:16, Isaiah 1:20; 1 Samuel 15:23.

Brazilian Christian understanding. In Africa, human dignity is known in and measured by the person's capacity to use their life force for the cultivation and increase of the collective wellbeing and wealth. All action denotes the presence of the life force in the person and good deeds can denote her or his virtuous character. Good acts increase the life force of the community and persons.

More specifically, the communitarian and practical proclivities of African traditional knowledge are pivotal in the way which Black Christian communities understand dignity. In fact, they are central traits of Brazil's popular way of knowing. The Brazilian culture and cultivation of knowledge resemble that of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Amazon more than that of the Iberian Peninsula. To be sure, Brazilians are not Africans. Nor do they know things the way Africans know them. Yet most Brazilians self-identify as Black, and almost all Brazilians acknowledge the nation's spiritual and cultural indebtedness to Africa. Amid Brazil's vast and complex cultural landscape, there is a consensus that we Brazilians are significantly "African" in an "epistemological" sense because we have always been very "African" in a cultural sense too.[26] Such identification and indebtedness have at least two immediate implications. First, culture is the principal locus of human knowledge. Second, all cultural expressions eventually serve the same practical purpose as African knowledge, which is the increase of communal welfare.

The African holistic understanding of reality gives it a purpose.[27] Mutombo Nkulu-N' Sengha, who is a philosopher working on the traditional religions of Africa, synthetizes its practical purpose with a Luba proverb about *Bwino* (knowledge): "Knowledge is not knowledge. True knowledge is knowing how to live in harmony with our fellow human beings." For Nkulu-

[26] That consensus does not dismiss the Indigenous, European, Middle Eastern, and Asian contributions.
[27] Motombo Nkulu-N'Sengha, "African Epistemology" *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, 8th ed. Molefi Kete Asanti and Ama Mazama eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 39.

N' Sengha, being and knowing are so integrated with one another because Africans have a holistic view of life.[28] Being and knowing complement one another because they both serve an ultimate and common purpose: to increase communal wellbeing, including material dignity and harmonious relationships. Brazilians are "epistemologically" (culturally) African inasmuch as they agree that knowledge of reality serves a dignifying purpose. All actions denote the presence of the life-force in the person and good deeds can denote one's virtuous character, insofar as they do good to the community. For example, the Yoruba and the Bantu cultures recognize dignity in the personal use of the life-force for the cultivation of the common good.

The Yoruba people call the life force *àṣẹ* (*axé*). This term conveys several ideas which the modern mind feels tempted to equate with "agency," "energy," "power," or "vitality."[29] Since it is the generative "energy" out of which life happens, *axé* is also the spiritual energy that feeds human action. Some anthropologists translate it as "order," "command," or "authority," but these are derivative meanings. They mistakenly conflate the transference act with the transferred energy because in the Brazilian Candomblé the transmission of the *axé* requires a moral authority.[30] But the anthropological gaze is also helpful. Authority, which is always interpersonal, "legitimizes" the transmission[31] of *axé*. The authority of leaders depends on their power to keep harmony in the "*família*" (the community).[32] Because the life force moves through "kinship" bonds,[33] the moral authority of its transmitter depends on the alignment of her or his

[28] Nkulu-N'Sengha, "African Epistemology," 42–44.
[29] Reginaldo Prandi, *Herdeiras do Axé* (São Paulo: Huciated, 1997), 1.
[30] Juana Elbein dos Santos, *Os Nagôs e a Morte* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1976), chap. 3;
J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 124.
[31] dos Santos, *Os Nagôs e a Morte*, 46.
[32] João José Reis, "Candomblé and Slave Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Bahia," in *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic*, eds. Luis Nicolau Parés and Roger Sansi (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 65, 75.
[33] Rachel Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 110.

personal *axé* with the divine purpose for the good of the whole *família*.[34] The more the community and its leaders act harmoniously, the more *axé* they receive and transmit.

The Bantu people understand that the formation of a person (*muntu*) is a dialectical process which involves the life power (*Amagara*) and the spiritual laws that protect the community. The Supreme Being is the ultimate source of all powers, including the capacity to transmit the life force. Being exists in relation to power and vice versa for the Bantu because the force that animates life connects all beings. Within the family, those ties signify interdependence. Consequently, all actions that augment human happiness also increase the vital force.[35] In this way, becoming a *muntu* (person) entails increasing one's active participation in the communal life.[36]

The African view of dignity expects a person to apply her or his life force and abilities for the benefit and abundance of all. Virtue is a sign of the capacity to act wisely for the increase of communal welfare.[37] A person's character indicates how much and how well that person does at fulfilling the communal good. Deeds and moral character cannot be good in and of themselves, only in relation to all. Good character belongs to those whose actions demonstrate a commitment to maintaining and multiplying the shared abundance.[38] In other words, such character depends on *acts* that increase the common dignity.

For that reason, serving the communal "abundance of life" is doing dignity. Public wellbeing, welfare, and good are directly dependent on how much the community shares. When

---

[34] The Yoruba word for good character, *iwa*, is the same as for being and nature. Segun Gbadegesin, *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).
[35] Munanga, "Origem e Histórico do Quilombo na África."
[36] *Amagara* (soul) is essential in this process. N. K. Dzobo, "Values in a Changing Society: Man, Ancestors, and God," in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye eds. *Person and Community*, Ghanaian Philosophical Studies 1 (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy), 223–40;
[37] John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 53.
[38] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: the Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998).

every household cultivates good values and has food, livestock, children, and good health, these are signs that they are living dignified lives.[39] The life force and the increase of the common wellbeing go hand in hand because the ultimate goal is the continuation and improvement of the quality of life.[40] Since the common abundance of life indicates shared wellbeing, it also functions as an index of individual good character. In turn, good character is also a measure of personal and communal dignity.

Two distinctions must be made at this point. First, having material dignity is not the same as enjoying the prerogatives of exclusive use, possession, and transference of material goods. Persons who are more dignified are those who demonstrate more generous character, rather than those who possess and own more things or assets. Second, good character does not depend on the "efficacy" of personal deeds. Instead, personal dignity corresponds to the proportion of the spiritual energy that each one can apply to the elevation of the social good given the person's specific social and economic conditions. The amount of dignity correlates roughly to the proportion of the spiritual energy that a person "gives" to the community.

Since it is intimately tied to the communal good, African dignity has political-economic implications. In the Black Brazilian understanding, it is something we do together, rather than something we "own" or have—even though the common or shared abundance can denote individual dignity. Julius K. Nyerere, Tanzania's first president and anti-colonial political theorist, suggests a political-economical approach to dignity with Ujamaa. For him, Ujamaa conditions one's dignity to perform socially and economically responsible deeds. He teaches us that

[39] Magesa, *African Religion*, 31–32.
[40] Magesa, *African Religion*.

> Those who control a man's livelihood control a man: his freedom is illusory and his equal humanity is denied when he depends upon others for the right to work and eat. Only as his poverty is abated will his existing political freedom become properly meaningful and his right to human dignity become a fact of human dignity.[41]

One's factual dignity depends on one's conscientious participation in economic improvement and equitable distribution of wealth.[42]

In sum, African dignity is implied in an act that can be "measured," or we might perhaps say "evaluated" because it corresponds to a value: how much a person in fact contributes to social wellbeing. However, dignity is not subject to monetization. A spiritual norm prohibits the monetary conversation: for everybody is equally a child of the Supreme Being, who is the ultimate source of the life force and of human capacities.[43] Since the sacrality of life is inalienable, dignity is not a tradeable object either. Rather, having more material and spiritual "wealth" comes with the obligation to make wiser and more responsible uses of them. The correlation between the levels of dignity and social responsibility confirms that dignity is also a political-economic act.

Theoretically, the African moral "scaling" of dignity can function as a social equalizing device because it incentivizes dignity-creation. The increase of individual dignity implicates the decrease of social and economic inequality. Hypothetically, the inequality of dignity as an act can promote economic equality by democratizing production and wealth. The dignity "gap" can incentivize cooperative initiatives. These, in turn, can leverage the entire national economy by diversifying and increasing poor people's access to material and spiritual wealth.

---

[41] Julius K. Nyerere, *Man and Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 45-46.
[42] Nyerere, *Man and Development*, 88–89.
[43] Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 158.

If Brazilians are inclined to create and cultivate knowledge the African "way," then even more are Brazilian Christians inclined to explore the African heritage in Brazil's popular Christianity. That legacy is evident in the theological production of Black and poor persons. African religion and theology appear prominently in our conceptions of God,[44] community, and liberation,[45] in Biblical hermeneutics,[46] and in the notion of personhood. The African view of dignity comingles with Christian spirituality and the experiences of racial oppression and liberation.[47] The ambiguous experiences of African descendants in the Diaspora helped them produce a distinct mode of assessing and innovating material reality. Indeed, theirs is a practical wisdom which is firmly grounded in a down-to-earth sensibility. Their combination of African "practical" dignity with Christian values has, since the seventeenth century, been evident, for example, in the central social vocations of the Black Catholic confraternities.[48] Also, Brazil's Neo-Pentecostal churches, whose members are largely Black, are liturgically "African," to the extent that they have preserved and innovated in key elements of the African spiritual expressions;[49] Even Palmares, the most iconic emblem of Black rebellion and resistance in Brazil, had a church with images of Catholic saints and a Candomblé house.[50]

Together, African values, Christian spirituality, and the experiences of oppression and liberation formed a practical sensibility and wisdom in Brazilians. Such practical wisdom is

[44] Hendrix Silveira and Obeide Bobsin, "Afroteontologia: Estudos sobre Deus Segundo a Cosmopercepção das Tradições de Matriz Africana" *Estudos Teológicos* 60, No. 3 (Sep.-Dec., 2020): 839–850.
[45] Marcos Rodrigues da Silva, "Teologia Afro (ou Negra) da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas" *Horizonte* 11, No. 32 (Oct.-Dec., 2013): 1769–1776.
[46] Maricel Mena-Lopez et. al, "Bíblia e Descolonização: Leituras Desde Uma Hermenêutica Bíblica Negra e Feminista da Libertação," *Mandrágora* 24, No. 2 (2018): 115–144.
[47] Emiliano Jamba Antônio João, "Porque na Esperança Fomos Salvos: Caminhos Para Uma Teologica Negra Diaspórica e Incarnacional" *Identidade!* 25, No..2 (Jul.-Dec. 2002): 27–41.
[48] Mariza de Carvalho Soares, *Devotos da Cor* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Civilização Brasileira, 2000).
[49] Marco Davi de Oliveira, *A Religião Mais Negra do Brasil: Por Que Mais de Oito Milhões de Negros São Pentecostais* (São Paulo: Editora Mundo Cristão, 2004).
[50] Clóvis Moura, *Os Quilombos na Dinâmica Social do Brasil* (Maceió, Brazil: EDUFAL, 2001).

firmly grounded in a "down-to-Earth" spirituality and sensibility which permeate a great portion of Brazil's religious and social landscape. Afro or Black Brazilian practical wisdom continues to help a demographic majority survive economic exploitation and racism in their own land. This "down-to-Earth sensibility" is evident in the shrewd ways in which we Brazilians correlate, analogize, blend, and reinvent "Deus e o mundo" ("God and the world") for the purpose of living with dignity. Perhaps the most telling example is the transformation of Jesus of Nazareth into the "Orixá of Compassion." Jesus became an Orixá in the popular faith of people who are much more concerned with what he does for them than with who he is.[51]

The down-to-Earth responsiveness reiterates that true knowledge is knowing how to interact harmoniously and for the benefit of the community. By defining US Black Christian spirituality, the womanist theologian Jamie T. Phelps, O.P. indirectly points to the African principle of life, also evident in Brazil:

> The absolute criterion of authentic black spirituality is its impact on the quality of the believer's life. It assumes that the true nature of our faith is reflected in the way in which we relate to other human beings and the created order, and that our concern for others will naturally generate witness and actions directed toward the realization of freedom for all human beings to live a liberated and joyful life, energized by the power of the Spirit.[52]

The more we live, the more we learn about life and how to live harmoniously. We learn from parents, elders, and the ancestors the wisdom they have learned before us. But we must put their lessons into action. As we live, our shared experience grows more and more meaningful, gradually becoming sedimented in our collective memory as wisdom "banks." These are like depositories of anecdotes filled with advice, consolation, hope, wit, and encouragement.

---

[51] Marcelo Barros, "Jesus de Nazaré, Orixá da Compaixão (Elementos de Uma Cristologia Afro-Brasileira" *Identidade!* 12 (2007), http://periodicos.est.edu.br/index.php/identidade/article/view/2221.
[52] Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., "Black Spirituality" in *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States*, ed. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 192.

Consider, for instance, the practical acumen of the Brazilian samba[53] and of US spirituals, of the slave narratives[54] and of the 2,847 current *quilombos* of Brazil.[55]

Brazil's Black down-to-earth sensibility also indicates that a belief only "is" if it can be enacted. A faith can only exist if it is subject to being lived out daily. A faith by which one cannot live is merely an idea. Inversely, a faith that is "done" has the nature of an action and represents the application of the spiritual energy ("life-force") for the purpose of innovating and intervening in the status of the world. In Brazil's predominantly Black Pentecostal churches, believers see the Spirit acting to help them overcome quotidian obstacles in family and economic relations, which provides them a sense of dignity.[56] In the Americas, the archetypical act of the Black faith is liberation. An action is liberating if it can preserve and increase the community's life-force.[57] Hence, the black faith is above all a liberating act for dignity.

To recapitulate: Black people create knowledge by positively interfering in their material and spiritual reality. The Black faith is acted faith, an attitude, and it emerges from a dialectic between the Black-Brazilian experience and an African-inflected practical wisdom. And liberation is the archetypal faith-act of Black Christianity in Brazil. Today, Christian communities transform ancestral African wisdom with new experiences and through a down-to-earth sensibility, in this way creating a "reality" that is conducive to the increase of human dignity. In short, Black liberating faith is at once a way of knowing and of producing dignity.

[53] Muniz Sodré, *Samba, O Dono do Corpo*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 1998).
[54] Mário José Maestri Filho, *Depoimentos de Escravos Brasileiros* (São Paulo: Ícone, 1988).
[55] CONAQ-Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas, "O Que É Quilombo," http://conaq.org.br/coletivo/terra-e-territorio/.
[56] De Oliveira, *A Religião Mais Negra*.
[57] Phelps, O.P., "Black Spirituality," 192–192.

It follows that the higher its potential to increase human dignity, the more "real" is a given fact, value, or idea for Black Christian communities. The more a given object is assimilated into the collective experience as being affirming of human dignity, the more it is considered "real." Faith in the realization of dignity is therefore the maxim of Black theological knowledge, given that the divine will is for the marginalized to live with dignity.

2 Material Redemption: Liberation, Dualism, and the Divine Image Reflected in Human Life

The practical maxim of dignity which coordinates the creation of knowledge could falsely hint that Black people "negate" the reality of oppression, since whatever denies dignity is considered "less real." In fact, the maxim encourages the oppressed to discern critically the value of everything in terms of the communal purpose, as if asking, "How much does such and such statement, fact, or value contribute to the substantiation of our dignity?" If the answer is positive, chances are the object will be considered more "real" than others, thus also more valuable in the community's self-understanding. If negative, the community might decide to interfere in it. In this sense, people deliberate on the "truthfulness" of inhumane deeds and situations. Rather than being an escapist adventure, the maxim organizes the community's denial of the denial of their humanity.

The faith-act affirmation of Black humanity is Black theology's point of departure and organizing principle.[58] Within this foundational affirmation is an implicit declaration of human dignity. In a rebellion, such affirmation also entails the ultimatum that either the community's dignity is acknowledged and respected, or the rebels might resort to force. Because the

[58] José Geraldo da Rocha and Cristina Conceição da Silva, "Ser Agentes de Pastoral Negros no Contexto da Realidade Brasileira," *Cross Currents* 67, No.1 (Mar., 2017): 245.

affirmation of and demand for dignity is so meaningful and foundational, many theologians conflate and confuse dignity and liberation. At times, they represent the two concepts as the two ends of a causal relation. Elsewhere, those two concepts convey one and the same idea.[59]

Theologian James H. Cone has perhaps written more about Black dignity and liberation than anyone else. Even though Cone has not thoroughly compared the two concepts, his Christology posits that both liberation and dignity are divine gifts for which Black people must fight.[60] For Cone, we know that Christ's presence is a liberating event and the positive end of redemption[61] because Jesus's presence is also the giver of dignity: "His presence in the black experience was the decisive liberating event which bestowed dignity upon [Black people].[62] It is up to us to "create" the conditions for the enjoyment of the divine gifts. Discussing the truth of the Spirituals and Black worship, Cone writes:

> God the spirit of Jesus that guides and moves the people in their struggle to be what they were created to be… All these phrases point to God as the living and ever present One who grants freedom for the humiliated and stands in judgment upon oppressors who attempt to destroy black dignity… Here [in the Spirituals] is the affirmation of the gift of divine freedom and dignity in the context of religious worship.[63]

Christ brings liberation as freedom from oppression and as freedom to be in relation to God, self, and community.[64] The elimination of social oppression is integral to the divine presence, who gives dignity, but having dignity also demands of us the elimination of social oppression. So, both liberation and dignity are gifts and goals for Cone. The main advantage of Cone's emphasis on the universal and divine gift lies in its power to convince a racist society of the intrinsic human dignity of Black people.

---

[59] For example, the *Statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen* on June 13, 1969.
[60] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), preface, 22, 224.
[61] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 130.
[62] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 177.
[63] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 20.
[64] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 177.

Many scholars working in Black Pentecostalism[65] and "mainline" Protestantism,[66] Black Catholicism,[67] and the Afro Brazilian religions[68] likewise link dignity to liberation. For example, the Black feminist theologian Cleusa Caldeira suggests a kind of interconnection that resembles Cone's scheme. She defines liberation in terms of protest for a life lived with dignity. For her, the Black liberation faith is first and foremost a protest for dignity.[69] The advantage of Caldeira's position is the conceptual "acknowledgment" that Black and poor people protest and are liberated but continue to lack dignity. It is an advantage because it reminds us of the urgency of the work that is be done.

The conceptual entanglement of dignity and liberation may be engrained in an everlasting empirical predicament: What in reality is the dignity of the liberated yet poor? In Cone's approach, what would be the purpose of Jesus's liberation if Black communities still live without material dignity—the same dignity that they have been given through a divine act of creation? And, what is a divine gift that is also a goal to be pursued? Where is the dignity that Jesus's liberating presence has bestowed on people who are hungry and humiliated? If the poor have been liberated and have some dignity, they must have material wellbeing no matter what else. On the other hand, taking Caldeira's point, we must ask whether protest really suffices in the pursuit of dignity. Can and does protest actually create or lead to dignity?

---

[65] For example, Marcelo Ayres Carmurça et al., "Rappers do Senhor: O Hip Hop Gospel Como Movimento de Afirmação Social de Segmentos Marginalizatos da Juventude Negra em MG" *Debates do NER* 9, No. 14 (2008).
[66] For example, see Ronilso Pacheco, *Teologia Negra: O Sopro Antirracista do Espírito* (São Paulo: Novos Diálogos, 2019), 8.
[67] For example, Marcelo Barros, *O Sabor da Festa Que Renasce: Para Uma Teologia Afro-Latíndia da Libertação* (Brazil: Paulinas, 2009), 770 electronic edition.
[68] For example, Harding, *A Refuge in Thunder*, 157–61.
[69] Cleusa Caldeira "Teoquilombolism: Black Theology between Political Theology and Theology of Inculturation" *Perspectiva Teológica* 53 (Jan-Apr., 2021): 137–159.

To be sure, Cone and Caldeira understand that dignity and liberation have material underpinnings and consequences. Both speak from the Incarnational faith—"Jesus's presence" for Cone and "embodiment" for Caldeira—and imply that there is no liberation without economic dignity and vice versa. No doubt, we learn from them that liberation is a historical faith-event for Black people and that it takes place in the indissoluble union of the community's material and spiritual life. But to proclaim the liberated status of a people who actually lack material well-being is to negate their liberated status in the first place. To a substantial degree, their shared faith in the unity of the body and the soul—material and spiritual life—collides with the undeniable reality of Black poverty. While Cone and Caldeira reject the immaterial or purely "spiritual" nature of dignity, they also detach actual material dignity from liberation. I am questioning two assumptions: that a liberated "status" automatically grants (Cone) or encourages (Caldeira) material dignity for the poor, and that the gift of dignity (Cone) and the act of protest (Caldeira) have immediate economic consequences.

I suggest that the root of the conceptual entanglement of dignity and liberation stems from a dualist incoherence that has had a lasting influence on Black theology. The separation of the body and the soul has outlived the twentieth-century anthropological turn and continues to influence several theological areas, including biblical hermeneutics, especially in questions regarding being. Liberation theologians have defined liberation eschatologically, and for that purpose they have relied on the history of the Black Church and culture, Marxist analysis, feminist theory, and decoloniality, for example. But we have also defined human dignity biblically and with a type of hermeneutics that accepts Aristotelean-Thomistic dualism. On the one hand, we have defined liberation through interdisciplinary conversations with the social sciences, broadly conceived. On the other, we still understand dignity biblically and

philosophically. While we defined liberation with historical, ecclesial, and social representations of reality, we defined dignity with scattered biblical verses, understood through certain philosophical approaches that accept hylomorphism. So far, the classical division of the soul and the body still underlies the Black biblical view of dignity. The result is a conflict between faith in a divinely-given, absolute, and universal human dignity and the negating reality of poverty. Although we insist that every soul has a dignity, poor and Black bodies continue to experience hunger, illness, and violence—they lack dignity.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s personalism is an example of this mismatch between faith and facts.[70] King's valuable teachings and biography are of course grounded in the Black Church's spirituality of resistance. But both Gandhi's non-violence and the lofty social gospel of Reinhold Niebuhr also play a part in King's theological anthropology.[71] For Rufus Burrow, Jr., the Achilles' heel of King's personalism is precisely the "mind-body" dualism, which he discusses in a metaphysical key.[72] King understands that the divine image is reflected in the human soul, which is the foundation of human dignity.

J. Deotis Roberts, a first generation US Black theologian, contributes to this conversation. His conception is less dualistic than King's, but his perception of Black consciousness and the dignity of the body allow space for dualist interpretations. For Roberts, dignity has two sources: First, it is intrinsic to God's creative act and selfhood.[73] Dignity is a "supreme worth" received through black consciousness, but it originates in God and the presence of the Black Messiah. As

[70] Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame), 125.
[71] Diana L. Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace: African American Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 120.
[72] Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity*, 90; chapter 4.
[73] J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, 2nd ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 34, 90.

such, it is unchangeable.[74] Second, it is intrinsic to black selfhood, which is grounded in black consciousness—the psychological process of developing "black pride, self-determination, and Black Power."[75] Roberts also acknowledges a bodily dignity that is situated in the physical being's need of goods and services for a "dignified and meaningful life." The body is sacred and worthy in its own right simply because it is God's creation.[76] Feminists likewise focus on the dignity and sacramentality of the body.[77]

The vital theological link between dignity and liberation is more practical than we have admitted so far. It raises related questions such as: "How can Black people 'make it happen' and keep enjoying dignity?" Because theo-dignity-talk has focused so much on the dignity of the soul, it has provided only mild concrete improvements to the poor. Theologians have yet to realize that the real question of dignity is as practical as human life and death—and that requires that Black communities seek more effective approaches.

Black theology can initiate an alternative response to the practical question of dignity by letting go of all dualist notions. It could begin with a politically inflected biblical hermeneutics that accepts the binary of life and death instead of the separation of the body and the soul. Particularly helpful in that task are the books of Exodus and Genesis. They reveal that the divine image is reflected in human life, rather than in the soul.

---

[74] Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 51, 72; Also, J. Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminter John Knox, 1974), 87; J. Deotis Roberts, "Dignity and Destiny: Black Reflections on Eschatology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology* ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 214.
[75] Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 2, 211.
[76] Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, 92; Roberts, "Dignity and Destiny," 215.
[77] Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, "Abriendo Caminos: Teología Feminista y Teología Negra Feminista Latinoamericana," *Magistro* 1, No. 1 (2014): 82–96.

Two images from Exodus appear consistently in different historical versions of Black Christian self-interpretation.[78] Many US Black theologians take as starting point their faith in the Exodus "enactment." The first image is God's liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt, and the second is the political covenant. The narrative shows that they are inseparable.[79] Exodus literally means "the way out" and in the text God commands, "let my people go," seven times.[80] Together, "Let my people go" and the covenant imply that the oppressed have the freedom to decide about their future and act accordingly. Black understandings of God's promise have helped form a pragmatic conviction that mobilized different strands of the liberation movement. The first Black Christians in the Americas were courageous women and men of initiative who self-identified with the people of Israel, fought for freedom, and believed they were God's beloved children.[81] But to be fully liberated, the people must enter and honor the covenant with God—Exodus's second great image.

After escaping the Pharaoh's hands, the Jewish people had a life-and-death choice to make. Israel decided to enter a political covenant. According to the Portuguese-Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza, God offered the pledge in order to show that Israel was in a "state of nature."[82] By this Spinoza means that between the desert and the promised land, Israel had the freedom to choose, just as Adam and Eve had had before: Should they return to the Pharaoh, or march toward a land of milk and honey? The covenant, which assumed the freedom to choose,

[78] Thomas C. Holt, "Slavery and Freedom in the Atlantic World: Reflections on the Diasporic Framework," in Darlene Clarke Hine and Jacqueline McLeod (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of the Black People in Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 36.
[79] J. Severino Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: 1981).
[80] Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 83.
[81] Callahan, *The Talking Book*, 83, 85–86; Pacheco, *Teologia Negra*.
[82] Cited in Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 75.

was a "founding act" by and for the Jewish people.[83] Exodus describes the birth of a people in the strongest sense, i.e., a group with a shared moral and political history out of which would grow profound bonds of responsibility. The human-divine covenant is a "reason for political action" precisely because it ordains service to God and to the neighbor.[84]

After 1776, Black US prophets demanded that the recently formed nation live up to its constitutional purpose to protect life, liberty, and the possibility of happiness. They spoke "biblically" and politically. Rightly, they paired the Constitution with the Biblical Covenant, but kept having their divinely given rights violated even after they became enshrined in the Constitution.[85] Black Brazilian prophets also demanded that Brazil's constitutional principle of universal human dignity be realized.[86]

The commitment by Black Christians to live by the Exodus's covenant contrasts with a dualist construal of the human being. God's liberation is a comprehensive notion, embracing body and soul, persons and communities. That comprehensive view contrasts with a narrow construal of the *imago dei* in the book of Genesis. Traditional theology insists that the *soul* has a dignity, which it lends to the body. This narrowness helps theologians affirm the dignity of soul in a situation of material privation. But Genesis, too, is a political book, for it establishes human participation in the story of all creation. Humanity is integrated with the cosmos through natural laws and moral relationships.

The message of Genesis is political in its own right, not only when it is interpreted in tandem with Exodus. It introduces the salvific story in which God inserts humanity and gives it a

[83] Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 76.
[84] Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 90.
[85] Callahan, *The Talking Book*, 104, 105.
[86] The Black abolitionist and lawyer Luiz Gama is the greatest example.

protagonist role. The stewards of creation are also a model for living harmoniously, as Genesis intended. Genesis not only declares that we humans have the capacity to interact with God—which is a form of political power—but also because we are meant to be protagonists in the evolutionary story. Creation forms a "dyad" in Genesis and Exodus: the ex nihilo creation of the universe and the creation of a people who will be liberated are interconnected.[87] Genesis and Exodus point towards revolution. In the Exodus covenant, God chooses to save humanity in a particular way and through the alliance with the oppressed. Liberation is a political and cosmic evolution. Exodus describes two events that integrate the evolution which Genesis inaugurated. Creation and redemption "comingle"[88] because creation too is "political" in the sense that God wants all of creation to live freely and harmoniously. Exodus and Genesis declare the universal reflection of the divine image, but also tell us that God opted to establish an alliance with a people who experience poverty and enslavement.

Slaveholding Christianity desacralized the divine image in the black person, starting with the body. The colonial uses of the classical Thomistic body-soul division perpetuated the idea of the dignity of the black soul and the reality of the indignity of the body.[89] The separation provided the theological and legal assumption for the formalization of the slave's moral personhood, which was a basic prerequisite for rights. Brazilian slavery implied a system of moral values because the Portuguese colonial rule formally acknowledged the slave's

[87] "In the Genesis-Exodus dyad the creation of a world ex nihilo prefigures the creation of a people, Israel, out of Egyptian bondage." Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7.
[88] Roberts, *A Black Political Theology*, 87; compare with Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 88.
[89] Joseph Hoffner, *Colonização e Evangelho: Ética da Colonização Espanhola no Século de Ouro* (Rio de Janeiro: Presença, 1977), 79; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 82. 3; 92.1; Thomas Aquinas, "The Disputed Questions on Truth," in *Truth* vol. 2 *Questions X–XX*, trans. James V. McFlynn, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), q.1 .1, p.6. *apud* Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Created in God's Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 42, 45.

humanity.[90] Since slaves had a soul, they could be converted and had the right to own property, marry, and even buy their manumission. However, the possibility of having rights does not necessarily result in actual legal protection. The formal rights of the soul by no means curtailed the violence that the body endured at the hands of slaveholders and others. Indeed, a formal recognition of one's humanity basically corresponds to the denial of the one's material existence altogether.[91]

In response to the colonial crime, a Black Brazilian understanding of the *imago dei* posited that people reflect God in the reality of life, dispensing with speculations about the rational soul. Polly, a former slave, explains the rationale: "We poor creatures have need to believe in God, for if God Almighty will not be good to us some day, why were we born?"[92] Black people's dignity (represented by God's goodness) is self-evident in Polly's life. The biblical dilemma of what to do between life and death, makes clear that a life lived without dignity is an experience of death in life.

Black people know dignity is a life question because living without it implies a type of paralysis. We all know something about dignity by the mere fact that life happens. The good Samaritan spontaneously noticed the neighbor's dignity and acted to restore it.[93] At once, dignity is "self-evident" and elusive. But we all know what happens when we lack it. "Paralysis" is a psychological representation of the chasm between a community's or an individual's sense of

[90] Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1992), xv–xvi.
[91] Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 90.
[92] Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*, Religion in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 49.
[93] Luke 10:25–37.

purpose and realization. Living with a "negative dignity" is an oxymoron, but so many people do indeed live without it.[94]

Black theology's primary purpose is to help the poor live abundantly and to create new, sustainable life possibilities for all those who are marginalized.[95] Its redeeming task requires that the corporeal truth of human existence be understood without reservation. Moreover, Black theology must remind us that to live with dignity is the divine purpose for black people. As I suggested above, the more a person acts to increase dignity, the more "real" life becomes and the more the person knows of life. Living with and knowing dignity are directly correlated because doing the "truth" in the Christian sense is knowing it and vice versa.[96] Hence, we can begin by concluding at least that the knowledge of human dignity happens through its act of creation, which is redemptive.

So far, I have argued that dignity is an act, but the predominant view still focuses on the soul and responds insufficiently to the poor's lack of material well-being. A tentative response could start with a self-understanding of black communities in view of the integrated Exodus and Genesis stories. It would have to eliminate all dualist and assumedly apolitical interpretations of the imago Dei. Moreover, it could depart from a more "pragmatic" understanding of the imago dei, especially given that the question on the table is how to create and retain dignity. Since the Bible is a document about life and death, the divine image is reflected in human life rather than in the soul. Combined, the imago dei (Genesis) and the covenant (Exodus) point to the human responsibility to create humans' dignity. The creation of dignity has a redemptive connotation because to live with it is God's goal for the oppressed, who reflect God's image in their attitude.

[94] The absence of that which is positive in nature does not implicate a "negative presence."
[95] Cláudio Carvalhães and Fábio Py, "Teologia da Libertação" *Cross Currents* 67, No. 1 (2017): 340.
[96] "Doing the truth," in a Christian sense, is a way of knowing it. v, 158.

3 Why Rebel? Political-Economic Institutions Regulate the Value of Dignity through Race and Wealth Variables

An institution is a set of formal or informal norms that regulate a given sphere of human interaction. Among the institutions which traditional African priestesses and priests coordinate are marriage, deference to nature, and medicine.[97] Theoretically, all institutions reduce social, economic, and political uncertainty,[98] but they can also "naturalize" or "standardize" our perceptions of rights and wrongs. They prescribe automatic routines and reinforce specific codes of behavior for the resolution of disputes. In theory, they "stabilize beliefs"[99] in order to reduce uncertainty.

Institutions provide social relations some degree of certainty by adding to and subtracting worth from specific modes of interaction. Ultimately, in order to implement their particular values, all institutions seek to increase or advance and decrease or hinder certain styles of interactions. The common pursuit of shared purposes is theoretically the primary justification for the power of institutions to stimulate and discourage deeds. For example, they can facilitate or deter economic and political cooperation and competition by reinforcing faith conventions, religious moral codes, and other cultural norms. For the common good, they can decide the consequences of our dealings. As Nobel Prize winner Douglass C. North argues, because institutions can decide the costs and rewards that ensue from human interactions, they can

[97] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk*"* in *Writings*, Nathan Huggins ed. (New York: The Library of America, Penguin, 1986), 357.
[98] Douglas C. North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), chap. 2.
[99] Daniel W. Bromley, *Sufficient Reason: Volitional Pragmatism, and the Meaning of Economic Institutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1.

determine the "economic and social opportunities of society."[100] They influence economic relations by interfering in how we cooperate and compete.[101] For that same reason institutions can decide the value of dignity.

Institutions represent the legacies of a people's struggle to augment their dignity over time. Institutions are not necessarily born out of the disingenuous imagination of the endowed elites. Rather, they are "made of" the established yet continually mutating habits, preferences, and values that integrate a people's self-understanding. Institutionalists thus acknowledge theology's and religion's economic implications insofar as they help mold the historical processes that impart the public structuring of the costs and rewards that interfere in relations of production, distribution, and consumption.[102]

New institutions typically surge after long and difficult historical processes during which the options available in the public discourses become scarce, as a result of which people decide to experiment. Notably, the Civil Rights movement reshaped and expanded the institution of citizenship with "old" Christian and secular ideas. Likewise, starting in the 1960s, the Brazilian Movimento Negro began the expansion of the notions of democracy and citizenship.[103] While institutions can provide a window into the mechanisms through which a society contends,[104] they are also the legacies of social conflicts.

Institutions can help a society materialize human dignity given that they instantiate values by interfering in how people make use of the available resources.[105] They delimit and oversee the

[100] Douglas C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions Series (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[101] North, *Institutions*, chap. 3.
[102] North, *Institutions*, 3.
[103] Do Nascimento, *O Genocídio*; Paulina L. Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), chap. 4.
[104] North, *Institutions*, 6.
[105] Bromley, *Sufficient Reason*, 180.

range of opportunities and possibilities of each person and community. At their maximum utility, they should be capable of realizing our highest common values. Institutions are therefore encumbered with the enormous task of giving direction to a society's future.

However, as historical products of human invention, institutions are fallible, contingent, and transitory devices that can also be used to interfere in specific political-economic agendas. In a democratic regime, they ought to provide opportunities for conflicts to install and advance debates regarding democracy, equality, dignity, and so forth. Yet in an intrinsically hierarchical society like Brazil, they might instead become the key tools of authoritarian plots that only benefit the elite. Who decides the individual prerogatives and social obligations of private property? Who counts as a citizen? What are the limits of personal freedom? Most of the time, courts, legislative bodies, chief executives, appointed individuals, and committees will have the last word. As such, institutions are good, given their potential to multiply rights and guarantee a minimum coherence in social life. But not all institutions are in fact good and just, let alone efficient. Some may bring about stability, but not necessarily improvement; accelerate economic production or consumption but at an unbearable social cost; or even stall important debates.

In the worst case scenarios, institutions subvert the values that they purport to advance. They can reward or penalize people's socioeconomic conditions, rather than people's "choices" of action. For example, Brazil's racial-democratic myth subverted the ideal of equal participation and increased white privilege. It propagated the illusion that Brazil is free from systemic and structural racism because everyone is equal in a land where everybody is racially mixed. Thus, the institution discouraged anti-racist initiatives and other critical forays into the structural causes and consequences of economic oppression against black and Indigenous Brazilians.

Like all other institutions, capitalistic institutions can also subvert values. Private property, for example, should protect everyone's right to maintain and use the wealth that they produce or inherit. But instead of performing its social function, private property gives a pecuniary value to human dignity by determining how much access to resource and opportunities each person can have. Rather than coordinating interactions, property actually establishes the limits of dignity according to prescribed social markers.

Slavery and colonization shaped many modern institutions, including private property in the forms in which we deal with it today. Without the global expansion and consolidation of the right to detain people and their labor, colonization and slavery would have been absolutely impossible. Property's global conquest began with the growth of mercantilism, the slave trade, and the Industrial Revolution that they propelled.[106] "The decisive forces in the period… are the developing economic forces."[107] Later, the same economic developments that led to the institution of slavery also led to the end of the slave trade and abolition.[108] Brazil was the second greatest destiny of the slave trade, if not the first.[109] Slavery was the institution which regulated the mode of production which surged with mercantilism and the expansion of capitalism.

During slavery, the possession of wealth and the theft of labor and land that produced it achieved a high level of interdependence. After 1783, with the advent of finance, banks were founded to manage and magnify the riches that traders and planters had accrued from their theft of black labor and Indigenous land. Wealth and the private control of people's labor become co-

[106] Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, "Introduction," *Beyond Freedom: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
[107] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944; 1994), 210.
[108] Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 107, 211.
[109] Frank Tannenbaum, "Slavery, the Negro, and Racial Prejudice" in *Slavery in the New World: A Reader in Comparative History*, ed. Laura Foner and Eugene D. Genovese (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 3.

constitutive institutions during the Industrial Revolution. Planters and slave traders needed investments, leverage, and insurance to multiply the production of commodities, so that they could increment their sales.

Structural racism developed in Brazil during this period when the institutional co-dependence of money and labor control became key for the political economy. Racism was the consequence of slavery, not the other way around. To be sure, race helped justify slavery, but the slaveholding system relied heavily on individual property and birthrights. The first structural gap was economic, even though race grew in significance as the colonizer grew in wealth.[110]

Gradually, slavery tied private property to racism. Having ownership over something means having the legal protection of the governmental apparatus for the exercise of the exclusive prerogatives to hold on to, otherwise use, explore, rent for profit, and sell or transfer material and immaterial things. The juridical regime that defended a certain group of people from holding another group of people as property ruled Brazil for 354 years.[111]

Racism reinvents itself through political-economic and cultural developments. Some of the ideas built during the colonial expansion of private property continued long after the colonial business ended, but through different institutional arrangements. As Thomas C. Holt argues, race continues to transform in time and "with the institutional spaces that history unfolds."[112] The juridical regime of property rights has changed, but not much. Clearly, the power to force people to work and yet to keep from them at least the bulk of the fruits of their efforts has outlived slavery. Today, we see this, for example, in the "Uberization" of work[113] that characterizes our

[110] Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 5, 7, 24–25, 201.
[111] Dom José Maria Pires, "Teologia Afro," *Perspectivas Teológicas* 34 (2002): 89–104.
[112] Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[113] Ludmilla Costhek Abílio, "Uberização: A Era do Trabalhador Just-in-Time?" *Questões do Trabalho* Estudos avançados 34 (98) Jan-April 2020. https://www.scielo.br/j/ea/a/VHXmNyKzQLzMyHbgcGMNNwv/.

current "gig economy."[114] Unsurprisingly, new strategies to keep the descendants of enslaved people economically vulnerable emerge from time to time and private property is always involved: such strategies decide who has what and who can have more. As I will explain below, racism contributes to the concentration of property because economic institutions use race as a variable in their determination of how much dignity each person can have.

By controlling the dynamics of the wealth concentration, property regulates the amount of dignity each person can have. Here, dignity is a value in the algebraic sense, rather than in the humanistic sense. Institutions regulate it by stipulating worth (the costs and rewards) that each one deserves according to their positions in the economic hierarchy. Institutions should regulate our choices but they can only coordinate actual human interactions, which always escape the rationalism of courtrooms or the mathematical rigor of the economics lab. Institutions decide the value of our dignity by "arbitrating" solutions to concrete conflicts and by reflecting the true priorities of a society. Brazil's highest priority is hierarchy. Thus, institutions are prone to augment social disparity.

The process of controlling the dynamics of wealth concentration is twofold. The first step stipulates a consequence; the second, a calculation with variables. If you insult someone publicly, you deserve punishment. If you generate and accumulate wealth, you will be rewarded. Those are first-level institutional rules. The actual punishments and compensations for our actions come in the second step, which entails a calculation. In an unequal society, the calculus for reward and punishment produces disproportional results because the institutions will necessarily operate with intrinsically unequal variables. Real interactions give the concrete

[114] Monica Anderson, Colleen McClain, Michelle Faverio and Risa Gelles-Watnick, "The State of Gig Work in 2021" *Pew Research Center* Dec. 8, 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/12/08/the-state-of-gig-work-in-2021/.

values and variables for the distribution of dignity. Given that they distribute rewards and punishments based on uneven social variables, it is hardly possible that institutions will actually apportion similar amounts to the wealthy and the poor.

An example: Suppose a thirty-year old CEO who is also an American citizen is killed by a drunk driver. Under the torts system, his family can demand compensation equal to the estimated amount of wealth that man would probably create (earn and accumulate) throughout the remaining years of his anticipated life. Suppose as well that the CEO was white. Because of such variables, the law assumes—and statistics may confirm—that the CEO would likely save his earnings and invest them efficiently. The law assumes that his wealth would grow over time and be fully transferred to his family upon his demise.

Now, suppose the same drunk driver kills a woman from Latin America who is not an American citizen. Probably, she was underemployed, i.e., doing some kind of precarious work in the Uberized economy because she was "undocumented." She had no wealth. If her family is lucky enough to find a public defendant, they can demand financial compensation, but her "lifetime income" would certainly be vastly inferior to that of the white male citizen CEO. Consequently, her family's compensation would never reach the stratospheric heights of the CEO's family. Because of such variables, the law assumes—and statistics may confirm—that the Latin American first-generation migrant woman would never be able to accumulate wealth.

In my hypothetical example, the law has decided that the statistics of wealth, race, nationality, and gender shall determine the maximum amount of compensation that each family can receive for the same loss. Since wealth and race indirectly determine or at least affect rewards and punishments, the two families could never receive the same amount. Ultimately, the two lives have different pecuniary values. The specific costs that the negligent driver has

incurred in each case are sharply disproportional, as are the compensations that each family can expect. Yet, the loss of a wealthy white US CEO does not cause his family more pain and suffering than the loss of a poor Latina migrant causes her family. The poorer and the darker, the higher the chances a person occupies a lower position in the dignity spectrum.

4 A Consequence of Dignity: The Union of the Body and the Soul

Given such disparities, Black economic cooperation is one possible light at the end of the tunnel, for it channels the enormous power of indignation toward a sanguine attitude that constitutes dignity. The cooperative model of the quilombos is an early prototype of the ecclesial base communities in which liberation theology surged. Black cooperation continues to be a sign that today Black poor communities can create the conditions for a new period of redemption. The hallmark of the *quilombola* culture was economic integration, rather than isolation.[115] *Quilombos* proliferated in Brazil because they were capable of connecting their internal culture of cooperation with the external commercial logics that predominated in each region. Most of the times, the *quilombola* lived in a peasant economy. Commercial exchanges by ploughwomen and -men, innkeepers, fisherwomen and -men were bread-and-butter operations. But depending on location, the quilombos also included greengrocers who sold manioc, beans, rice, potatoes, bananas, *aguardente*, and sugar cane; they included gold and diamond prospectors, and artisans who produced ceramics, pipes, and other utensils.[116] Trades represented commonly also included those of the slaves who were still working in nearby farms. Some quilombos became so powerful that they regularly sold their goods to slave masters. To be sure, the *quilombola* micro and

[115] Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Mocambos e Quilombos: Uma História do Campesinato Negro no Brasil* (São Paulo, Brazil: Claro Enigma/Companhia das Letras, 2015), 19.
[116] Dos Santos Gomes, *Mocambos e Quilombos*, 19–28.

cooperative economic model is by no means easily translatable to the national level because of the complex factors involved in macroeconomics. Yet, economic cooperation has a demonstrated power to promote freedom from economic domination, which also teaches us a lot about the nature and meaning of dignity.

Dignity as an act can light a candle on the altar of material redemption, but it requires the courage to rebel. In the seventeenth-century slaveholding economy, quilombos became a synonym of transgression and collusion. Brazilian authorities, farmers, and other types of slaveowners in all parts of the colony feared that *quilombos* would initiate widespread rebellions. Their fear became a reality. Numerous *quilombos* instigated slave insurrections back then, and even now they continue to create more horizontal and sustainable alternatives to Brazil's monopolist and racist regime of private property. In sum, doing dignity means being disobedient and this creates a moment of redemption.

Black Brazilian Christianity postulates that to live with dignity is humans' purpose because we reflect God in our lives—neither in the soul, nor in the body. But while the divine image in us constitutes our personhood and gives us a purpose, the reality of life shows that dignity does not appear to be a universal divine gift.

And yet, perhaps God is present in poor persons' acts of dignity. After all, they generate the conditions for the community to experience some degree of redemption, making everyone a bit freer from oppressive bonds. There is a special "dignity" in the poor's enactment of the Word, through which they generate the conditions for the community to experience a moment of redemption, which is the divine plan for them. I am not attributing a weight or value (dignity) to such kinds of deeds, nor am I suggesting that there is a "dignity" in such attitudes. I am saying that deeds which generate material redemption enact human dignity.

The Black practical response to Brazil's economic and racial hierarchy is also a response to the Aristotelean-Thomist dualism. Our capacity to "do" dignity is a sign of the divine reflection in the "unity" of human life. In traditional terms, dignity affirms the indissoluble "union" of the body and the soul, which are two aspects of one being. The more a person "does" dignity, the more the two aspects become integrated. Not "doing" it leads to paralysis, which is basically a reflection of the misalignment of the corporeal and the soul aspects of a person. Such morbid inertia only confirms that dignity is a life-and-death question and that humans reflect the divine image in their lives.

Chapter 3

A Dignity-Oriented Personhood: The Body, the Soul, and the Spiritual-Body

The previous chapter concluded with a suggestion that dignity assumes interpersonal and social relations. I have claimed that "poor"[1] and disinherited Black Brazilians consider the affirmation of their dignity to be an act with material implications, since they discover what dignity is by creating the conditions for wellbeing. They attain dignity by "doing it," so to speak, by developing the conditions for a materially and spiritually fulfilling life. My claim about the meaning of dignity is grounded in a Black-Brazilian view of the *imago dei*— that because the Bible presents a life-and-death question rather than a body-and-soul dualism, the divine image must be reflected in interpersonal and social interactions rather than in the privacy of the soul. I have likewise alluded to two salient, interwoven features of dignity so far: rebellion, defiance of Brazil's economic and racial hierarchies; and redemptive action, since the divine reflection shows that the human purpose is to live with full dignity. From a Black vision of liberation, dignity entails a redemptive rebellion waged against those who exercise oppressive power.

In this third chapter I continue to investigate the meaning of dignity for people who lack it. Instead of probing directly into its practical nature, however, I propose a dignity-oriented

[1] In this chapter, the "poor" has a theological and a political-economic meaning. The theological refers to the members of the Reign (Lk. 4:18–19), including the socially vulnerable in the Hebrew Bible (Isa. 61: 1–2; Isa. 9:4–5; Macc. 5:6–7; Ps. 72:2–4; Ps. 72, 2:14; Ps. 82:3; Deut. 15:11; and Deut. 24:14). As Joachim Jeremias concludes, in the Bible the poor are "all of those who suffer from oppression and cannot defend themselves,… For Jesus, the word 'poor' evokes the same meaning as it did for the prophets… All the needy, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the incarcerated belong to the 'smallest' and/or 'little children." Joachim Jeremias, *Teologia del Nuevo Testamento* vol. 1 *La Predicación de Jesús* (Salamanca, Spain: Sígueme, 1974), 138. The political-economic meaning refers to the long cycles of carefully planned impoverishment that colonization has inaugurated in Latin America. Here, the "poor" are those who have been robbed of their material and immaterial dignity by indigenous genocide, land theft, slavery, inculturation, and economic dependence.

notion of personhood. Specifically, this chapter asks whether there is a causal relationship between the human capacity for dignity and personhood: What is a person who does dignity, and what does dignity do to its doer? In other words, "What is a person who affirms and perpetuates dignity through their acts, and what is its existential and spiritual significance for those who quest material dignity?" Awareness of these dynamics could contribute to a more genuine understanding of the person as such in Brazilian society, which is a necessary theoretical move to increase dignity.[2] Because the struggle for dignity is real and demands fundamental economic and social change, such change entails more than merely an in principle affirmation of universal humanity and equity.

An attitude which promotes the wellbeing of the economically and socially humiliated can transform persons. As Ivone Gebara and Leonardo Boff believe, persons are bodies who exist in and evolve through interactions.[3] When consistently and sincerely performed, dignifying deeds can modify interpersonal and social relations, and that in turn transforms one's existential and material status before God, humanity, and the world. Symbolically (I claim), an attitude of dignity also strengthens the "unity" or coherence of the two basic aspects of personhood, transforming the person into a "spiritual-body," a more deeply self-conscious person in community.

My claim relies on a revisioning of the meanings of the "body" and the "soul," in which the body becomes the key locus. What we ordinarily call "body" is, I suggest, in fact the entire way through which a person exists, in interpersonal and social relations. Since it is the totality of

[2] As discussed in the previous chapters, particularly the first.
[3] Ivone Gebara, *Intuiciones Ecofemininas: Ensaios Para Repensar el Conocimieno y la Religión* (Montevideo, Uruguay: Double Clic, 1998); Mark Haraway and Leonardo Boff, *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009).

one's interactions, this "body" represents more than a living organism, a matter or substance, a social construct, and a sacrament. It exists at one and the same time within and beyond its anatomic boundaries,[4] for it simultaneously depends on and transforms the human transactions that make it. That is, the body exists socially, economically, politically, and environmentally because its life and thriving depend on certain sources that become available through such matters, which it can nevertheless modify. I formulate this claim with an expansive interpretation of a portion of Gebara's theological-anthropology, especially, her notion of bodily "relatedness," A fundamental and existential bodily relatedness is the basic idea that grounds Gebara's ecofeminism, which she develops in *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation.* I complement "relatedness" with her view of the resurrection as a symbol of daily renovations or renewal. Departing from the body, I claim that what we call "soul" is in reality a set of life-sustaining capacities which are natural to the human corporeal existence. The soul represents all of the body's physical, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual capabilities. This claim grows out of my construal of Gebara's understanding of relatedness and it also relies on a constructive interpretation of Leonardo Boff's view of personhood, which he develops in his cosmologically-oriented Christology of liberation. Simply said, Boff weaves an alternative vision of the person through his cosmological insights and Christological findings that he discovered in his experience living with base communities in Brazil. For him, the person is the "consciousness of matter," which the resurrection has "maximized" by integrating the human reality fully into the divine abundance.[5]

[4] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 55, 56.
[5] Leonardo Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo, A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 7th ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1986), 62, 74, 87–89; Leonardo Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 24th ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2009), 43.

The body is the actual and conceptual center of gravity of the person. If it represents the actual totality of the human existence, and the soul is one of its attributes, then their "union" is a construct that refers to the integral nature of all dimensions of existence. Hence, such unity is not a "compound of unmixed substances," as Thomas proposes, assuming that a matter—in this case the body—always exists for and serves a form. Thomas postulates that the soul, a substantial form in his view, unites with a body (matter), forming the person. I propose instead that the person is a totality because life is corporeal. In reality, the body and the soul are two fundamental dimensions of one human bodily existence, rather than being different "beings."

Regarding the spiritual-body, this term refers more accurately to a particular mode of living and interacting than to a being. Specifically, it is personalized by the conducts of those who interact in liberating ways. An attitude is liberating inasmuch as it increases the participation of the poor in the divine superabundance. Thus, *soma pneumatikus* evokes practical and interactive understandings of the body and its realized capacities, which are represented by the soul. Because it communicates a mode of living, the spiritual-body is not exactly the "unity" of the body and the soul, even though it symbolizes that unity. Rather, it is a corporeal lived reality and a pledge for liberation. While everyone is potentially a spiritual-body, a person becomes "spiritual" by fostering social, economic, political, and environmental change that affects the body. After all, an attitude of dignity can change one's existence *because* the human condition is corporeal, not irrespective of it.

My principal assumption is that human choices have a role in shaping the person. As long as a person is a "collective dimension," as Gebara proposes,[6] the choices that comprise interactions do participate in the formation of their agents. Boff assumes the same: "the social

[6] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 83.

dimension is a web of relationships that constitute the very being of a person."[7] Since actual humans exist interpersonally, in the "we" sphere, all actions and omissions imply a who and a whom. In other words, all conduct is transitive-indirect: an agent always act "to" or "for," rather than "on," somebody. In part, the "I" is that which the "I" does to and for the "we."

I conclude that dignity is a corporeal capacity. The spiritual-body synthetizes a certain mode of living which prioritizes dignifying interactions and deeds. Since Jesus's life embodies and his resurrection consecrates the spiritual-body, we can call this type of action "Christian," even though it is universal. The heart of the Christian "faith" is the trust that God has lived humanly and resurrected in order to insert the human reality into the divine abundance, starting with the poor and humiliated. Still, while this "eschatologization" of humanity (Boff) is the central meaning of the resurrection, it remains incomplete without human assent. Such assent is evident in deeds that prioritize the downtrodden among us.

A word about dualist language: All Christian theologies are more or less dualist. The invention and the separation of the body and the soul is ingrained in all God-talk, at least since the times of the New Testament authors. It is virtually impossible to speak about the "unity" of the person without using dualist jargon, particularly the words "body" and "soul."[8] The gospels were written in the same language of the forerunners of dualism, like Plato and Aristotle, whose ideas might have had an influence on the "theologies" of several disciples, including Matthew and John. Paul (Saul), the tentmaker and Sanhedrin prosecutor, was born in the predominantly Greek town of Tarsus. Andrew and Philip are Greek names. Today, we still lack a non-dualist vocabulary, even though many attempts have been made in that direction, mostly in the field of

[7] Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1979), 142.
[8] Some authors add the "spirit."

comparative theology. As John Dewey has synthetized the problem, "We have no word by which to name mind-body in a unified wholeness of operation. For if we say 'human life' few would recognize that it is precisely the unity of the mind and body in action to which we are referring."[9] There are, nevertheless, different degrees of dualism. For example, Thomas's is not as radical as that of a certain strand of Thomism which has proactively participated in the colonial organization of Latin America.[10] Most contemporary expressions, including liberation, are less dualist than the traditional and modern European. Still, the "symbols" of dualism, like the "body" and the "soul," remain fully operative and pervasive in the plural theological landscape of our days. Hence, my articulation of dualist words and ideas is relatively justified, since it is necessarily, if not unavoidably, directed to theologians, given the lack of an alternative.

Even though both employ a dualist terminology, Thomas's and my Gebara-Boff framework differ substantially, primarily because Thomas's conception of the person as the union of a body (matter) and a soul (substantial form) is reductive and ontological, whereas my articulation is heuristic and symbolic. Let it be clear that the body and the soul are theological symbols in my view. Not only does any idea of personhood entail an abstraction, which implies a reduction, but Thomas's theological use of Aristotelean hylomorphism contributes to the natural reductionism of all conceptual thinking. In contrast, my use of these words is symbolic in the sense that they represent different aspects of one type of existence—the human.

Hence, my use of a "minimally dualist" terminology and position may be justifiable until more terms emerge. Throughout the dissertation, I therefore advocate a protagonist role for the body and posit the soul as a set of capacities that belong to the body. Since the one is a capacity

[9] John Dewey, "Body and Mind," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 41, No.1 (1928): 3–19.
[10] See chapters one and five for historical details.

of the other, rather than a separate being, they are actually one. The body, which is central, symbolizes how full persons exist or live interactively, and the soul represents the full range of the body's interactive capacities. Since interaction/existence and capacity/consciousness imply one another, a person is a peculiarly conscious way of existing—symbolically, a self-conscious body. While centering personhood in the body cannot in itself eradicate all dualist overtones, I trust it can at least diminish its practical effects.

While my dignity-inflected construct emerges from the (practical) sphere of action rather than from being, it requires that I attach new meanings to two key words which historically have been steeped in ontology and metaphysics. As I have shown in chapter one, Thomas considers human dignity equivalent to the value of the soul, whose disembodied life is temporary but also metaphysically superior, since he thinks the body is matter. In the two *Summas*, the *de Anima*, and elsewhere, the person is an unmixed compound of a "substantial form" (soul) and matter (body). In his adaptation of the Aristotelean hylomorphism to Christian anthropology, matter originates from and exists exclusively for its corresponding form. Accordingly, the soul gives life to the body, which it uses in order to know God cognitively, since that is the end of humanity. Thomas assumes that a disembodied soul could know God more "directly," through the "infusion of abstracts," which partially resembles angelic knowledge. Even though he considers it natural for the soul to exist in a body, the metaphysical status of the disembodied soul would be superior to the embodied body, since its purpose is to know God cognitively. That an "intellectual" substance creates and uses a matter in order to pursue its end is the fundamental premise of Thomas's entire anthropology and conception of *dignitas*. In this way, he implies that dignity is absolute in nature but relative in value; absolute, because it is God-given (Gen. 1:26–27), just as the soul is God-made; relative, to the extent that the soul can have two "modes of

existence," each with a different value in the metaphysical scale. His dualism leads to a rationalistic and hierarchical conception, which has supported institutions that determine on the basis of their race and class how much dignity they ascribe to a person.[11]

In contrast, Black Brazilians have shown that dignity is a matter of action, rather than of being. In that sphere, a specific attitude is its existential and material presupposition. The present chapter advances that Black insight discussed in the previous. In the previous chapter, I have proposed that certain mutually liberating deeds can form an attitude that is conducive to the creation of material dignity. As I will claim at the present chapter's conclusion, dignity can also be considered a human capacity when understood anthropologically and in light of the symbol of the Resurrection. The repetition of a certain attitude can indicate a mode of living, which in turn involves more than the verbalization of self-worth. In other words, the "denial of the denial"[12] of dignity must be at once an existential and a physical reality and has plenty of political and economic implications. Dignity as an attitude is always noticeable, even though it has an "internal"[13] dimension, too, provided that deliberate acts imply intention and decision. Not only does it implies consciousness, it also assumes a certain set of capacities. An attitude is public, since it always exceeds the assumedly subjective or private confines of the soul. Like personhood, it is public, to the degree that it shapes actual persons, families, communities, and entire societies. Yet however external and public it is, an attitude also assumes the personal capacity to choose and enact it in daily life.

[11] For a complete discussion, see chapter one.
[12] Dussel, "Dignity," 93.
[13] For example, Margalit thinks dignity is the "external aspect of self-respect," a representation of "the visible tendency to behave in a dignified manner which attests to one's self-respect." Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* trans. Naomi Blum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 51–52.

In order to build my claim, I select—from the universe of theologies made for Brazil—two particular ideas, one from Gebara's and one from Boff's theology. From Gebara, I borrow the cornerstone portion of her theological-anthropology and central insight of her ecofeminism, that a "fundamental bodily relatedness" constitutes all of human reality. She develops this notion in *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. In her previous book, *Out of Our Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, Gebara draws on gender as a critical hermeneutical tool for a new understanding of the meaning of evil and salvation in women's lives. In it, Gebara tells us that a great portion of the evil that women suffer is caused by men's oppressive power to ascribe value to women's bodies.[14] Over the centuries, several forms of theology have been complicit with this type of domination, by affirming that women's bodies are an innate site of evil or "sin." Her decision to develop her subsequent project around the idea of "bodily relatedness" is no mere coincidence. In Gebara's "ecofeminism and liberation," which is elaborated in *Longing for Running Water*, the body of poor Brazilian women is the epistemic starting point and theologicus locus. All of our knowledge, she declares, is "embodied" and not only gender-based but gender-biased. Thus, across the millennia, men have had the power to decide what constitutes a person. A alternative even if tentative ecofeminist notion must not only acknowledge such embodiment and bias, but also the particular "contextual, circumstantial and collective perspective" from which theology stems. Assuming the perspective of poor Brazilian women, Gebara proposes the most important point to be that "we are all one and the same Sacred Body in multiple and diverse experiences."[15]

[14] Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 34–37.
[15] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 82.

Likewise, rather than the "soul," it is the body that functions as the point of departure and theological locus of my dignity-oriented personhood. Although I take on or assume her point of departure and view of the body in the present chapter, I only engage Gebara's fundamentally corporeal and relational view of reality in a very selective and constructive manner. While I do not advocate or admit her comprehensive and bodily episteme, I do accept and find beneficial her re-conception of the body as the entire way in which humans exist, in relations. In sum, I borrow from Gebara's ecofeminism only her expansive understanding of body and her choice to place it at the center of all theological knowledge. Thus, I do accept "relatedness as a human condition," but I do not go as far as Gebara, who sees human relatedness as an "earthly condition," "ethical reality," "religious experience," and "cosmic condition." Transposed into my formulation of a dignity-oriented personhood, her view of human relatedness indicates that the person is fundamentally a body in relation—but this leaves aside (and outside the scope of my investigation) the question of whether the fundamental "truth" or "reality" of personhood and dignity is or is not "relatedness."

From Boff, on the other hand, I borrow his definition of humanity as the "consciousness of matter," which focuses on the capacities of the "soul." Boff's peculiar notion grows out of a mix of interests, especially Christology and the cosmology. My interpretation of his understanding of personhood implies and is guided by Gebara's deeply corporal view of the person in relation. However, differently from my reading of Gebara's bodily relatedness, which concentrates particularly on one of her books, my reading of Boff extends across several of his works. At various points in those works he declares and explains his belief that humans are the Earth's living consciousness. Principally in *Jesus Christ Liberator, O Destino do Homem e do Mundo: Ensaio Sobre a Vocação Humana,* and *The Tao of Liberation,* Boff explains his

correlation of insights derived from the "new cosmology" and the heart of his Christological faith: the Resurrection was a cosmic event which has maximized the human capacities by integrating them into the "divine reality." Boff emphasizes the evolution of personal abilities that can be roughly called "consciousness." In my appropriation of his definition of humankind, our physical, cognitive, psychological, and spiritual capacities, which together form our "consciousness," are all part and parcel of the body.

Boff's exegesis of the Pauline anthropology is also helpful in my development of a dignity-oriented personhood. In light of Boff's interpretation of Paul, the "body" is a biblical representations of the totality of the human person. The capacities that are inherent to this "totality" can be enhanced and become a "spiritual-body," which is a particular way of living, rather than a being. In my Boffian appropriation of Paul, the term designates the Christian dignifying way of living that persons might enact by virtue of dedicating themselves to the wellbeing of poor communities and persons. Since dignifying acts are necessarily relational and transformative, a person who repeatedly shows an attitude of dignity might become a "spiritual-body."

Like my reading of Gebara's "bodily relatedness," my appropriation of Boff's "consciousness of matter" and Paul's "spiritual-body" are critical and constructive. Although I do not advocate or espouse the entirety of Boff's cosmological Christology, I indeed borrow his vision of humanity as the consciousness of the Earth—of "matter." Regarding his correlation of the event of Jesus's Resurrection with the apex of natural evolution, I accept only its allegorical meaningfulness for his definition of personhood. In my view, the Resurrection is a faith event and truth, rather than a scientific and "cosmic" (evolutionary) landmark. Consequently, its effects are exclusive to the Christian symbolic universe, including its wide-ranging worldview

and cultural identities. Also, I suggest that a person is a potentially conscious body, since consciousness ("soul") belongs to matter ("body"). However, I do not assess Boff's new-cosmological and Christological narrative of the human evolution since it is not essential for my purpose of a dignity-oriented construct of personhood.

Five basic commonalities make a collaborative conversation between Gebara and Boff not only possible but also desirable: First, both scholars agree that human choices and action, both of which are always enacted in community, have a role in shaping the person. For Gebara, the person is a "collective dimension," and for Boff she/he exists in a "web of relationships." For both scholars, relations can transform the material and existential status of the person in community and before God.

Second, both theologians are first and foremost committed to the liberation of the poor and marginalized. They would agree that a person who lacks dignity but affirms it through deeds actively participates in the liberation of the oppressed.

Third, they espouse the position that I call "minimal dualism," an anthropological stance that affirms the indivisible "unity" of the body and the soul but nevertheless uses historically dualist language. Such "minimal dualism" is the least dualist option available in the entire universe of contemporary Christian theology.

Fourth, Gebara and Boff acknowledge the empirical and intellectual need for a more genuine understanding of the person in the Brazilian reality. I would add that such new understanding begins with a minimally dualist re-conception.

Fifth, they agree that the theological meaning of the "body" transcends or exceeds the anatomic, physiological, or fleshy boundaries of the human body. In other words, both of them believe that it "exists" socially, economically, politically, and environmentally since it depends

on resources that are attainable through such types of relations. Their five shared positions form the common ground upon which I fix my point of departure (that the person exists in relation), my driving question ("What is a person who affirms dignity with action?"), my purpose (a dignity-oriented personhood), and the overall significance of this chapter for the dissertation ("Who is the human agent of dignity?")

1. The Body Resurrects the Body: Existence and Everyday Salvation According to Ivone Gebara

In this section, I claim that the body is the way in which humans exist, in relation. This claim is a starting point—a necessary but insufficient move for an expansive understanding of the body. In this vein, Gebara conceives of the body not only as mediating our encounters and relations, but also as comprising their totality. In her feminist eco-theology, the body is more than a physical organism that senses, feels, and thinks, more than an interface with the world, more than a social phenomenon. It is all such things combined, for it simultaneously enables and mediates human interactions with all living beings. In reality, Gebara considers the body to be a mystery as great as the Incarnation, for it represents the primordial, "pre-cognitive," and unifying[16] experience of being alive, which she synthetizes in the ambiguous notion of "relatedness." Relations of all kinds form the body. For example, its survival and thriving depend on social and biological interactions[17] that can provide it with basic and necessary resources from outside of itself, like water and recognition.[18] From the individual's standpoint, such connections

[16] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, vi.
[17] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2010), 33.
[18] Butler, *Frames of War*, 30.

are not only "libidinal," but also, nutritional, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual. From a public angle, the links to the material sources of the body involve social, economic, and political factors. Both of these converge in Gebara's emphasis on bodily dignity.[19]

In contrast, theological dualism—which typically idolizes the soul—places what I think is a misleading weight on the "inner" and invisible dignity of the soul. Ironically, this belief has "exterior" consequences. In Brazil, the Thomist emphasis has enabled the emergence of bigoted institutions that help to perpetuate a hierarchical culture which is blind to the worth of poor, Black, Indigenous, women's, migrant's, and LGBTQIA+ bodies, among many others. A more just conception must dispense with the soul fetish and instead take all bodies seriously, particularly those that are socially oppressed.

Pauline anthropology is the immediate alternative at hand, but its relative monism offers only a narrow solution. Paul believes that the body is the actual person in her or his totality, and that Jesus's resurrection has transformed all bodies into sacraments of Christ (Rom. 6:12f; 8:10; 1 Cor. 6:18f; 1 Cor. 15:42–47). If Paul believed in human dignity at all, he would equate it to the dignity of the body broadly conceived, which resonates with the understanding shared by Black and poor Brazilians. For one, they love their bodies. For two, they believe the body and the soul form an indissoluble "unity" now that will continue to be united "beyond" this life. Alluding to the unity of the body and the soul, the first Black Brazilian Catholic Bishop, Dom José Maria Pires, used to say that "Black people teach us to keep united what God has unified."[20] Understood like this, the soul could not have a metaphysically superior status, since it is de facto

[19] Tertullian believes in the primarily corporal dignity of the person. Tertullian, *Treatise on the Resurrection* trans. Ernest Evans (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1960), §5; p.19.
[20] "…corpo e alma formam unidade aqui e no além." Dom José Maria Pires, "O Deus da Vida nas Comunidades Afro-Americanas e Caribenhas" in *Teologia Afro-Americana: II Consulta Ecumênica de Teologia e Culturas Afro-Americana e Caribenha* (São Paulo: Atabaque-Asett, 1997), 28.

one with the body. For three, Brazilians realize the economic and social effects of theological dualism and counterpose those effects with collaborative action.

However, the personhood that Paul articulates is not sufficiently free from dualism. Paul, who was well versed in Stoicism and Gnosticism,[21] never opposed body (*soma*) and soul (*nephesh, psyche*), but he did establish a dialectic between the flesh (*sarx, basar*) and the spirit (*ruah, pneuma*).[22] Since the flesh symbolizes a mortal, sinful attitude, it cannot resurrect. On the other hand, the body can, because the resurrection has transformed the whole person (body).[23] Although *sarx* and *soma* have different meanings, Paul's flesh-spirit dialectic does leave room for dualistic overtones that resonate in his view of the body. To be sure, he was not a die-hard dualist, perhaps because the cultural milieu he inherited was as complex as the world which his ideas helped invent through the centuries. By no means was Paul as much of a dualist as most Greek philosophers, for example. Yet, neither was he a monist, since he did accept the opposition of flesh and spirit, which suggest an implicit "dilemma" or conflict between human corporeality (in a material sense) and spirituality.

Since Paul's alternative is insufficient, we turn to Gebara. Her "minimal dualism" would do a better job of establishing a dignity-inflected personhood, provided that it started by positing the "embodiment" and interdependence of all knowledge. Furthermore, her anthropology does offer a direct response to the Aristotelean-Thomist knowledge, which for centuries has dominated all other forms of knowledge in Brazil and most of Latin America.[24] Gebara takes

[21] John L. McKenzie, S.J., "Body," *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee, MN: Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), 102.
[22] Rom. 7; Gal. 5:18–21; 1 Cor. 1:26; 2 Cor. 10:5; Rom. 8:6.
[23] 1 Cor. 15:51; Rom. 6:6; 8:23.
[24] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 21–23; 43.

issue with its essentialist, hierarchical, anthropocentric, and androcentric episteme,[25] above all because the model of humanity that it constructs overestimates men, promoting a patriarchal and sexist image of Christ.[26] Her proposed alternative follows an intentionally ambiguous and autobiographical method that draws inspiration from Brazilian women's first-hand experiences.[27]

According to Gebara, poor Brazilian women tend to consider "relatedness" the nature and essence of reality.[28] All that is exists, exists within a single web of interdependent and visceral relations.[29] Each individual being is both a cause and an effect of their interactions, so relatedness is nothing short of the ground or basis of the "human condition," "earthly condition," "ethical reality," "religious experience," and of the "cosmic condition" she says.[30] She even suggests that God is "relatedness" itself, the most foundational principle of life. Again, although I do not assume Gebara's bold postulation regarding the nature of all reality, I do assume that "relatedness" is the "basis of the human condition." For her, not only are we all interconnected, we are also all corporally interdependent, given that we are all, fundamentally, evolving bodies. The totality of all of such visceral links forms a single and elusive "Sacred Body,"[31] which certainly comprises humanity.[32]

Because humans beings are corporeally interconnected, our knowledge is likewise "anchored in the corporeality of the flesh,"[33] Gebara continues. Assuming we can know only through our interdependent bodies, the economic and social positions that they occupy of course

[25] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 42ff.
[26] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 143.
[27] "To know is first of all to experience." Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 48.
[28] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 83.
[29] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 51–52.
[30] Relatedness is the "underlying fabric that is continuously brought forth within the vital process in which we are immersed." Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 84–85.
[31] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 48; 52–53, 54.
[32] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 84; 104.
[33] Here, the flesh represents the body. Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 123.

participate in the formation of knowledge. What we know about humanity, in particular, depends on the knower's geographical location, culture, gender, race, class, ideology, and sense of beauty, among other factors.[34] Such markers of identity shape not only our knowledge but our value[35] when they become socially attached to the body.

In a web of sexist and capitalistic forces, which endorse a culture that treats women as things,[36] the worth of women's bodies fluctuates according to the places they are allowed to occupy, the activities they are allowed to undertake, and the "price tag" that men impose on them. For example, Gebara reminds us of the daily violence suffered in the sex trafficking marketplace. When no options are available, selling one's body—oneself—is a form of crucifixion. Also, Black and Indigenous women can interiorize the worthlessness that society tries to attach to their bodies from the moment of birth.[37]

Gebara understands how poor, Black, and Indigenous Brazilian women make religious and political sense of their bodies Christologically. For her, since they experience social oppression in their "flesh," their bodies represent the cross.[38] However, women's bodies also show the meaning of the Resurrection in gestures of "justice, beauty, tenderness, and history."[39] Irrespective of the socially superimposed insignificance, they are a "breathing space" full of strength and joy. Gebara's rhapsodic explanation is helpful at this point: the body is the "edge of the abyss in which we [women] exist"[40] because good and evil are present, and comingled in the body. The Latin American feminist memorialist culture is a good example. In this culture,

[34] Gebara assumes all epistemes are ethically biased. Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 27, 29.
[35] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 36.
[36] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 78.
[37] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 34–36, 78.
[38] Gebara, *Intuiciones Ecofemininas*, 95.
[39] Gebara, *Intuiciones Ecofemininas*, 94-95.
[40] "My body is my good and my evil!" Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 58.

women retell their struggles, victories, and frustrations; denounce the cruelty and contempt they experience; and examine the instrumentalization of relationships and other gender-related forms of violence. By sharing, denouncing, and remembering, they create encouragement and gradually retrieve their self-worth. Such retrieval is for Gebara a transformative act and a "vital experience."[41] At first, the change becomes visible in a person's love for their own body,[42] indeed, for themselves as a person. The process expands as they walk in spaces, and speak, create, and rejoice where they could not do so before. By being increasingly present in such new spaces, and by assuming new roles, they become living signs of renewal.

Their presence, and the gestures that make it possible, form a kind of resurrection.[43] For Gebara, those oppressed bodies which enact life transformations symbolize and evoke resurrection rather than merchandise. She trusts that the Spirit has awakened them to a process of rebirth that continually inspires dignity, so that they can increasingly overcome self-forgetfulness and silence, violence and worthlessness. Their rebirth is noted in trivial and circadian achievements that seem ordinary in the eyes of the powerful, such the acts of sharing a meal with the hungry, paying a visit to the sick, and having the courage to denounce a perpetrator of domestic violence. Yet, for those who have eyes to see it, their new presence and agency symbolize a resurrection.[44] This "process of salvation," however, is not an "eschatological event" at all, but is as natural and ordinary as is the yearning for liberation in the human heart.[45]

[41] Ivone Gebara, *Levántate y Anda: Algunos Aspectos del Caminar de la Mujer en América Latina* (Mexico: Dabar, 1995), 12, 15, 17.
[42] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 122.
[43] Gebara, *Levántate y Anda*, 15.
[44] Gebara, *Intuiciones Ecofemininas*, 94.
[45] Gebara, "Cristologia Fundamental," *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 190 (1988): 259–272, 262.

In this way, Gebara ties the body to salvation, and salvation to Jesus, who for her is a living metaphor of salvation that can be identified in daily life.[46] Provided that the meaning of the Resurrection is to be grasped in the confines of the human corporal existence, it can inform the meaning of the body and vice versa.[47] For her, the Resurrection signifies salvation, which is only genuine in and by the body,[48] since the savior is always a personification of divine liberation.[49] An Emmanuel is always a living, thus mortal, body, but also, a redemptive one—a Mystery among us.[50] We are all made of earthly ties, which are frail but resilient, vulnerable and interdependent, and always evolving. In view of our vulnerability, thus, we can only speak of salvation metaphorically, but deliverance does happen, although in small and ordinary ways.

According to Gebara, the symbol "Jesus" contains the liberation logic which he demonstrates in his life.[51] The early "Jesus Movement" aims at the restoration of the full humanity of and by the victims of political-economic and religious manipulation.[52] The Bible attests that poverty, stigma, marginalization, sexual and gender-based violence, and all forms of psychological torture, can cause physical harm, and leave a material wound in one's life. Jesus's personal involvement in their tangible suffering signals that God has elected the socially demeaned to be agents of transformation. As a person, Jesus symbolizes their healing, the recovery of material wellbeing, and the enhancement of neighborly love. Since he performs the good news for and with bodies who struggle to live with material dignity,[53] his symbol also communicates the insufficiency of affirmative words alone.

---

[46] Gebara, "Cristologia Fundamental," 259–272; Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 183.
[47] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 122.
[48] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 184–5.
[49] Gebara, "Cristologia Fundamental," 259–72, 261–62.
[50] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 32, 187.
[51] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 180.
[52] Gebara, "Cristologia Fundamental," 259–72, 167–68.
[53] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 180, 183.

Women's experience of resurrection confirms that salvation "must start with the body because that is what Jesus taught and because we are a living body."[54] In her realistically ambiguous Christology, human bodies bespeak the fragility and corporality of salvation whenever they experience the cross and the resurrection.[55] As Gebara emphasizes, a glass of water can quench one's thirst, but only for a moment. Salvation is delicate and bodily precisely because it happens in the materiality of historical time.[56] Small seeds of renewal might germinate in every concrete act that nourishes the dignity of life and liberates the body.

What is also noteworthy is that she emphasizes the archetype of the feminine Redeemer. The Indigenous and African religions, which cultivate the feminine deities as much as the masculine, have influenced Latin American Christianity, and most notably Catholicism. For instance, devotion to the fertility Goddess has resulted in different images of the Madonna, images that depict primordial and "visceral" experiences. For Gebara, such symbols express something that is prior to the meaning of the masculine God, the Creator.[57] The "Great Mother," Mother of the Savior," or "Mother of God," who is a virtuous warrior and a caretaker, gives birth to the Messiah, outlives his departure, witnesses his return, then helps to propagate the Reign, which shows how her care can transmute trauma into liberation.[58]

Assuming Gebara's view, we can say that the body simultaneously performs salvific deeds and experiences its outcomes. The acts of the body (whole person) can resurrect the body (the way the person exists). The body-person is an agent who can transform the person-existence

[54] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 183.
[55] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 126.
[56] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 124, 125.
[57] Ivone Gebara, "A Look at the Concept of Human Nature" in *Human Nature and Natural Law*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill et al. (London: SCM-Concilium, 2010), 127.
[58] Gebara, "Cristologia Fundamental," 259–72; 265–66.

through acts of dignity which alter one's ethical status by changing one's relations. Fundamentally, it is the body aspect of personhood, rather than the soul aspect, which experiences the life renewals[59] that the person promotes. In Gebara's logic, the meaning of the resurrection is less germane than the meaning of the body, which is an agent of self-change in community. Seemingly trivial gestures of dignity are the real matter of salvation, given that they are actual life-affirmations, which can make a person more whole.

The symbol of the resurrection invites us to live in ways that respect and affirm the "unity" of the body (existence) and the soul (life-sustaining capacities). Our resurrection, in life, is our own choice because the human freedom and ability to act belong to the body. Because agency and freedom are intrinsic to our corporal type of life, how a person chooses to respond to one's and others' lack of dignity is an existential decision. In other words, the resurrection is an existential decision. As a little moment of rebirth, for example, a decision for dignity is "actualized" in the options that enrich the abundance of life existent between bodies.[60] According to Gebara, the resurrected body is not a ticket to immortality, only a way to begin living in a more integral and integrated manner. The "risen" person is somebody who lives more abundantly the "unity" of the human corporeal existence and its innate capacities.

Despite Gebara's carefully reticent Christology, its symbolism informs the meaning of dignity as an act and it highlights the agent, a body. In the light of the resurrection, it reflects a human effort to transcend the social illnesses of a hierarchical culture, rather than a change in human nature.[61] People cannot become more or less than what they already are because of what

[59] Gebara, *Out of the Depths*, 125.
[60] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 179.
[61] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 101.

they do. However, Gebara trusts that anyone can experience a stronger sense of integration with the Sacred Body by cultivating life's dignity, starting with the socially worthless of the Earth.

2. "Consciousness of Matter:" The Soul in Leonardo Boff's Theological Anthropology

In this section, I claim that the soul is a set of life-sustaining capacities that belong to the body. Leonardo Boff depicts the human being as the "consciousness of matter," which implies the body's capacity for self-consciousness. Self-awareness, in turn, implies one's cognizance of one's role in the universe. Moreover, says Boff, humanity's main vocation is to care for life—to acknowledge, protect, and increase its dignity. Succinctly, I argue that the "soul" can be understood as the totality of such competences, all of which stem from the body's faculty of consciousness.

Boff paints a notion of personhood with translucent brushstrokes that reveal a panentheistic background. For him, God and humanity emerge within a grand process of evolution, which culminates in Jesus's Resurrection. The titles alone of his first three books already hint at his lifelong intellectual-spiritual pursuit. The first one is *The Gospels of the Cosmic Christ: The Scientific and Religious Search for Unity in Totality*.[62] His second book, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, underlines the political and anthropological underpinnings of his faith in Jesus's gift of liberation. His third volume, *The Church as a Sacrament in the Horizon of World Experience*,[63] derives from his doctoral dissertation and was transformed into a book thanks to the generous financial support of his former teacher, Joseph A. Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI.[64]

[62] My free translation. Leonardo Boff, *O Evangélio do Cristo Cósmico: Busca da Unidade do Todo na Ciência e na Religião* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1971).
[63] My free translation. *Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung*.
[64] (Interview) Eric Nepomuceno, "Leonardo Boff," Sangue Latino, Youtube vídeo, 23:59. June, 23, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGN4q6pXO70.

The cosmic, liberating, and sacramental attributes of the Christ form the "holy trinity" of Boff's theology. The cosmos represents the Father, or God the Creator in his first book; liberation symbolizes the Son in the second; and the sacraments, represented by the Church, communicate the Paraclete. In the confluence of the three Persons, we find Boff's dream of a perfect communion,[65] which he has imagined in the shapes, colors, and proportions of the liberation and the ecological movements, the inspiration of St. Francis's, and his study of Teilhard de Cardin.[66]

The sacraments have primary relevance in Boff's conception of personhood. If Gebara's major epistemic premise is "relatedness," Boff's is "sacramentality:" the entire universe reveals God, who evolves with and "interpenetrates" it. His theism informs a dialogue between theology and a branch of the new cosmology, just as Gebara's view of reality (relatedness) informs a dialogue between ecofeminism and liberation theology. From the physical-cosmological perspective, Boff suggests that God can be conceived as the "zero-point energy"—the elemental force which keeps atomic components interlinked and moving.[67] God as an "Energy" is the mysterious, supreme, conscious, self-organizing, and -sustaining force that moves life. While Gebara's "Sacred Body" is grounded in a comprehensive and inescapable "bodily relatedness," Boff's correlation of "energy" (science) to "God" is grounded in his evolutionary perspective. Assuming a cosmological stance, he posits God as an "infinite Passion of communication and expansion, given the universe assumedly expands in time, space, information, and, beings."[68] Evolution is at the intersection of the two concepts, since its energies bring all into a greater

[65] Leonardo Boff, *A Trindade, a Sociedade, e a Libertação* 2nd ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1986).
[66] Leonardo Boff, *Reflexões de Um Velho Teólogo* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2018), 20–21.
[67] For Boff, a cosmology is a comprehensive view of reality that reflects the vital ideas, practices, habits, and values of a people. Boff, *Reflexões*, 101, 103. Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 181.
[68] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 323–24.

communion and expansion.[69] Observe that Gebara's "relatedness" assumes a different starting point—the embodied nature of all knowledge—only to reach a similar destination, that we are all integrated into a permanently evolving "Great Body."

Boff's panentheistic cosmovision[70] highlights the divine immanence and active participation in evolution, which is the process through which time and space, and "energy and matter" have emerged. A cosmogenesis is a narrative of the universe's story, which God has initiated, for the purpose of bringing life into being and allowing it to participate in the divine superabundance.[71] Recall that Gebara refuses to propose overarching claims about God's nature and agency, and the ultimate origins of life on Earth, even though she does claim that the human reality is "relatedness." In contrast to Gebara, whose assumptions are perhaps more humble and embedded in the daily-life experience, Boff believes the vastly unknown evolutionary process can evince the divine agency and the single origins of all that exists.[72] In this way, Gebara's anthropology starts with her experience of being a body-in-relation, while Boff's departs from insights derived from his cosmological faith and Christological inclination.

In truth, Boff almost conflates "reality" and evolution in a way that resembles Gebara's tight correlation of "reality" and relation. In Boff's account, evolution is the central force or energy of cosmogenesis,[73] the process through which everything comes into being. To be sure, he distinguishes it from God, thus rejecting pantheism. Still, by a supreme act of creation, Boff states, "God is present in the cosmos and the cosmos is present in God,"[74] so the whole universe

[69] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 248.
[70] Panentheism is key in his cosmovision: God is in all things, but nothing is identical to God. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 154.
[71] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 182, 323.
[72] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 251; Boff, *Reflexões*, 102–103.
[73] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 324.
[74] Although God is not identical with the cosmos.

is "sacramental." On the other hand, Gebara makes a similar statement when she claims the utmost sacramentality of the "Sacred Body," in which we all participate solely by virtue of existing. To be sure, Gebara's "Sacred Body" does not equate to Boff's "cosmos." However, it is a symbol of the intricate relations of interdependence that constitute the cosmos. In other words, the theological functions of the "Sacred Body" and "relatedness" (Gebara) resemble that of the "cosmos" and "evolution" (Boff). Just as for Gebara nothing is outside the relatedness of the "Sacred Body," so for Boff nothing is outside the evolutionary process of cosmogenesis, not even its mysterious originator. If Gebara implicitly suggests that relatedness could indicate the "nature" of God,[75] Boff explicitly claims that God evolves with the universe. Thus, evolution itself is a "sacrament." In Boff's words, God and the evolving reality permeate one another. All is "transparent"[76] to God's presence, for Boff. Consequently, in that which is a priori ordinary, mortal, and relative always potentially inhere the qualities of that which is Extraordinary, Eternal, and Absolute. In contrast, Gebara sees the Sacred "printed" in the ordinary, mortal, and relative; in the human experience of being a body in relation. Thus, for Boff the evolving reality is a medium of the divine revelation; and for Gebara, the "relatedness" of life communicates the sacred. According to Boff, the final analyses of the greatest physicists, astronomers, and cosmologists would confirm the monotheist faith in a concealed agent standing behind the formations of the universe, life, and humanity.

In sum, Boff thinks that the sciences help us to understand how humanity integrates the universe, since all life perforce advances toward increasing complexity, diversity, and change.[77]

---

[75] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 104.
[76] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 235. Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis: A Model For Human Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 8, 17, 88; Boff, *Liberating Grace*, chap. 9.
[77] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 149.

Through a religious lens, he sees an all-encompassing and evolving system of signs to be interpreted. For him, the capacity to transform objects into sacred symbols, and ordinary actions into rites, is evidence of the sacramentality of evolution. Given that God pervades material reality, the human creation of sacred symbols and rites is simply natural. For example, the dove did not become a symbol of the second Person by chance. Rather, it has always been a fitting candidate, inasmuch as it naturally communicates something about the third Person of the Trinity to those who have the eyes to see. Millenia before Jesus was baptized, when the Spirit descended onto him in the form of a dove,[78] Noah had already given a messenger dove the task of searching for a secure, dry land.[79] Even before Noah, doves had been given in sacrifice and had been admired because of their alleged "purity."[80] The sacrificial, the messenger, and the baptizing doves represent the same Spirit, whose intervention has produced different meanings on each occasion. Boff believes the religions have synthetized our profoundest and universal spiritual sentiments into stories and images (myths) that communicate an actual process of cosmogenesis. While the myth is imagined, its meaning is very real. For him, the biblical eschatological process[81] is a cosmogenesis that entails a "biogenesis," an "anthropogenesis," and a "Christogenesis." As for Gebara, while she believes that religious symbols can condense and synthesize human experience, she also hints that their creation is not "natural" in the same biological-evolutionary sense employed by Boff. In sum, Boff's evolutionary panentheism attempts to reconcile scientific and religious insights about God.

[78] Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32.
[79] Gen. 8:8–9; 8:11.
[80] Gen. 15:9; Lev. 12:6; Song 1:15; Luke 2:24.
[81] Leonardo Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 11th ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes), 23.

Another piece of evidence is his comparison of sacramental and scientific-cosmological language. Boff explains how the appropriate sacramental language is performative and narrativist.[82] The sacraments implement transformations in human life through the human-divine encounter that they provoke. Language can change the meanings of objects and actions by evoking a past and inviting a future into the present.[83] The increased awareness of the divine presence that it promotes can empower us to transform our today. Given that all beings and facts contain a reference to God in Boff's system, the act of telling a past event, describing a behavior, or defining a goal can add a new layer of meaning to an old idea. Also, sacramental language is narrativist because humans create sacred symbols and rites by connecting events and attaching meaning to them. God's message is thus communicated through a storyline, and, the religions explain the cosmos chronologically.[84]

Because nothing is outside evolution, not even revelation, any meaning attributed to humanity must depart from the realization of God's presence and agency in cosmogenesis.[85] Humanity "becomes" within the temporally and spatially vast evolution of all organic and inorganic actualities. Cosmogenesis, which probably began over 13 billion years ago, gave rise to biogenesis at about four-and-a-half billion years ago. At about 300,000 years ago, biogenesis gave rise to yet another process, namely "anthropogenesis," which to do is only a fraction of the cosmogenesis's timespan.

Being born as part of these vast natural processes means that humans are constituted of "particles and waves."[86] For Boff, the *homo sapiens* is a specific organization of the same kind of

[82] Leonardo Boff, *Os Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975), 6.
[83] Boff, *Os Sacramentos da Vida*, 7.
[84] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 247.
[85] Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, xii; 152–54.
[86] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 173.

molecules that have emerged in the heart of the great red stars. Yet human "matter" possesses a distinct set of capabilities, which he synthetizes in the ambiguous word "consciousness." In brief, consciousness is a physical phenomenon that happens at a quantum scale, an "expression of the relationships between primordial matter and energy at a most intense degree of complexity and relatedness."[87] In the beginning of biogenesis, so the narrative goes, some elementary particles aggregated in new, more intensely organized ways. Biologists have called this self-organization "life." Over the millennia, they have continued to re-organize themselves, in ever more complex ways, so as to increase their participation in their respective biomes, until the moment they became self-conscious.[88] The more the particles interconnect, the more they increase in self-organization, the more they become self-conscious, the more they interfere in and interact with their environment. In this way, Boff thinks the advent of human consciousness represents the birth of the universe's self-awareness.[89]

A soul is a conscious and thus potentially capable body. Since consciousness is a capacity of physical "matter" and since the "soul" is the aspect of personhood which often symbolizes or represents such capacities, therefore a soul is a conscious body. However, just as the division of energy and matter is physically unverifiable,[90] so too the division of the soul and the body is a helpful but dangerous theological abstraction. On the one hand, the apprehension of the separation between the two aspects of personhood is a function of consciousness. On the other, consciousness can only symbolically represent the soul, and matter the body, for such categories do not have actual correspondence and cannot represent two "parts" of a person, one physical

[87] Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 53.
[88] For Boff, life evolves by maximizing its capacities to thrive in its particular environments, and such maximization is revelatory. Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 323. Also, Boff, *Reflexões*, 41.
[89] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 172; Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 56.
[90] Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 56.

and the other metaphysical. A person is not a compound of different substances, as Thomas affirms. Not only is matter mostly empty space, thus largely non-existent, but the body and the soul do not exist physically in a manner in which they can be placed in a dualist frame. Still, cosmology allows Boff to associate the "soul" figuratively with consciousness, and this through organic matter.

At this point, we must ask, "What does Boff's cosmological and anthropological symbolism has to do with the human dignity?" Well, all capacities come with responsibilities. Boff firmly believes that the ability to understand one's own role in the universe implies the obligation to protect and increase the dignity of other beings. He emphasizes two practical implications of consciousness: the power to generate meaning about the Sacred, and the vocation to act for the dignity of life. The abilities to understand God and to attach value to facts and beings[91] have made humans distinctively conscious of their call to take care of the socially humiliated and our "Common Home"—the Earth.[92]

In short, consciousness is an evolutionary prerequisite for the enactment of human dignity.[93] Only a self-conscious being can critically examine and amend its conduct. Self-examination is possible only for the type of beings who are "hearers and respondents."[94] In the Bible, a human is a being endowed with the capacity to understand God's call, and, a person is

[91] Boff, *Reflexões*, 26.
[92] Leonardo Boff, *Ética e Espiritualidade: Como Cuidar da Casa Comum* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2017); Leonardo Boff, *Saber Cuidar: Ética do Humano, Compaixão Pela Terra* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2002); Boff, *Reflexões*, 103–104, 117; Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 6; Leonardo Boff, *A Opção Terra: A Solução Não Cai do Céu* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2009), 51.
[93] "Human dignity resides in the capacities of self-interrogation and to enter into dialogue with the Mystery." My free translation, Boff, *Reflexões*, 37.
[94] Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 62.

"more relationships than being,"[95] a "knot of relationships."[96] Indeed, the Bible depicts a dialogical personhood,[97] provided the capacity to hear implies the capacity to respond. We become human dialogically, since that is how God calls us into a meaningful life,[98] the one which allows for the full realization of our innate abilities. Also, the Bible indicates that persons exist at the "intersection of immanence and transcendence."[99] In other words, we become what we are by "hearing and responding" to the neighbor's needs; by externalizing our struggles and joys. Boff laments that theology has erroneously conditioned the possibility of freedom and spontaneity to a radical immanence. Thomas, for instance, thinks a person is essentially an *ultima solitudo entis*,[100] a "radical solitude" and an independent soul.

In contrast, Boff's dialogical view assumes that the person is forged in human-divine and human-human encounters, which occur at the "intersection" of the body and the soul. For Gebara, the formation of the person takes place in and through the manifold relations that constitute the body. In Boff's understanding, the biblical anthropological images can communicate specific modes of living, rather than substances. Immanence/body often highlights our individualism, vulnerability, and mortality, while transcendence/soul stresses the power to overcome the limitations of the egoic prison. Their intersection is where the divine makes Itself transparent to the conscious body.[101] If the encounters happen at the intersection of the "I" and

[95] We are a "process of encounters and event-beings." Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 62–63.
[96] Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador: Ensaio de Cristologia Crítica Para o Nosso Tempo*, 19th ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2008), 186; Boff, *Tempo de Transcendência*, 36.
[97] Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 62.
[98] Boff, *Os Sacramentos da Vida*, 3.
[99] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 179.
[100] Thomas Aquinas, *Opus Oxoniense* III, 1.2.1, n.17 *apud* Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 63.
[101] Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 109.

the "Thou," the person, too, exists in that encounter. If personhood is forged in the "We" space,[102] its modes of living (body and soul) are too.

Provided that consciousness represents the soul, it is realized in the recognition of the neighbor as a dwelling of God.[103] To be sure, consciousness implies autonomy, but autonomy itself is dialogical[104] because personhood is too. Most certainly one becomes a person before becoming relatively autonomous. It is in the "I-Thou," or "we," that the "I" is born, so our responses to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, or otherwise humiliated can define who we are. Only then, Boff concludes, the "immanence" of the body ceases to be a prison in the Bible.

Physically, the soul is an attribute or a consequence of the intense relationships between the "particles and waves" that form the body:[105] "we humans are the conscious and intelligent part of the universe and the Earth." Here, it is noteworthy that the practical effects of Boff's quantum framing of consciousness is similar to the effects of Gebara's "bodily relatedness." Yet, Gebara does not share Boff's anthropocentrism—he considers anthropogenesis the culmination of cosmogenesis and Christogenesis the zenith of anthropogenesis. In Boff's cosmology, energy and matter are two aspects of a single whole. In a person, they form one "psychochemical" structure.[106] So, both the body and the soul are basically energy flowing in space. For Boff, despite their appearance of solidity, all bodies are made of ephemeral energy flowing through empty space with "great coherence." The more quantum physicists look into the nature of matter, he points out, the more they discover the atomic nucleus's porosity. More than 99.99999999999

[102] Boff, *Os Sacramentos da Vida*, 64.
[103] Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 65.
[104] Boff, *Os Sacramentos da Vida*, 64. Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 85.
[105] Basically, the soul is the highly organized interactions between the four basic forces of physics.
[106] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 248; Boff, *Reflexões*, 105

percent of an atom's volume is simply empty.[107] So, what is matter? For Boff, "matter" exists in the same way that musical notes spring from a chord when it is played on a guitar: they simply "happen," out of self-expansive and self-contracting movements that tend to culminate at a fine equilibrium. "Thinglessness" and the "quantum entanglement" theory reinforce Boff's faith in the common origin of everything.[108]

Boff hears the Bible speaking in mythological language a confirmation of the new-cosmological and quantum-scientific unity hypothesis. For example, he thinks that Paul describes the soul as a quality of the body, and the body, as a self-conscious person (2 Cor. 4:16; Rom. 7:22). The entire person is conscious, and a given body is human precisely because it is potentially conscious. So, the scriptures and the sciences agree that there is no soul without a living body and vice versa.[109] Didactically, the Bible depicts the body as the "material" life of the soul, and the soul as the life-affirming powers of human matter. However, since the one's existence implies the other's, the body and the soul represents the entire person. Also, the Bible does not have a word to communicate the ideas of a bodiless soul and a soulless body.[110] The sporadic references to a "dead soul," *nephesh met,* as in Lev 21:1, 21:11, 19:28 and Num 6:6, 9:6ff., in reality allude to a diseased person, rather than to a soul who would presumably have outlived the body.[111]

Biblically, the soul-person is a *nephesh*—an actual living body in its self-conscious[112] and individual form. *Nephesh* has been ambiguously rendered as "soul" in various English

[107] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 173.
[108] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 252.
[109] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 38.
[110] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 86.
[111] The soul cannot survive without the body. For example, Gen. 35:18; Job 11:20; 31:39; Jer .15:9. McKenzie, S.J., *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Soul," 836.
[112] To seek the *psyche* is to seek life according to Matt. 2:20 and Rom. 11:3; the loss of *psyche* is loss of life in Acts 27:10, 22; 1 Cor. 15:45.

translations. Although this Hebrew noun conveys a number of related meanings, including "life" (Gen. 12:13; 19:20; 1 Kings 20:32; Jer. 38:17), "self" (Gen 2:7; 12:5; 49:6; Num 23:10; 30:3ff.; Judg 16:30; Job 9:21; Ex. 13:8–9); "person" (Lev 24:17f.; Prov 11:25; 19:15; Job 16:4), and the "*psyche*," biblical scholarship concurs that "soul" is its most recurrent connotation.[113] In the Bible, humans do not "have" a life, a self, a person, and a consciousness; rather, they are all such ideas, so *nephesh* means the concrete existing and conscious person, and it symbolizes the soul-person, self-person, or consciousness-person, an accentuation of the cognitive, subjective, and spiritual powers of the physical body.[114] Being "life," a "self," a "person," and a "psyche" imply a specific mode of existing or living. According to Boff, the Scriptures describe at least four of these modes, each of them containing a particular conception of personhood that reflects the biblical archetypes: the flesh-, the body-, the soul-, and the spiritual-persons. The "soul-person" differs from, but does not oppose, the "body-person."

Ruah or *pneuma* highlights another principle, for the spirit, which animates the soul and the body, is not to be confused with them. It is the animating principle of life and its vital activity. In Gen 2:7, for instance, God shapes the first human with the dust of the ground, then breathes into their nostrils the breath of life. God's animating breath is the spirit, and the soul is the outcome of God's enlivening the dust-made body with the Spirit. The body, who is now alive, can become a soul-person (*nephesh*) because it has consciousness. To say that a soul always lives in a body is to imply that it *is* a conscious body-person, but *nephesh* is not the principle of life which enlivens the body: that task is reserved for *ruah* or *pneuma*. While the

[113] McKenzie, SJ, *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Soul," 836, 837.
[114] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 88.

spirit is the principle of life, vitality, and, activity,[115] the soul is the living and self-conscious body.

Nephesh and *soma* also convey different ideas, although they are not different substances or beings. In the Bible, *nephesh* symbolizes the body's material and immaterial capacities, rather than the body's immaterial face or the like. Rather, it represents the total sum of the body's abilities, such as intention, desire, decision, reason, emotion, empathy, faith, hope, and compassion, but also breath, sleep, digestion, movement, other forms of expression, and so on. Even though it occasionally refers to supposedly non-carnal abilities, such as thought and sentiment, the soul is absolutely "corporal" in the biblical sense, to the extent that it is the consciousness of a particular *soma*.

Since *nephesh* is the conscious and potentially capable body, it also differs from *basar* or *sarx*. For Paul, the soul does not oppose the body, but the spirit can oppose the flesh. It is significant, for our understanding, that he distinguishes between the body-person and the flesh-person. According to Boff, the best exegesis postulates that Paul more often and substantially uses the "Hebrew" dialectic of the body and the flesh, than the Greek dualism of the body and the soul.[116] The body is not the flesh, since *sarx* represents humans' imperfectability, capacity to commit sinful deeds, and rejection of God's love. Instead, the "body of flesh" (Rom. 2:28–29; Macc. 14:38; Rom. 6:6; 7:24; 8:3; 8:6; 8:12; Co.l 2:11; Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 6:13; 15:43; 15:50) or simply, "flesh," is a subordinate aspect of personhood which assumes humanity's freedom to act virtuously. Assuming that the flesh represents our moral and spiritual limitations, it also represents mortality in Paul's anthropology. Yet, even though the body-person can commit sins,

[115] McKenzie, SJ, *Dictionary of the Bible*, "Spirit," 840.
[116] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 72.

its imperfectability and mortality cannot characterize personhood. Instead of the soul, it is the flesh that opposes the spirit, which is the principle of life. In Boff's interpretation, there is no essential dualism between the flesh and the soul, but the dichotomy of life and death does participate in Paul's construct of personhood.

While for Paul the flesh cannot resurrect, the body can, because it exists for God (1 Cor. 6:13), who has given it life, promised it abundant life, then transformed it into a potential "spiritual-body" (1 Cor. 15:51; Rom. 6:6; 8:23). Although the body-person can sin, it aspires to immortality, but the flesh-person will not join the Reign because its mode of living is spiritually flawed (1 Cor. 15:50; Rom. 7:24). In the "Semite" anthropology, the body is the whole person, in their interpersonal relationships (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 7:4; 9:27; 13:1). When the body dies, the soul dies too. Jesus's mouth cried out loud at the moment of death (Mk. 15:37) because his soul suffered the agonies of a persecutory death (Lk. 22:44; 26:38; Mk. 14:36; Matt. 26:40). His soul and body have died and resurrected together, showing that the real dichotomy is the one between life and death, or "spirit" and "flesh" in Paul's words.

In this way, the Pauline view of the Resurrection reaffirms the indissolubility of the body and the soul, to the extent that it implies the soul's immortality, conditioned upon the body's.[117] Although the Gospels never proclaim the immortality of *nephesh*, the promise of the Resurrection only makes sense if it is directed to the entire person, whose identity is, at once, fully corporal and fully in the soul.

In sum, the body is the whole person in its corporal existence, the soul is the body's life-affirming capacities, and the spirit is the principle of life. As the soul is the consciousness of the body, so too the person is a conscious body. Assuming, with Gebara, that the body is how

[117] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 73.

humans exist, in relation, then personhood implies a conscious mode of interacting. Boff's panentheistic cosmovision organizes his theologization of a few scientific insights on evolution and the role of human consciousness. For him, the body and its capacity for consciousness have emerged in the process of anthropogenesis, which is a subsidiary of biogenesis, and this, of cosmogenesis. Anthropogenesis represents the moment when the whole universe has become self-conscious. Jesus's Resurrection is its zenith, a "cosmic event" with remarkable effects on personhood.

3. The Spiritual-Body: A New Mode of Living

While Boff's first three books foretell the dominating theses and his theology's point of departure,[118] his fourth book is an exegetical restatement of his Christology. In 1971, Boff published an important pamphlet, translated under the title *The Question of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus*.[119] The original title is even more suggestive: *A Ressurreição de Cristo: A Nossa Resurreição na Morte* ("Christ's Resurrection: Our Resurrection in Death").[120] In this text, Boff's cosmovision becomes a universal and Christological journey for liberation.

Like his anthropology, Boff's Christology springs from his cosmovision and assumes the concrete images and aspirations derived from his engagement with the liberation movement. In it, the Resurrection is a "cosmic event" in which Jesus realizes the universal liberation that he had proclaimed.[121] In the Bible, the processes of cosmogenesis are symbolized by the myth of creation and the eschatological history, and anthropogenesis is represented in the Adamic myth.

[118] Christ's cosmic, liberating, and sacramental attributes.
[119] Leonardo Boff, *The Question of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus* trans. Luis Runde, OFM (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald, 1971).
[120] Leonardo Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo, A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 7th ed. (Brazil: Vozes, 1986).
[121] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 60, 61; Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, 56.

Boff argues that both culminate in the advent of the Messiah. So, the Resurrection is not only the apex of Christogenesis; it is also the culmination of cosmogenesis.

Presuming his evolutionary view of reality, Boff argues that the Resurrection has "eschathologized the human reality," and that the entire cosmos has achieved its maximum level of consciousness. This means that Jesus's risen body has reached the "maximum concentration of sacramentality" in history,[122] so that all human capacities will also become fully realized. He believes that the Bible tells a story in which all that is keeps coming into being, including humanity and Christ. While the eschatological narrative can be told from different perspectives, all of them actually form a single, totalizing, and progressive "process of becoming." Jesus is the epicenter and convener of all the different perspectives, since he has become completely "transparent" and "full of God" in the Resurrection. In Boff's view, the universe has become fully conscious of itself, in one human person, but such "becoming" remains effective afterwards, he says, for it continues to enhance human capacities over time. Since the person of Jesus has reached a maximum level of sacramentality, Boff concludes that he is the "Cosmic Christ."[123]

Boff believes Jesus's presence has become eternal and ubiquitous.[124] Because of the Resurrection, the divine Presence, as *Kyrios* and *Pleroma*, is now unconstrained by time and space,[125] given that it continues coming into being. It is as though the Incarnation and Resurrection form a type of permanent yet progressive recapitulation of all of God's already

[122] Boff, *Os Sacramentos da Vida*, 5.
[123] Boff, *Os Sacramentos da Vida*, 5; Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 329; Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 111–12; Boff, *O Evangélio do Cristo Cósmico*.
[124] Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 42–43, 111.
[125] Eph. 1:23; Col. 2:9. Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 62.

dispensed and future grace.[126] While this recapitulation of grace is concentrated in one person and event, Boff thinks it does not fully reclaim the logos-flesh tradition of John, Polycarp, and Justin; it differs from Irenaeus's recapitulation of the Word made flesh.[127] Irenaeus believes the Incarnation has restored God's promise of biological resurrection.[128] Boff, on the other hand, believes that the Resurrection magnifies all of the human physical, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual capacities, rather than interfering in the species' biological configuration. In this sense, it represents a recapitulation of God's grace, rather than God's Word. For Boff, the Word was made flesh for the gratuitous "eschathologization of the human reality."[129] The Resurrection thus represents a fuller participation of humanity in God's "imperishable life."[130] Consequently, it has expanded human corporeality—our innate capacities—assuming the person is a body, by which, however, it does not mean the genetic, physiological, and/or anatomic composition of *homo sapiens,*[131] for whom death continues to be real. In comparison, Gebara's Christology is quite different, and so is her view of the resurrection. For her, Jesus's rebirth is above all a mystery and a symbol of life transformations, undertaken through relations, rather than an "event" full of cosmic and anthropological meaning.

Boff believes that Jesus's spiritual-body has achieved "cosmic ubiquity."[132] He embraces Paul's universalist hope that the vocation and future of all that exists is to become the "body of God,"[133] but not in the same way that Gebara affirms a patent integration of all beings through

[126] Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 110–11, 112.
[127] Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, book 3, 21.9; 21.10; 11.8.
[128] In his account, the Resurrection entails a biological transformation, indeed, a kind of re-creation leading to physical and spiritual incorruptibility. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses,* book 5, chap. 14–16; 28.
[129] The Risen one is the "eschatological man" (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 15:14). Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 111; Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 61.
[130] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 176.
[131] Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 43.
[132] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 101; Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 103.
[133] Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 110.

the "Sacred Body." Since the resurrected Jesus foretells the future of all "matter," Boff predicts that the human body will become so full of divinity that all of its latent capacities will be maximally actualized. In Gebara's view, humanity does evolve, along with all other species, but not toward an (unpredictable) "maximization" or "actualization" of our natural capacities. In Boff's understanding, the process of actualization is not only present but also perceptible. Mary Magdalene, Simon, and the other disciples saw Jesus, spoke to him, ate with him, and touched his body, a body absolutely transfigured, glorious, and powerful. Boff's key evidence is Paul's faith in the transformation of Jesus's body into a "spiritual-body" (1 Cor. 15:44),[134] which he considers to be a vital moment in the Gospels. For Paul and Boff, the Risen Christ is neither a spirit, nor an angel (Lk. 24:39; Acts, 23:8–9), but rather, a body, for it has wounds and eats with other bodies (John 20:20; 25–29, Acts 10:41). The fact that the spiritual-body acts and interacts in the world shows three relative truths of faith: First, that God's gracious transfiguration of the human personal reality is a possibility here and now.[135] Second, that this possibility has become instantiated in the elevation of the human capacities, rather than a biological, physical immortality. Third, that the announced Reign is not a collective fantasy. In Boff's perception, Jesus's glorifying presence, which I emphasize, is corporeal but not biological, "saturates" all of reality because of the resurrection, which shows that He is the "Cosmic Christ."[136]

As for Gebara, the resurrection of Jesus has symbolic meaning rather than cosmic implications. She agrees with Boff that Christ is above all a body, rather than a "spirit." However, Jesus is for her a metaphor of the divine presence in the human flesh and a symbol of

[134] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 62.
[135] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 94.
[136] Boff cites Hos. 139:7; Gen. 1:2; Col. 1:15–20; Eph. 1:10; 1:23; and Col. 2:9. Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 62.

salvation.[137] Hence, Gebara encounters the Risen Savior in the ordinary, mortal, and fleshly persons who promote liberation for the oppressed. Jesus is thus present in the community through our ordinary but nevertheless dignifying deeds. As proposed in the previous section, they can transform the relations that constitute ourselves. For Gebara, the centrality of Jesus is to be understood as the centrality of ordinary persons, particularly marginalized women. Consequently, Gebara agrees with Boff that the promised Reign is not a collective hallucination, but disagrees with him that it is "Eschatological" (with a capital "E"). Just as she thinks that the Incarnation symbolizes our "bodily reality," the resurrection represents a positive transformation in that reality, precisely, the evolution of the "Sacred Body."[138]

Boff goes a step further and ascribes a strong sacramentality to that evolutive process. For him, the entire cosmos is destined to undergo a process of "divinization."[139] The more life evolves, the more it becomes transparent, and the more God becomes visible in it. Regarding human "divinization," he thinks the elevation of God's Son (Dan. 7:13) has "spilled over" to all of God's children, modifying their status as agents. For Boff, the practical effect of Christogenesis, that "moment of consciousness that is identical with Divinity," is in the mystical messages of 1 Cor. 1:30 (Jesus has become the human model of righteousness, holiness, and redemption); Rom. 8:10 (for even though the body is subject to death, the Spirit gives it life because of its capacity for righteousness); and 2 Cor. 13:5 (for self-examination implies the capacity for self-consciousness). In Boff's account, this "divinization" renews all aspects of human physical and spiritual life, but it does so because and inasmuch as it has transfigured

[137] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 185–86.
[138] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 183.
[139] Boff, *Vida Para Além da Morte*, 107, 109.

Jesus's earthly condition.[140] In other words, the divinization process implies a transformation of the human corporeal life.

Although the Resurrection does not create "super-humans," Boff thinks it has given rise to the *homo cosmicus*, who participates more intensely in God's superabundance.[141] To be sure, Paul does believe in the resurrection of the physical body because Jesus's body has resurrected (1Cor. 15; Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14), and he proclaims life's victory upon death (1 Cor. 15:55-57; Song 8:6), but Boff thinks the good news actually indicates the maximization of our capacities, a milestone in the process of "divinization." From the perspective of the Resurrection, which has further brought humanity into life, the purpose of our existence is to participate in God's superabundance. After all, everybody has been created in order to enjoy God's generosity, intelligence, and material abundance.[142] From the viewpoint of the Resurrection, says Boff, the enhanced capacities of the *homo cosmicus* imply such divine invitation, and that the biblical story is one of love, growth, and true progress. In the light of the Resurrection, Boff claims, the "cosmic person" increasingly reflects the image and likeness of God. In Jesus, all of humanity resembles God perfectly, to the degree to which each one inherits some of his divine-like abilities.

Divinization must be a form of humanization because humanity's elemental vocation is to become more and more human.[143] For Boff, the *homo cosmicus* is an instance of the *homo viator*. Humans are fundamentally a *homo viator*, a "being" who seeks to realize itself, by means of actualizing their capacities and enjoying their plenitude.[144] Boff believes the dignity of being a

[140] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 90; Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 33.
[141] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 108.
[142] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 323.
[143] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 181; Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 41.
[144] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 56; Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 179; Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 99.

human is in our being a person, which means above all a process of encounters and an "event-being."[145] In other words, an actual person is not only a *homo viator* but also a "knot of relationships" that move in all directions (divine, worldly, human). Boff is convinced that divinization is accelerated by the alignment of humanity's "historical" and "eschatological" vocations. The former mediate and realize the latter.[146] Those plenitudes that can manifest biologically, professionally, artistically, and intellectually, for instance, are "historical," since they are individual, specific, relative, temporal, earthly, and tangible. In contrast, the eschatological vocation is universal. It entails entering a radical unity with God, which, in practice, assumes loving one another in a liberated and liberating way.

Because it strengthens capacities, the Resurrection assumes a new mode of living,[147] according to which everybody can pursue and enjoy human dignity. By augmenting the human powers, Jesus's spiritual-body has sowed the seeds of liberation,[148] but the Spirit does not act on behalf of the individual person, who is born free to deliberate and act according to their conscience. Nor does the Risen Spirit inspire hearts in the void. Rather, Jesus's material and social situation are integral to the meaning and practical repercussions of the Resurrection. Specifically, the Resurrection unveils the possibility of living virtuously, amid economic and political domination, since Jesus was killed and raised because he accepted his divine mission; he dared to feed the poor and build the Reign in the face of the powers that be.

For Boff, the relevance of any Christology depends on its function vis-a-vis the political-economy and the environment. All Christologies are crafted in specific historical moments, with

[145] Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 61, 63.
[146] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 108; Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 31ff, 35.
[147] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 64.
[148] Rom 5:5; Cor. 1:8; Gal. 5:13; Rom. 15:30.

the use of particular modes of material, ideological, and cultural production, which always assume a concrete social position, and its corresponding political interests.[149] In reality, to define or to describe the person of Jesus is to envision the economic, political, and environmental future of a people and the whole planet. Those Christians living without dignity might spontaneously profess that Jesus is the Christ, and live in hope that his efforts will come to fruition, turning economic relations more just and amending the political institutions of his time. For the undignified, the Resurrection symbolizes the overcoming of death and humiliation, here and now. In a predatory and capitalistic economic setting, a genuine Christology must presuppose the struggle against the institutions and ideas that organize the unjust distribution of opportunities.

In Brazil, the material reality of hunger and other types of spiritual humiliation together provide the epistemic point of departure and the social location of Boff's Christology. Gebara's starting point is the same, but she focuses on the situation and daily experiences of poor women. While both authors depart from the same hierarchical reality, Boff's attention is perhaps more inclined to the "macro" scale and Gebara's to the "micro." Both theologize from the perspective of those living at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid. In a word, the epistemic premise and social location of Boff's Christology are, respectively, the effects of a devastating and mutable political-economic system, and the longstanding lack of dignity that it produces so effectively.

In view of the poor's location in Brazil's political-economic hierarchy, the Resurrection's new mode of living must imply a "liberating" personhood; it must reflect the poor's pursuit of equity, a substantive political change, and, most important, of economic or material dignity.[150] This pursued reality can be glimpsed in Jesus's gestures toward the Reign, which signifies a final

[149] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 16.
[150] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 101.

and collective abolition of sin. For Boff, the Resurrection has symbolically brought about a new human, whose participation in the supreme reality of superabundance assumes a special attitude. The new person is anybody who uses their life-sustaining capacities to liberate[151] the poor.

Assuming that the Resurrection is only meaningful if it can reveal the future of the hopeless and downtrodden, Boff lists at least four dimensions of liberation.[152] At the personal level, liberation means, first, a radical change in the comprehension of reality as such. A liberated person understands facts and people "directly," without using artificial interfaces. Second, socially speaking liberation implies a culture that values everyone equally, and provides each one the same opportunities to realize their personhood. Its "interior" dimension is the realization of one's subjectivity and capacities, which can be expressed through the creative arts, the professions, business, thought, government, and religion or spirituality. Third, liberation entails a more profound sense of communion, including the widening of our power to empathize with other earthly beings. Fourth, it can also be understood as an era, the age between the "Technozoic" and the upcoming "Ecozoic" periods. In this age, human beings are "co-creators of the cosmos."

Thus, Boff's "Cosmic Christ" is "Jesus the Liberator." Although the Resurrected is at once a cosmic event and a human agent of transformation, in Boff's view any Christology that is thought of in an environment of humiliation and poverty must emphasize the historical Jesus over the Christ of faith. Poverty is a historical, structural, institutional, tangible, visceral, and epidermic phenomenon, so the Cosmic Christ is real, for the poor, only to the degree that the man of Nazareth has announced and practiced the Reign (Lk. 6:20–21). The transformation of

[151] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 293; Boff, *Cry of the Earth*, chap. 6; Leonardo Boff, *Ética e Espiritualidade*, chap. 3.
[152] Haraway and Boff, *The Tao of Liberation*, 292–93.

Jesus's body into a spiritual-body is not mere speculation for Boff, since his liberating attitude indicates he is the Christ. In Boff's cosmology, Christ is a mediating event, and in his Christology, the man of Nazareth is a person. In him, God participates in the human condition, experiences our profoundest agonies and aspirations—misery and joy, kindness and hostility, friendship and sadness, temptation and glory.[153] Christ Jesus is, therefore, an event-person who has revealed God's human face, and humanity's divine-like capacities. The divine person introduces himself to the world as both a sign of the new order and as one of its prophets.[154] Although the Resurrected One is now transfigured and immortal, he remains a human body, so that we also can transform and be transformed. Since the transformation that is urgently needed is liberation, we can say, with Boff, that Jesus is the "Cosmic Christ" because the man of Nazareth is the Liberator. Boff trusts that the Resurrection of the Liberator confirms the actuality of His universalist utopia—a "global, structural, and eschatological liberation." The Reign is all-encompassing, totalizing, and universal, but its first human agent mediates it with concrete gestures and words directed at actual persons, offices, institutions, and rulers.

In Brazil, the Resurrection can achieve its full meaningfulness only in face of Jesus's insurrection. First, because Christ assures us that the powerful and rich won't have the final word. Second, because the rebellious attitude of the event-person forms a dignifying *act et facta Jesus*, indeed, a praxis orientation for the captive and neglected (Lk. 4:16–21; 24:47; Acts 2:38).[155] Such is the core of Jesus's ministry, a ministry evident in his liberating attitude: the Reign belongs to them because social and economic injustice is the very reason for the Cosmic event happening, and for the person from Nazareth to act on God's behalf (Lk. 6:20–21). The

[153] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 65 ff.
[154] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 48.
[155] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 28, 31.

Reign represents an innovation in the totality of the material and spiritual world, the sunrise of a new era which has not yet been completely established. Only an ongoing insurrection will allow the last to become the first.

Thus, the Reign is reached by virtue of voluntary, compassionate, and courageous service to and by the poor, by whose bodies God is represented on Earth.[156] As Boff suggests, the liberating event-person keeps "coming into being" in the human acts that dignify the economically and socially shamed. The Reign is by no means an imposition, since Jesus has laid its foundations voluntarily; citing Dostoevsky, Boff claims that His contribution was the "widening of consciousness."[157] Similarly, the agent of dignity is never a tyrant, provided that any authentic act of justice represents an spontaneous gesture of resurrection.[158]

Such spontaneous deeds reflect a "resurrective" attitude, namely, of the spiritual-body. Following Christ entails adhering to the new order that he has announced and lived (Lk. 12:8-9). Christ's followers are those who express through their life choices their dissatisfaction with the status quo and their subsequent involvement with a new form of existence.[159] Thus, becoming a spiritual-person is far from merely an act of piety. Instead, it means undergoing a change in one's ideals, sensibilities, and decisions (Lk. 13:3–5). The door of liberating love is narrow precisely because it defies the current established order, which relies on greedy individualism, selfish accumulation, and narcissism.

In sum, the body-person becomes a spiritual-body when the person starts acting in a liberated and liberating manner (1 Cor. 15:51; Rom. 6:6; 8:23; Phil. 3:21). The spiritual-body is

[156] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 29.
[157] Boff cites Dostoievski. Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 73.
[158] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 34, 35.
[159] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 49.

wholesome because it can belong entirely to a God-filled reality (1 Cor. 15:42–44; 15:53). In the Pauline texts, the body-person represents a pending, not yet accepted invitation to join the Reign (1 Cor. 15:50–52). In light of Boff's understanding of personhood as the "consciousness of human matter," interactions that promote liberation on both the material and existential dimensions of life characterize the spiritual-body's new attitude. According to Boff, Paul believes the Resurrection has united the human soul with Christ's body, whose Spirit indwells the whole person now (1 Cor. 3:16). In other words, the Resurrection has sacralized the body, transforming the entire person into a living temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Paul had two criteria for the "recognition" of the presence of the spirit: grace, and a liberated attitude, which he described as love. The Reign is God's gift to all, but membership in it depends on a personal decision and courage. By God's grace, all of the human capacities have been maximized, but definitive transfiguration requires a corresponding response,[160] one that perforce interferes in the material, political, and environmental reality. Hence, the spiritual-body is both gift and action (1Cor. 15:51; Rom. 6:6; 8:23).

4. Conclusion: Dignity is a Corporeal Capacity

Irrespective of their materialistic temperament, the political cultures of the West strategically localize the human dignity in what they assume to be an immaterial sphere. Plato has divided the soul into three parts, each representing one capacity: *logos*, *eros*, and *thymos*. Thymos differs from reason and desire insofar as it is the segment of the soul in charge of making judgments of self-worth and pride, that is, "dignity."[161] Thymos is responsible for the

[160] Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 31.
[161] Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and The Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2018), 18.

desire to receive positive judgment. This ancient construct had its heyday among political thinkers during the Liberal revolutions, thanks to which it gained some degree of legal protection, especially after some of the most notable thinkers[162] concluded that pride or self-worth is part of "human nature." To some degree, their conclusion implies Plato's assumption that dignity belongs to thymos, which is an integral element of the soul. Today, the prominent political philosopher Francis Fukuyama confirms that the soul (or "inner self," as the secular sensibility prefers to call it) is the "basis" of dignity[163] as long as it seeks external validation. Positive assessment of one's person can generate pride and satisfaction, while negative valuation can lead to anger and shame. For example, an offense committed against somebody's identity is considered an illegal attack on their self-worth, pride, and dignity, and it violates the integrity of that person's soul. Both in political thought and in law, dignity continues to be understood primarily as a matter of the soul.

Yet we also feel indignation in situations that *a priori* involve more than self-worth and pride, as when we witness episodes of police brutality or sexual harassment against other people. On certain occasions, the citizens of a powerful country can even experience indignation when their leaders and supporters invade, dominate, and spoliate other nations. In such types of defilement, our own intrinsic and immaterial human worth, pride, and identity are not directly at stake, and yet our dignity can still be profoundly wounded. Why?

My constructive interpretation of Gebara's anthropology and Boff's Christology suggests that dignity "happens" between human bodies (full persons) which are existentially and materially interconnected. It is the body, rather than the soul, that is the "compass" or measure of

[162] For example, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.
[163] Fukuyama, *Identity*, 10.

dignity. For Gebara, the body signifies the particular ways in which humans exist, "in relation." The person exists relationally and the ethical statuses of each of those relations can be modified in an ongoing way by the small but meaningful gestures of salvation that the body enacts. Provided that such gestures do transfigure the very interactions that form an actual person, the body's quotidian "salvific" acts can momentarily modify itself. In other words, the body-person has the capacity to modify the body-existence through its interactions with other persons. For Gebara, such modifications represent a type of resurrection. In a sense, the body-as-full-person "resurrects" itself, and other bodies, through daily acts of justice, compassion, and real kindness. Consequently, it is the existential and material "indicator" of dignity— "existential" and "material" to the degree to which dignity can alter its agent's mode of existence in the material reality.

In my interpretation of Boff's cosmological Christology, the soul is a reflection of the body's enhanced capacities, including the aptitude to care for the dignity of life, which presumes self-consciousness. Physically and evolutionarily, both the body and the soul aspects of personhood symbolize the self-organizing interactions between the particles and waves that compose human matter. Symbolically, though, the soul is the "consciousness of human matter," a set of physical, cognitive, and spiritual attributes that belong to the body. In the Bible, the body represents the whole person, the soul symbolizes the body's self-consciousness, and the spiritual-body a mode of living that has corporal and existential implications. In Boff's view, the Resurrection has maximized all the physical, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual capacities, enabling everybody to realize them continuously in ways that can fulfill humanity's vocation for liberation. Symbolically, thereby, the soul is a corporeal reflection of human capacities. As such, it cannot be the "seat" of dignity, as Plato thought.

We can now tentatively answer the chapter's guiding questions by suggesting that an attitude of dignity transforms the body (person) into a spiritual-body. An attitude is a spiritual, emotional, mental, and/or physical position with regard to a given fact or state. Often, it is assumed for a particular intent. For example, a defensive position is commonly assumed whenever a person perceives an imminent menace to their bodily and mental integrity. A position that is repeatedly assumed by someone for a particular purpose[164] presumes the capacities to perceive, discern, decide, and act or respond. Thus, an "attitude" of dignity presumes the "capacity" to assume such a position. In this sense, we can say that dignity is both an "attitude" and a "capacity." Since it is assumed (an attitude) and enacted (a capacity) by the body-person, we can conclude that it is a capacity of the body. Yet, as both "attitude" and "capacity," dignity is neither a status, nor can it be "enjoyed" factually, nor can it be possessed, owned, and used, for it is not an object; nor is it a no-thing, since it does exist factually and indicates the way in which a spiritual-body lives its relations.

In his commentary on Corinthians, Boff synthetizes Paul's notion of spiritual-body by saying that it typifies the realization of all virtuousness.[165] Presumably, it characterizes the plenitude of all of the human capacities to act virtuously. Paul understands that the gifts of the Spirit are a way of witnessing to the presence of the Risen Jesus in the bodies of his followers (Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 14:14–16; 2:4f; Gal 3:5). The capacities to prophesy, speak in tongues, heal, and perform other miracles are, for Paul, perceptible signs of the Spirit's indwelling in the bodies of the Christians (1 Cor. 12; 14). However, the gifts of faith and hope are the paramount signs of

[164] My definition is inspired by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary's. Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, "Attitude," accessed October 1, 2023. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/attitude.
[165] Leonardo Boff, *Coríntios* (Rio de Janeiro: 1999), 16.

becoming a spiritual-body (2 Cor. 4:13). The follower receives faith and hope from the Spirit's indwelling the renewed body-person (Gal. 5:5).

Because of their faith and hope, the body-person serves God by means of true, liberating love. Following Paul's view, the spiritual-body shows both the realized capacity to give oneself beneficially to others in need and a correspondent attitude. In sum, the spiritual-body is someone who intentionally and recurrently assumes a certain position in face of a given fact. The spiritual-body can assume such a position—show such "attitude"—because they have a particular capacity, namely, the capacity of "doing dignity," so to speak, to affirm human dignity with concrete action.

In Boff's words, such a new person "transcends" their "immanent" individualism in their acts of compassionate and liberating love. Hence, becoming a spiritual-body entails participating in a grand process of personalization,[166] which emphasizes an attitude of care for the wellbeing of whoever occupies the lowest positions in the economic and social pyramid. The Resurrection is a universal promise, since everybody is potentially a spiritual-body (but also a "lived reality").

As each one repeatedly assumes a dignity "attitude," a spiritual-body begins to comprehend the world through the lens of responsibility, possibly conceiving it as a reflection of their own choices. For Boff, the Resurrection has inverted the classical ethical order, emphasizing a critical and proactive approach to the human capacities and virtues, in lieu of stressing reaction, retribution, and restoration. He quotes the Brazilian theologian Carlos Mester:

> "if there are evildoers, then examine your conscience: you have closed your heart and did not help them grow… the misery of the world is no longer an excuse, nor a justification to escape, but an accusation against oneself. You cannot judge poverty, [rather] it is poverty which actually judges you and your system; it allows you to see your flaws."[167]

[166] Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 182; 183.
[167] My free translation. Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador*, 57–58.

For the virtuous, who actively respond to the misery of the world, poverty and other types of social domination occur because of humanity, provided the distinction between goodness and evil has become a matter of practical conscience. In the final analysis, the human reality is the fruit of two basic inclinations that indwell everybody: one's courage to give a positive response to poverty and humiliation, and one's fear and opportune omission.

In short, *soma pneumatikus* is a model of a dignity-oriented personhood—a body that interacts and does so in an increasingly conscious and liberated manner. The newly assumed attitude is not supra-human, since the spiritual-body is corporally identical with the body-person, although they are not existentially identical.[168] Their corporal equivalence does not signify material equivalence either. The body and the soul are not a matter, either biblically or physically. In fact, no endeavor can "unite" someone's body and soul, since there are no such things. If the body is the entire person, and the soul is too, then the body and the soul must be the same. Still, presuming we can speak of them figuratively, as different aspects of the person, they must form a duality rather than a dualism, and the spiritual-person symbolizes a spiritual and evolutive achievement of the body. Such attainment has immediate corporeal outcomes that are perceptible in interpersonal contacts and overall disposition towards other bodies. The more the body-person is open to receive the Spirit, the more they live in a liberated way, defending and increasing the dignity of the poor and the Earth. In this sense, dignity is a liberating attitude and capacity.

Hence, dignity has direct material implications, since it can affect a society's economic organization. The access to capital and the other means of production can profoundly affect interpersonal and social interactions and vice versa. The political economy affects human bodies

[168] Boff, *A Ressurreição de Cristo*, 104–105.

at the lowest level of their material and spiritual existence. It undoubtedly affects the entire person, since its institutions stipulate specific modes of interaction that function in order to guarantee the expected results of some underlying ideology. Political-economic values and institutions can both incentivize and discourage a people's capacity to envision a liberated future, and to develop a liberating culture. The economic relations and material organization of a society together participate in the formation of the ideological character of a culture, its political inclinations, and "superstructure;" they can determine and enact specific notions of justice, for example, and control the instruments that generate the common wellbeing, like tax and labor policies. Since it substantially interferes in interpersonal relations, the material organization can control a society's culturally accepted views of personhood too.

In the Brazilian case, a particularly hierarchical culture dictates who deserves to live with dignity, and how much of it each one can have; its values legitimate and perpetuate the preexisting hierarchical economic relations. Since it monopolizes the land, water, oil, gas, the financial market, knowledge of production, media, and government, a small elite arbitrarily stipulates the general terms for participation in the decision-making processes that involve the common or communal societal wellbeing. Capitalism produces political and economic alienation through hierarchical values which have become so ingrained in Brazilian society and culture since colonization. The economic exploitation they facilitate is, for example, ordinarily manifested in the formats of hunger and violence, which people feel in their humiliated bodies.

Since dignity has direct material implications, the human bodies who create the conditions for a dignified existence can tell us where their dignity is.

Chapter 4

Intrinsic and Dialogical Dignity:
The Divine Presence Reflected Between Two Human Persons and the Dialogical Renewal

So far, we have explored the "why," the "what," and the "who" of human dignity in Brazil. In the first chapter, I sought a theological answer to the question, "Why there is a gap in dignity?" By registering the complicity of Aristotelean-Thomistic dualism in the foundation of Brazil's hierarchical culture, I claimed that the dignity assigned to particular persons is in fact proportional to their social and economic status (rather than to their dignity as children of God). A discrepancy in the assumed metaphysical values of the body and the soul reinforces social and economic hierarchies. In the second chapter, I outlined a response to the question, "What is human dignity for people who live without it?" For Black and poor Brazilians, I claimed, it is a redemptive and rebellious act that generates or increases their communal and individual wellbeing. The third chapter's central question was, "What is a human person who affirms dignity with action?" In my reply, I delineated a dignity-oriented personhood in which the body represents the total of humans' existence, and the soul is a set of capacities that belong to the body. With my Black and action-centered view of dignity I have posited a corporeal and soul-full personhood. Rather than a hierarchy, the two aspects of the one and same person form a dialectic; rather than a dualism, they form a duality. As a person affirms dignity with action, the dialectic intensifies, and the person gradually becomes a "spiritual-body."

With all that in mind, in this chapter I ask: "Where is human dignity located?" Once again, I seek and examine it in the world of human-human interactions, instead of in the confines of doctrine and pure theory. My search assumes the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's twofold

view. Basically, I claim that there are two types of dignity, depending on how we encounter one another: in pure relation, it is a God-given, innate, and intrinsic attribute that can be perceived in the interpersonal space where the divine presence manifests. In instrumental relations, dignity becomes relative and extrinsic. Nevertheless, two people can dialogically renew its "lost" "intrinsic-ness" through love and dialogue. Because this renewal requires only a low level of reciprocity and no presence, I suggest that its locus lies in the dynamics of dialogue, in which the role of the soul-aspect of personhood is more prominent.

On the other hand, the first type, which I call "intrinsic dignity," is reflected "inter-corporally." That is, an intrinsic dignity can be acknowledged in the physical space that is formed between two persons when they reciprocally confirm each other's full and individuated humanity.[1] I propose that its mutual acknowledgment is facilitated by the immediately prior reception of a divine "meaning." As Buber explains, when two persons say "Thou" to one another, they become present and receive a certain "meaning," a "presence as strength, in the[ir] being." Treated as a Thou, the other is not subject to my objectification and control, for she or he is present to me, and God's presence is reflected between us. Also, the role of the body-aspect of personhood is vital in the Thou moment, since the "whole speaking human body[ies]" meet with a certain "bodily attitude and action."[2]

Nevertheless, intrinsic dignity is evanescent. However transformative the reception of "meaning" might be, it becomes an object as soon as the participants step out of pure relation.[3] Since the received "meaning" facilitates its co-acknowledgment, dignity likewise tends to

[1] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* 2nd ed. trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner, 1970), 69, 81.
[2] Martin Buber, "Symbolic and Sacramental Existence," in *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1960), 157–58, 162.
[3] Buber, *I and Thou*, 63, 68–69.

become relative in the sphere of instrumental relations. It turns into one value among other values, and thus becomes fungible and subject to qualification, measurement, comparison, and even manipulation. Yet, Buber consoles us: once the Thou moment has passed, something of the received meaning nevertheless stays in the "being" of the participants, calling them to put it into practice in the world.[4] Likewise, I postulate, their memory of each other's intrinsic dignity, which by now has become relative and extrinsic, remains alive, and calls them to "restore" it. One never leaves pure relation the same as one enters it, for a divine voice keeps as it were whispering in one's ear reminders to enhance the other's dignity in whatever way necessary. In Buber's words, the Thou incumbers the participants with the task of "actualizing God in the world."

The central point of this chapter is that the human restoration of the "intrinsic-ness" of dignity is a way to "actualize God in the world." In other words, the enactment of meaning is a dignity-restoring movement. As such, it belongs in the realm of instrumental relations and can be achieved through dialogue. Hence, a "dialogical dignity" is in fact the product of the human recovery of the original dignity's intrinsic quality. Since instrumental relations lack the full reciprocity and "presentness" of pure relation, dialogical dignity is not necessarily perceived in the inter-corporal space that exists between two persons. Rather, it involves more prominently the human capacities entailed in the soul-aspect of personhood, precisely because they are more intimately involved in the enactment of the sacred "meaning."

In "It" or "instrumental" interactions, humans adopt a pragmatic orientation, consequently seeing one another as objects with the potential to serve in their individual pursuits. "It relations" are ruled by a logic of utility and are aimed at satisfying our need for security. It is

[4] To "actualize God in the world." Buber, *I and Thou*, 163–64.

the realm of objectification, quantification, qualification, comparison, and use. In this realm, we are never whole and only engage at the lowest levels of presence and mutuality.[5] Yet, instrumental relations are absolutely necessary for the organization of life.[6] They reflect two underlying principles of Buber's philosophy of dialogue: First, that we naturally crave predictability and seek to obtain a sense of control over our own destiny, not to mention the desire to meddle in our neighbor's fate. Not only do predictability and a sense of control provide the stability that is cardinal for social life; they are also indispensable for Thou relations, since they reveal the truth of otherness. The second principle is individuation, which affirms a "primordial distance"[7] between object and subject. It assumes that the constraints of time and space allow for the cognition of individual objects, multiplicity, and causality.[8] Through such distance we realize the truth of otherness, which is a precondition for both personal formation and Thou relations.

In a hierarchical culture like Brazil's, the natural need for security and individuation can nevertheless promote abuses. In fact, the undercurrents of power that feed socially hierarchical interactions can interfere with the purpose of instrumental relations. Inasmuch as they operate within a fundamentally hierarchical frame, they may incorporate the ruling logic of disparity,[9] and become instrumental for the preestablished social forces. Familial, communal, institutional, work, religious, and political interactions, for example, are *a priori* instrumental because they are meant to provide security and some measure of social stability. In Brazil, however, they can

[5] Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.
[6] Buber, *I and Thou*, 85.
[7] Martin Buber, "Distance and Relation," in *The Knowledge of Man: A Philosophy of the Interhuman*, trans. Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 59–71.
[8] Martin Buber, "Dialogue," in *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino, 2014), 4, 12.
[9] As I claim in chapter one.

actually grant an inordinate amount of power to those who retain the majority of the wealth and political influence. Operating in a culture of hierarchies, instrumental relations may eventually reinforce the economic and social disparities.

Dialogue can facilitate the retrieval of intrinsic dignity, given that it operates with a different logic and emerges within the instrumental sphere. Here, I assume Paul Mendes-Flohr's concept: that dialogue is "a relation one enters into by an existential decision and commitment to realize a truth that is not contained by conceptual knowledge of the phenomenal world."[10] There are at least two kinds of dialogue, "I-Thou" and "I-It."[11] The enactment of meaning and the restoration of dignity happen in the I-It kind, which does not require that the same people reengage. On the same day, I can have a "I-Thou" encounter with a person, and later, enter into an "I-It" dialogue with someone else. In the second encounter, I can strive to affirm the intrinsic dignity of my new interlocutor by means of re-enacting the prior and mutual acknowledgment that happened in the first encounter.

For sure, the renewal of intrinsic dignity is an arduous task, since "It" relations lack reciprocity. Because of the underlying logic of disparity that they tend to incorporate, the mission can be particularly hard for individuals who belong to different social strata. However, love has the capacity to enable a genuine "I-It" dialogue. Love can momentarily reduce the factual disparity of dignity because it is the most perfect articulation of dialogue, and the basic responsiveness that grounds one's "existential decision and commitment" to actualize meaning.

[10] Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Martin Buber's Conception of the Centre and Social Renewal" *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 18, No. 1 (June 1976): 17–26.
[11] Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Aporiae of Dialogue: Reflections on Martin Buber's Non-Noetic Conception of Faith," *Intersubjectivité et Théologie Philosophique: Textes Réunis par Marco M. Olivetti*, Archivio di Filosofia 69 (2001), 686.

Just as intrinsic dignity is perceptible when two persons are (corporally) present to one another, so also two persons can act to renew its intrinsic-ness through dialogue. Again, a "dialogical dignity" is more prominently "achieved" through the abilities associated with the soul-aspect, which has an important role in instrumental relations, since these do not imply the mutual and physical presence of pure relation.

According to the type of relation—whether it is pure or instrumental—the two aspects of personhood can be in a dualist or a dialectic (merely dual) relationship. As I will discuss below, a duality does not necessarily imply a dualism, and it is essential for personhood development. In the "I-Thou" moment, the spiritual and the physical spheres are absolutely interdependent and complementary, so the body- and the soul-aspects form a dialectic. In other words, the two facets of one and same person become more integrated. They may always speak in unison, but when we are mutually present, in pure relation, they become even more indistinguishable from one another. Presence implicates an enhancement in personal "integration" because the *Shekhinah* dwells among actual persons and wishes to reunite them: a divine Presence is refracted between the participants of pure relation.[12] Thus, the "place" of intrinsic dignity is "corporeal" in an interpersonal, physical, and spiritual sense. On the other hand, the development of dialogical dignity, in the "I-It" sphere, does not require the same level of integration between the two aspects of personhood. Instead, we may notice a functional duality. As I will argue below, this duality is "functional" because it is instrumental to the development of the "I" (person) but ultimately irreal. Occasionally, our bodily life seems to predominate. At other times, it is the range of capacities called "soul" that moves us forward. Always, they are two interdependent

[12] Buber, "Dialogue," 4, 17, 34; Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 143, n.34.

facets of the same being, but not always do we realize their unity and complementarity, as in the moment of pure relation.

Buber never encountered Brazil. Even if he had done so, the reality he would have encountered there would have been significantly different from the one in which most Brazilians live now. Being deeply familiar with the material and spiritual humiliations of the lowest of another society takes considerable investment of time. In order to "Braziliarize" Buber's two-fold frame, I join to it Ivone Gebara's notion of "bodily relatedness," Leonardo Boff's dialogical understanding of love, and Cleusa Caldeira's constructive interpretation of the dialectic between erotic and agapeic love in the Sons of Songs.

All four authors share four theological-anthropological premises: that the human encounter with God starts in actual human-human encounters; that human interaction provides a wellspring of analogies that help us imagine the human-God relation;[13] that of the three spheres of relations that Buber recognizes—nature, spirit, and community—community is the "real bearer" of relation, the "place" where actual persons try to live with dignity; and that the body and the soul are united.

In the first section that follows, a section dedicated to intrinsic dignity, Gebara's conviction that a "bodily relatedness" grounds human reality situates the reception of "meaning" in physical space. Joined together, Gebara's and Buber's ideas indicate that a divine meaning can be divinely and gratuitously given in the interpersonal space between the participants' bodies. Such meaning, I claim, encourages them to acknowledge mutually their intrinsic dignity.

The second section introduces my notion of "dialogical dignity," which focuses on the role of human love and dialogue in the renewal of intrinsic dignity. Although the revealed

[13] "The relation to a human being is the proper metaphor for relation to God." Buber, *I and Thou*, 151.

meaning gives the participants a "presence as strength," only through love can they enter into a specific type of dialogue which enables the enactment of meaning in a hierarchical society. Assuming that genuine dialogue incorporates the interlocutors' objective particularities, I compare Buber's "existential" view of love with Boff's Christological and liberation-driven understanding. For Buber, love is a basic responsiveness, indeed, a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of the other. Boff, on the other hand, emphasizes pathos and eros, both conceived as a form of oblation. Since love is "giving" and "accepting the other," he suggests, our fundamental vocation is "caring." Taking care of one another is therefore a positive response to a loving God, but the most perfect answer is still the one that Jesus has given: we must first attend to the socially vulnerable. Although this responsiveness-vocation is what drives or moves the entire person, its effectiveness depends primarily on the soul's capacity for dialogue.

In the third section, I claim that the body- and the soul-aspects can occasionally and temporarily form a duality in the "It" sphere, but that they always comprise a dialectic in the "Thou." Then, I illustrate their seeming inter-complementarity in the It-world using Caldeira's black-feminist translation and interpretation of Songs 1:5–6. For her, the divine revelation *is* sensuously communicated because eroticism participates in all spheres of life. Caldeira is a Bible scholar and the Bible sometimes separates the body and the soul. Caldeira's reading nevertheless challenges the general, traditionalist, dualist, allegorical, and de-sensualizing reading of the Songs, which negates the pervasiveness of erotic love. In particular, it denigrates Black women's dignity by denying the intrinsic and sacred beauty of their bodies. The verses of Songs 1:5–6 are particularly meaningful because they have likely been authored by an African woman who lived in the patriarchal milieu of post-exilic Israel. Speaking to other women, she declares her social worth and self-love, and grounds them in her ancestry, her body's blackness, and her physical

beauty. Having affirmed her divinely given and "bodily" Black dignity, she then and only then declares her soul's capacity to love somebody else. Agapeic and erotic love are inter-complementary precisely because the body and the soul are two aspects of the one and same person.

A preliminary word about how each author approaches the problem of dualism is imperative at this point. Body-soul dualism has been so deeply ingrained in theology that it is barely possible to speak about the unity of the person without unintentionally separating the two aspects of personhood. Our theological-anthropological vocabulary, for example, has been dualist since the times when the apostles wrote their testaments in Koine Greek. The lingua franca of Jesus's and the Apostle's time was the same of the pioneer dualists, such as Plato and Aristotle. Let it be clear then that although dualism has its theoretical value and it remains decidedly present in virtually all theological traditions to this day, I do not accept the independent existence of two different beings, substances, or things, one called "body" (matter), the other called "soul" (form). Rather, as I have claimed in chapter one, they are abstractions and their theoretical separation has caused concrete harm to poor and colored Brazilians. Instead of the common division, I have claimed in chapter three that the soul is a set of capacities that belong to the body, which is how we exist, in the totality of relations. In this way, the body can function as a fundamental key to theological reflection on the whole of the human existence, while the soul is the set of evolving abilities that has made our type of life possible across the ages. I have made that argument with the help of Gebara and Boff, who affirm that the body and the soul are actually one being, even though they, too, separate the two aspects in their respective analyses. We can say that their respective languages are "minimally dualist:" Boff believes that

the person has two aspects rather than two parts, while Gebara affirms the comprehensiveness of the body.

On the other hand, Buber's and Caldeira's positions can sometimes suggest that the body and the soul are two interdependent parts or elements of the person. Their understandings and respective vocabularies do contrast with Gebara's and Boff's "minimal dualism," for they do imply that the body and the soul can be considered two parts of personhood. For example, when Buber says "body," he really means the physical, material, fleshy, carnal, personal, mortal body, rather than some abstraction. The same is true for Caldeira. As for Gebara and Boff, they consider the "body" a basic principle of or comprehensive frame for their theological-anthropology, although they might occasionally refer to the physical body.

Once again, I side with Gebara and Buber on this matter. Thus, my present argument for the inter-corporeality of intrinsic dignity and its dialogical renewal does not imply or favor a possible hypostatization of the "body" and the "soul." Still, Buber's dialogical framework ("I-Thou") remains the steadfast underlying foundation of my twofold view of dignity elaborated in this chapter. Also, even though I try to avoid the dualist overtones of Caldeira's exegesis, I admit that her dialectical view of erotic and agapeic love can start a fruitful conversation with Buber's perspective. In sum, I can only espouse Buber's and Caldeira's "moderate dualism" to the degree to which their respective ideas advance my claim, namely that dignity can be perceived inter-corporeally and dialogically. Thus, since my own constructive articulation of their ideas touches on their relative hypostatization, here and there it may likewise communicate a false sense of separation. In other words, a genuine engagement with their important ideas demands space for their moderately dualist language in my own non-dualistic construal; the way toward a non-dualistic anthropology starts at the end of dualism.

I draw inspiration from Paul Ricœur's "dialectical hermeneutics" in my constructive interpretation of the "places" of dignity.[14] For him, the study of seeming opposites can lead to the conclusion that they are in fact complementary poles, rather than antagonists. In his numerous analyses of pairs—for example, oneself and another, history and truth, and time and narrative—Ricœur frequently seeks a rigorous alternative to the modern method that uses the thesis-antitheses-synthesis construct as the solution to all dialects. The same principle applies to my understanding of the relation between the two aspects of personhood in relation to dignity: they neither stand in opposition to one another nor do they form a synthesis. Rather, they can only be posited and analyzed in an ever-shifting relation to one another. Likewise, the places of dignity do not correspond to the assumed separate "locations" of the body and the soul. Instead, just as intrinsic and dialogical dignity are in relation to one another, so too are their "locations." Likewise, Ricœur's interpretative principle applies to my understanding of Buber's view of the self and the other, who are nonetheless separated by otherness.[15] For Buber, who never conflates the two, the "I" and the "Thou" exist because of one another. As I will propose, a dialogical dignity assumes a prior and intrinsic dignity, which assumes the possibility of being renewed through dialogue. In addition, Ricœur recognizes that interdependence, complementarity, and ambiguity are essential "categories" of all religious discourse.[16] My articulation of historically turbid notions such as "dignity," and of ambiguous others, like "relation," benefits from his hermeneutical plasticity.

[14] I accept David Tracy's understanding that the dialectic is the main organizing logic of Paul Ricoeur's thought and also his major hermeneutical device. Tracy, *Fragments*, 221 electronic edition.
[15] They form a "free polarity." Rivka Horwitz, *Buber's Way to 'I and Thou:' The Development of Martin Buber's Thought and His 'Religion as Presence' Lectures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 76.
[16] Again, this is David Tracy's understanding.

Ricœur's openness to different semantic and religious environments is also helpful in my engagement with the texts. Theological works demand of their readers an immersion in the author's world of meaning, which can stimulate our intellectual imagination. My immersion in Buber's *I and Thou,* Gebara's *Longing for Running for Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation,* Boff's Christology of liberation, and Caldeira's black-feminist exegesis hints that both Jewish and Christian symbols participate in my search for the place of dignity.

However helpful it is in my readings of theological-anthropology and religious symbolism, Ricœur's "dialectical hermeneutics" does not ground my argument in this chapter. Instead, it is Buber's dialogue that underpins my argument on the twofold place of dignity. Upon it, I base the three topical conversations that compose each of the following segments. They are organized by a rationale of "complementarity" in which one author's ideas can either restrain or potentialize the other's in a constructive manner. In section one, Buber's sacramental view of the I-Thou relation benefits from the expansive materiality of Gebara's corporeal "relatedness." If a divine presence is refracted in pure relation (Buber), it must be perceptible in the interpersonal space formed by the bodily presence of the participants of relation (Gebara). In section two, I conclude that love grounds the dialogical renewal of dignity because it is the medium of divine revelation or "meaning" (Buber) and it can undercut social hierarchies (Boff). Hence, love can sustain a type of dialogue through which the participants can renew their dignity in instrumental relations. In the third section, Caldeira's interpretation of Song of Songs 1:5–6 exemplifies Buber's dialectical view of erotic and agapeic love.

1. Intrinsic Dignity: The Divine Presence Reflected Between Two Human Bodies

In this section, I make two correlated claims: that an unknowable but embraceable meaning facilitates the mutual acknowledgment of an intrinsic human dignity, in the Thou relation; and, that such acknowledgment is made possible by the divine presence manifested between the participants.

"The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude,"[17] is *I and Thou*'s opening message. The repeated insight,[18] which resounds like a refrain in Buber's classic, evokes the basic "twofoldness" of human existence. The two basic attitudes with which a human being can address another form two dichotomous but homologous modes of relation.[19]

In the first type, the participants "confirm" each other's humanity, in their particularity, wholeness,[20] and intrinsic dignity.[21] In the second, they engage pragmatically and are prone to treat one another as objects. Buber believes that the most fundamental human need is dual: to have one's being affirmed by the other and to somehow exist in the other's being.[22] Deep down, we always need and look for a sign of the other's unconstrained acceptance of our unobjectified and integral humanity. Such need can be mutually and momentarily satisfied in Thou relations, the first type. Accordingly, the "primary action" or "basic movement" is, for Buber, saying "Thou" or "Here I am"[23]; that is, positively and wholesomely responding to the other's presence.[24]

---

[17] Buber, *I and Thou*, 53.
[18] Buber, *I and Thou*, 82.
[19] For Buber, an attitude is a fundamental mode of self-expression and activity. Robert E. Wood, *Martin Buber's Ontology: An Analysis of I and Thou* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 40; For the I-Thou and I-It homology, see Mendes-Flohr, "The Aporiae of Dialogue," 689.
[20] "Buber, "What is Man?," *Between Man and Man*, 168; Martin Buber, "The Way of Man," in *Hasidism and Modern Man* trans. Maurice Friedman (Atlantic Highlights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1988), 148–51.
[21] "…as a Thou each being enjoys an intrinsic dignity." Mendes-Flohr, "The Aporiae of Dialogue," 691.
[22] Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man: A Philosophy of the Interhuman*, trans. Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith, ed. Maurice Friedman (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 71.
[23] Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, 69.
[24] Martin Buber, "The Basic Movement," in *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings* ed. Asher D. Biemann (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 197, 200.

Buber tells us that when two persons stand in reciprocity and are fully present, they enter into "pure relation." In such a relationship of pure relation, they can receive a "something More in his [their] being." The fully present participants receive a "meaning" which is ultimately "unknowable," in the biblical and relational sense. Yet, this unutterable meaning can be felt as a "strength," and it must be "put to the proof in action."[25] One confronts another by having one's person physically, genuinely, and fully present to another.[26] There is no presence when one's mind is busy ruminating on something else. Because the "primary word" can only be spoken with one's full being, the "meaning" that the Thou bestows is received by the totality of one's person.

Buber warns us that this meaning, which "increases" the participant's being, though "neither interpretable nor translatable" is nevertheless embraceable. Even though we cannot define it, Buber describes it as a "presence as strength."[27] As such, it is not a thing or an object; rather, it simply happens. Likewise, it cannot be possessed and manipulated, but only perceived or ignored, welcomed or rejected, appreciated or confronted, and, above all, remembered and reenacted. According to Buber, this meaning-presence-strength, which cannot be isolated from its perceiving moment, does confront our bodily and spiritual senses. Its "contentlessness" does not prevent it from being "said into my [our] very life."[28] Buber casts a light on a "something" that exists, in our very physical and material reality, irrespective of its philosophical elusiveness and uncertain nature.

[25] "…what he receives is not a 'content' but a presence, a presence as strength." Buber, *I and Thou*, 158–60; 163.
[26] Wood, *Martin Buber's Ontology*, 65.
[27] Buber, *I and Thou*, 158, 142.
[28] Buber, "Dialogue," 12.

The effects that the reception of meaning produces in the person confirm its power: it gives a "something More in the being." Differently said, the meaning is verifiable in life transformations. Buber adds that although its perception is transient, it is permanently received into one's life. It can particularly enhance one's understanding of what it means to be "reciprocally" human. Among its effects is a conviction that one's humanity depends on one's manifest acknowledgment of the humanity of the other; and one's acknowledgment that the word "humanity" actually signifies very little without the other's wholesome and mutual assent. After such realization, one is no longer "cut off," isolated, or alienated.[29] For Buber, by the way, this sense of belonging is so authentic that a certain confidence results.

The "strength in the being" also "prepares" the participants for the co-realization of their mutual dignity. I cannot truly grasp my own dignity without the other's acknowledgment of my humanity, and without realizing her or his own first. In the mutuality of recognition resides a certain openness to that which is intrinsically valuable or truly significant. The mutuality which forms pure relation is grounded in the participants' decision to face one another's "real" humanity, in Buber's words. Their intrinsic dignity reflects the invaluable humans they are, in their particularity and entirety.[30]

Because the confirmation of intrinsic dignity is immediately subsequent to the reception of meaning, its "location" is to be sought in the interpersonal space of pure relation. Buber believes that the meaning-presence is sacramentally communicated.[31] That communication, which is not necessarily verbal, is however always physically mediated, and elicited by a "basic movement." Buber refers to an attitude which entails a bodily, physical movement, for the act

[29] Horwitz, *Buber's Way to I and Thou*, 114–15.
[30] Buber, *I and Thou*, 90.
[31] Buber, *I and Thou*, 16.

which he describes is performed by one's full person[32]—as in Buber's non-allegorical remark, "I perceive the other 'with every pore of my body' because the 'I' who is present is never an abstraction."[33] Two actual, bodily persons communicate and receive something about their sacred and God-shaped selves. The "meaning" is so tangible and real that one "could sooner doubt his [their] body and bodily perceptions than the meaning."[34] Indeed, Buber considers a sacrament a "binding of [divine] meaning to the body,"[35] and only the actual, living but mortal, body can be a symbol of the Sacred in human form.[36] Pure relation is the sacramental gesture *par excellence*, as it implies a divine presence reflected between two "whole speaking human body[ies]."[37] In this way, the unknowable but embraceable meaning is "sacramentally" given in the interpersonal space between them, where the divine presence manifests.

In a Buberian sense, "presence" is that which is most actual; it implies a "lived" moment that cannot be replaced by the past or the future, and a "reality" that cannot be superseded by another.[38] Perhaps, presence can be described phenomenologically as an atypically heightened concentration of physicality, temporality, and spirituality. It could otherwise be described as a grounding "eminence" or "accentuation" of life that is nevertheless absolutely normal, ordinary. For sure, it is most familiar to all, but it is also transformative.

---

[32] The said movement "is there to the very tension of the eyes' muscles and the very action of the foot as it walks." Buber, "The Basic Movement," 197.
[33] Buber, "Dialogue," 2, 27–28; Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation between Religion and Philosophy* (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 1999), 39.
[34] Horwitz, *Buber's Way to I and Thou*, 110.
[35] Martin Buber, "Symbolic and Sacramental Existence," in *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1960), 165.
[36] Sam Berrin Shonkoff, "Sacramental Existence: Embodiment in Martin Buber's Philosophical and Hasidic Writings," Ph.D. diss., (University of Chicago, 2018), 8, note 27.
[37] Martin Buber, "Symbolic and Sacramental Existence," 157–58, 162.
[38] Horwitz, *Buber's Way to I and Thou*, 20–21.

The Buberian "presence" is best understood in tandem with relationship. Simply said, one concept implies the other. When someone waits "over against us" for a response,[39] she or he aspires to become exclusive in our personal world, the center of our attention for a moment. My neighbor aspires to have her- or himself recognized and honored. In view of relationship, presence is the act of waiting for a confirmation "by means of which we are told that nevertheless there is meaning."[40] In the intensity and exclusiveness of presence, the objectifying, comparing, and qualifying trends of the "It" world temporarily cease; and one's person becomes fully integrated.

Real religion is for Buber a matter of revelation, and revelation is nothing but pure presence, which implies relation. A third One is indirectly present whenever two humans meet with reciprocity. Whenever one is fully present to another, one responds to God's address as well.[41] Buber believes in a ubiquitous and eternal God, but the Eternal-Omni-Present can only be addressed by meeting the finite, human Thou. Buber's entire philosophy of dialogue hinges upon his insight that relation to God is intimately connected to our relation to the bodily neighbor. Although the Eternal Thou is always present, we can glimpse the refracted divine presence in human relation.[42]

Buber's insight confirms the old Hasidic conviction that the *Shekhinah* indwells between us, and not only within each one.[43] "Wheresoever they were exiled, the Shekhinah went with them," announces the Megillah.[44] Buber's idea that religion is basically presence, and presence's

[39] Mendes-Flohr, "Aporia of Dialogue," 239.
[40] Buber, "Dialogue," 13–14.
[41] Buber, *I and Thou*, 123.
[42] Buber, *I and Thou*, 65.
[43] Martin Buber, "Preface of 1923," 6 *apud* Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 143, n.34.
[44] *Talmud Megillah*, 29a.

foremost "site" is relation, resonates with the trust that the *Shekhinah* wants to reunite all that God has created. Indeed, the word "Shekinah" derives from the Hebrew verb "to dwell."[45] In Hebrew, a *shaken* is a Neighbor and, as such, she/he must be approached.[46] Humans are both cosmic (natural) and spiritual (holy) beings. A divine spark indwells each one, the exiled presence of God in the world. But, in pure relation, that presence is refracted in the "Between."

By inference, the "place" where the divine presence manifests must be the place where the divine meaning is received, and where dignity can be acknowledged. To be sure, to generalize such a place is an error; after all, it may only be identifiable in the actual event of relation, and by its participants. Still, Buber assures us that God is indirectly present in the interpersonal "space" that is formed during pure relation. Supposing that a presence "happens" in that space, which is both physical and spiritual, we can speak of a physical and spiritual "site." Buber calls this interpersonal space the "Between." In it, the sense neither receive the communicated "meaning" as purely objective evidence, nor does the soul embraced it only subjectively. Likewise, the entire person listens to and speaks in unison with the finite Thou. As I will discuss in the third section, although the body and the soul are merely two aspects of one and same being, on different occasions we can notice a difference in the intensity with which each of them represents our entire selves.

Buber avoids making exhaustive propositions regarding the nature of reality, both human and divine, which he approaches more as a humanist than as a religious sage. Ivone Gebara is also cautious. Like Buber, the Brazilian Catholic nun embraces a certain "ontological humility." For instance, she develops her theological-anthropology by exploring the basic insights derived

[45] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide For The Perplexed*, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover, 1956), 34.
[46] *Tractate Shabbat*, 30b.

from her personal "experience" and observations of relationships. Like Buber, Gebara's assumed indifference to matters of being leads her to opt for an alternative starting point: relation. However, within the world of relation, both of them feel free to formulate innovative and often sweeping propositions about the human reality. For instance, Buber believes that "all real living is meeting," and Gebara, that a "visceral and vital relatedness" grounds human existence.

Gebara believes in a foundational bodily relatedness and she does not reduce the "body" to its physical, material, anatomic existence. Rather, according to her, since our being is "anchored in the corporeality of the flesh," we inevitably exist in and because of a web of vital relationships. Biological life has formed out of the infinite contacts that generate, reproduce, and maintain all bodies: "we are the relationships that constitute ourselves." Not only the physical depends on such vital links, which are biological and social at one and the same time; it is their totality. The body is the totality of all of our relations. Such visceral interdependence is for Gebara the "underlying fabric" of reality,[47] and it constitutes our mode of existence. Assuming a holistic and bodily vitalism, Gebara assumes that a person always already exists in the other, to some degree and in a particular sense, precisely by virtue of this "relatedness." Hence, in her view, the relation between bodily beings is more than a revelatory phenomenon, as it is for Buber. Rather, irrespective of presence and mutuality, all beings are, essentially, bodies that necessarily exist in relation.

Building on her idea of bodily relatedness, Gebara sketches a peculiar theistic notion which has implications for her view of sacramentality. For her, if a "body" is the totality of its physical and non-physical relations, the totality of the interactions involving all beings form a

[47] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 84–85, 90.

"Sacred Body." Gebara resists the temptation to affirm some mystical "unity" behind this unfathomable entity.[48] Like Buber, she acknowledges otherness and believes that the idea of one encompassing "Sacred Body" preserves the individuality of each being. Instead, she claims that it is not a being in itself, but only the relationships that form them. Although she insists that it is not a representation of God,[49] she concedes that at times it does function as a divine being. For example, the human participation in the Sacred Body conditions and interferes in all modes of human interaction, our biological evolution, and the production of knowledge. Considering that the human and all the other species depend on it, it is not farfetched to assume that the Sacred Body functions as the "ground of being" in Gebara's theology, which takes "embodiment" to be the core truth of life.

Even though Gebara upholds otherness and individuality, God is not the Supreme Other for her. She maintains that God is a mystery that is nevertheless "sacramentally embodied" in the relations that constitute life.[50] Gebara's reconciling rationale becomes transparent at this point: we cannot resolutely affirm either the absolute otherness or the immanence of "something" that we cannot know. Like Buber, she believes that we cannot really know God, even thou God is always presence. Unlike Buber, she affirms a corporeal ubiquity of the divine presence, but not God's otherness. Therefore, Gebara's God is unknowable but "embodied," in the sense that the Sacred Body grounds all living bodies and embodiment is the most basic truth. In contrast, Buber's God is unknowable but "actualizable" through the life of dialogue.

Gebara believes that God is "sacramentally present" in all physical bodies because those bodies exist in vital relations that may or not be physical. Humans can perceive God's presence

[48] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, vi, 82.
[49] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 127.
[50] Gebara draws from McFague's panentheism. Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 53.

in the bodily relatedness that generates and nurtures all forms of life.[51] We can, she says, infer God's presence because the divine entanglement with creation is bodily. God's continuous presence can be "located" in the complex processes of life, which form individual bodies and the "Sacred Body." Buber would agree that the Eternal Thou is ubiquitous but disagree that either God or God's presence is embodied, at least in the sense that Gebara proposes. For Gebara, the divine presence "resides" in embodiment itself. Still, Buber's sacramental view of relation—the human temple of the divine presence—can benefit from Gebara's radically corporeal "relatedness." If a non-corporal divine presence can be glimpsed in pure relation, then God's reflection must be between the participant's bodies. From the viewpoint of Gebara's relatedness, Buber's "Between" is inter-corporeal.

Assuming, with Buber, that "real living is meeting," then pure relation involves two bodily persons, and a divine presence is reflected in the "Between;" and assuming, with Gebara, that a bodily "relatedness" grounds the human reality, as well as that God is "embodied" in relations, then we can conclude that "site" of the divine presence in pure relation is between the participants themselves. Given that meaning is received in the same (interpersonal) space, and that it facilitates the mutual acknowledgment of dignity, therefore the site of intrinsic dignity is inter-corporeal.

2. Dialogical Dignity: The Love-Enabled and Dialogical Renewal in Hierarchical Relations

In this section, I claim that the "intrinsic-ness," i.e., the intrinsic quality of dignity, can be recovered through a love-enabled dialogue, in the sphere of instrumental relations. "Dialogical

[51] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 123; 105.

dignity," as I call this type, is "located" in the dynamics of dialogue, and the capacities that we call "soul" have a prominent role in its development.

Once again, we assume Buber's maxim, that "the world is twofold according to the human attitude." The basic attitude of "turning to the other" forms the world of pure relation, a meta-ethical reality.[52] Roughly, "turning" can open up a more truthful and basic dimension of existence. In it, ethics is only second in importance to the sacred implications of relation. Although pure relation has plenty of ethical repercussions, the reception of a meaning which gives a "something More in the being"[53] is a transformative event. Buber refers to "something" that is more elementary than the human good, and that contains it. For example, he considers the recognition of another person's presence as being much more than a moral obligation or a civic duty: it is the "indispensable minimal of humanity."[54] Buber hopes that the act of "turning" can open one's physical-and-spiritual sight to this innermost problem of humanity:[55] treating the neighbor with the same dignity that we reserve for ourselves. In Brazil, the problem of humanity becomes manifest mainly in matters of economic and racial injustice: Why do so many people have to live without a "something" which is intrinsic to their persons?

There are no human hierarchies in pure relation. When I meet my neighbor as a Thou, I meet the real one who stands over against me, who confronts me with her/his scarred face, unfamiliar odor, worn clothes, and tangled speech, who brings me nothing but hidden frustration, duress, and an everlasting desire for community and plenitude. In Buber's words, her or his

[52] Mendes-Flohr, "The Aporiae of Dialogue."
[53] Buber, *I and Thou*, 157.
[54] Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Desert Within and Social Renewal: Martin Buber's Vision of Utopia," in *New Perspectives on Martin Buber*, ed. Michael Zank Religion in Philosophy and Theology 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 219.
[55] Martin Buber, "Reply to My Critics," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, The Library of Living Philosophers 12 (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967), 723.

"real" humanity becomes transparent to me. The perception of the human realness depends on the participant's reciprocity and the divine presence, which warrants no "hierarchy" between the participants. Regardless of their economic and social statuses, the recognition of the other's singular humanity is a threshold to the graceful and all-loving divine presence. In that reflected Light, the participants' dignities are "unequal" only regarding the particularities that make their bodies and souls unique—including their economic and social statuses. However, their dignities are equal in terms of their intrinsic-ness, innateness, and sacrality. In pure relation, they are not subject to measurement, only to recognition and appreciation. Yet, when we leave it, dignity becomes relative and extrinsic.

In contrast to "turning," the "bending back"[56] movement is natural to the sphere of instrumental relations. It does not necessarily denote individualism, conceit, or narcissism. A person who habitually bends back does not brag about their professional merits, moral rectitude, physical beauty, polished aesthetic taste, or spiritual gifts. Actually, said person may "bend back" and still perform good deeds, for their own sake, for example, by paying respect to all neighbors, abiding by the ideal of justice in one's daily dealings, giving to charity, supporting the socially vulnerable, and diligently fulfilling all other political, moral, social, professional, and familial obligations. Being good and bending back are not opposites.

Once again, Buber alludes to something that is more basic than a moral flaw: bending back means withdrawing from accepting into one's core another person in her/his human particularity.[57] It means walking away from an invitation to receive the neighbor's subjective and objective world into one's own and allow them to do the same for oneself. If "turning" is the

[56] Buber, *I and Thou,* 165; "Buber, "The Basic Movements," 198.
[57] Buber, "The Basic Movements," 198.

attitude that can form pure relation, bending back means prematurely "turning away" from it. Also, such avoidance implies neglecting one's own need for community and capacity for responsiveness. Hence, this basic movement represents an unresponsiveness, instead of moral irresponsibility or evilness; it is an existential omission with material and interpersonal implications.

By bending back we remain in the "It world," which is governed by utility and the coordination of things in time and space.[58] In the comfort of our "backward-bending," we keep at bay the risks entailed in pure relation,[59] consequently facing the other as a value-neutral object in our individual pursuits. Yet, "It"-relations are necessary. Because they can provide some stability and predictability, they fulfill an important function in the organization of life. Think, for instance, of the stabilizing function of the rule of law, culture, and institutionalized religion in the resolution of conflicts, the processes of identity formation, and the general orientation of familial and personal life. Without instrumental relations, communal life would be impossible because the exchange of services, goods, and favors, as well as the management of power, require a minimum of predictability.

However, since "all real living is meeting," the evasion of pure relation represents a refusal to engage in the primordial expression of "reality." Real life is for Buber the "life of dialogue," meaning, of genuine encounter: "Human life and humanity come into being in genuine meetings."[60] But "real" people are defective and their presence defies our false and individualistic sense of contentment. The option always to bend back into one's comfort zone

[58] Buber, "Dialogue," 12, 4.
[59] Buber, "Distance and Relation," 59–71.
[60] Buber, *The Martin Buber Reader*, 211.

and individualism has a high cost. When I dismiss or ignore my neighbor's "real" humanity, both objective and subjective, the "essence of reality beings to disintegrate."[61]

In instrumental relations, I miss my neighbor's intrinsic dignity because I miss her or his particularities. In other words, since I miss the intrinsic-ness of her or his humanity, I also miss her or his intrinsic human dignity. Thus, I also miss my own. After all, pure "relation is reciprocity."[62]

A similar double loss takes place when pure relation ends. By stepping out of it, which is a natural movement, our dignity becomes objectified. Rather than being missed entirely, the intrinsic dignity becomes extrinsic. Because all humans desire to "have" God continuously, in time and space,[63] we immediately transform the divine presence (which was actual during pure relation) into a memory, object, idea, or thing. Likewise, when the Thou moment ceases, the unknowable yet performable "meaning"[64] soon becomes an object. The revealed "meaning" perforce turns into a thing among other things; in the world of instrumental relations, it becomes relative and fungible, subject to examination, comparison, qualification, measurement, and manipulation. The same happens to the intrinsic dignity that the participants had recognized. That which has just been mutually acknowledged and appreciated, by virtue of the revealed meaning-presence, immediately loses its intrinsic quality. From being particular, wholesome, and intrinsic, it becomes contingent, fragmentary, and extrinsic; a value among other values, and a means to something else.

[61] Buber, "The Basic Movements," 198.
[62] Buber, *I and Thou*, 167.
[63] Buber, *I and Thou*, 161–62.
[64] Buber, *I and Thou*, 158.

Yet, even when the Thou moment ceases, something of the revealed meaning-presence stays with the participants, and calls them forth to put it into practice. According to Buber, the co-received meaning "cannot be preserved but only [be] put to the proof in action; it can only be done, poured into life."[65] Now, the participants are encumbered with the task of "actualizing God in the world."[66] There is, of course, a great difference between the dignity which is co-acknowledged and its outlived form. The first is a "reality," in a Buberian sense, while the second is a memory that wishes to become actual. Invested in this living memory, the person is sent forth into the world with the task of transforming all "It-ness" into a "Thou-ness." The memory of a "real" dignity calls us to declare and defend our equal human worth. In this way, the retrieval of the "intrinsic-ness" of dignity is part of what Buber calls "putting meaning into practice."

Let me be clear that I think an eternally intrinsic dignity is out of a mortal being's reach. Buber does not suggest that "turning to the other," time and again, is a sufficient condition for fulfilment. Instead, irrespective of our desire always to "have God," full spiritual and material realization is only possible at the final meeting with the Eternal Thou. Assuming Buber's vision, a "total" and immutable dignity is only eschatologically conceivable, for no one can live full-time in God's presence, since such exposition would consume us[67] rather than liberate us. No living human has ever seen God face to face. Until the yearned for time of fulfillment, however, we are called not merely to sit and wait, in the comfort of our existential shells, perhaps sadistically enjoying the despair that brews in the stew of relational inertia. Rather, we are called

[65] Buber, *I and Thou*, 16.
[66] Buber, *I and Thou*, 163–64; Horwitz, *Buber's Way to I and Thou*, 118.
[67] Buber, *I and Thou*, 85.

to honor the strength that the Thou has given us, by striving to live in such a way that every It can be met as a Thou.[68]

If all we can "do" is turn to the other, then the real challenge is how to meet *all* human others as a Thou. As I have claimed in the first chapter, a hierarchical culture can relativize and empty the meaning of the most basic human values, which become a means for the usurpation of economic and political capital. Since we search for the place of dignity in hierarchal Brazil, the pressing question is, "What does it mean to 'put meaning into practice,' by meeting the poor as a Thou, such that their intrinsic dignity can be acknowledged and respected?"

From the outset, there is no clearcut answer, for the meaning-presence is not a "content" or a "concept." Above all, it is communicated inter-personally. Buber emphasizes the particularity of its reception, which is marked by communion. Thus, meaning is always specific,[69] besides being "untranslatable." Nobody can commend or reinforce it because it cannot be described and declared. Still, it calls us to confirm, embrace, and actualize it in the world.

Although our driving question has no definitive answer, a few clues can give us some direction. The first is the nature of the given meaning. We cannot know its content, but we know that it is divine revelation. As such, its reception is transformative, even though it soon becomes objectified.[70] The memory of revelation does not altogether vanish when we hasten to transform it into a "thing." Instead, its "strength" still gives us the courage to transform our small share in the world. When the Thou ceases to exist, the bestowed "something More" becomes a spiritual mark of God's love grafted onto our personal lives. In other words, the objectification of meaning does not delete the memory of God's loving presence, so the impact left in the

[68] Buber, *I and Thou*, 68, 84, 163.
[69] Buber, *I and Thou*, 159.
[70] Buber, *I and Thou*, 157, 158, 161. Horwitz, *Buber's Way to I and Thou*, 114–15.

participants' lives is for good. Also, Buber believes that revelation always pushes us further away from its Source, toward a "We."[71] As revelation, meaning encourages us to actualize it in the warmth of the home, the vibrancy of the school, the competition of the workplace, the rush of public transportation, the sanctity of the temple, the leisureliness of the garden, etc.

For it to be authentic, the enactment of meaning must be simultaneously unrestricted by and attuned to social difference. On the one hand, it must be enacted at every opportunity we have to meet with persons from all walks of life, regardless of nationality, class, religion, race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, etc. We must trust that everyone has been created with a God-given and intrinsic dignity. On the other hand, the enactment signifies the recognition and protection of the neighbor's dignity, in view of her or his objective and subjective reality. If all social hierarchies disappear in the Thou, because of the *Shekhinah*'s presence, in instrumental relations they return full throttle, for the "It" world lacks in reciprocity and presence. In the sphere of instrumentality, our specific economic and social positions do interfere with how we are mutually perceived. Thus, they can also influence our perception of one another's dignity. Overlooking each other's "real" humanity, we are more than prone to classify one another according to many variables, including wealth, class, nationality, occupation, education, name, abilities, age, race, gender, and religion.

The second clue is love. The divine revelation communicates and demands love.[72] And the divine love grounds and strengthens human love. God's love is the clean and renewable "energy" that feeds the human responses to the finite Thou. Hence, I suggest that human love can enable a re-dignifying dialogue. It can modify actual relations that operate with predetermined

[71] Buber, *I and Thou*, 164; Horwitz, *Buber's Way to I and Thou*, Lecture Eight.
[72] Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Love, Accusative and Dative: Reflections of Leviticus 19:18.* The B. G. Rudolph Lectures in Judaic Studies (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007).

ranks, be they economically, socially, or politically determined. For example, collaboration within Black and poor communities may attenuate economic disparity. However, strategic alliances alone cannot neutralize all types of social injustice, particularly in a hierarchical culture. A potential answer is to be sought in the dimension of human love. In the following paragraphs, I integrate Boff's Christological and liberating understanding with Buber's. I do so by creating a dialogue about the meaning and power of love on the micro-social level. Boff and Buber can be eloquent interlocutors because both believe that interpersonal relations form the basis of authentic community.

For Buber, divine and the human love are not feelings. The uniqueness of being human lies in our capacity for relation, which indicates our aspiration to abide permanently in the divine Presence.[73] As discussed in the previous section, pure relation is a concentrated and reciprocal activity—a transformative moment that is always illuminated by the reflection of a third One. Thou moments are "pure" in terms of the type of connection that they instill, rather than the emotions that they evoke. Their "purity" resides in the participants' reciprocity, and the divine love that they may obtain, contingent upon God's grace. The divine Presence mobilizes the entire person, especially one's capacity to "indwell" love.[74] Buber supports his claim with an empirical observation. Feelings come and go, whereas love aspires to stay. While feelings are projected onto an object, an "I" has no real love for a "Thou." Instead, love simply "happens." Buber illustrates the fundamental difference by contrasting the unity of Jesus's love for all with the multiplicity of his feelings for his beloved followers and the possessed.[75] Jesus certainly "had"

[73] Martin Buber, "Interrogation of Martin Buber," 44.
[74] Buber, *I and Thou*, 66; Rivka Horwitz, *Buber's Way to "I and Thou,"* 115–6, 121, 128.
[75] Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

different feelings for different people, but he showed one love for all. True love is always one and the same, regardless of the beloved. Feelings, on the other hand, can vary.

Rather than a sentiment, Buber thinks that human love is a responsiveness—"the responsibility of an I for a Thou." It is the sensibility which sustains the positive responses that the participants of pure relation can give. Love is the most powerful response, and perhaps the most universal, too, since the divine love itself prompts it. While the ways in which revelation can be "put to proof" are infinite, love is always their underlying responsiveness. Although the revealed meaning is not "love," without the divine love its actualization is unbearable.

Love can guarantee the continuity of our responses to the finite Thou, and such continuity is essential for authentic community. For Buber, there are three spheres of response: the "forms of spirit," which include the intellect, art, and pure action;[76] community; and nature or "cosmos." Community is the primordial sphere because human-human interactions provide analogies for human-God relations. The ways in which we engage God are rooted in our models of communal engagement. In sum, community is the "real bearer of the Between," and love, the most excellent response of all. Face-to-face meetings are so essential because they form the occasion for Thou relations, which are the basis of community.

Buber's unfinished socialism is purposefully centered on pure relations. He believes that public institutions cannot guarantee the unity of a genuine community and allow for social renewal. Obviously, Thou relations cannot be reinforced or institutionalized, for they are evanescent and ultimately depend on the divine grace. However, according to Buber, they may "acquire a semblance of constancy by frequent renewal."[77] I-Thou relations could gain a

[76] Buber, *I and Thou*, 89.
[77] Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber's Concept of the Centre and Social Renewal*, 18.

"measure of continuity" without involving the same particulars. The intensification of Thou relations within a given community are for Buber the heart of community because they relate directly to the social "Center." All Thou relations intersect in God, the ideal center of a genuine community.[78] Community emerges out of a "common relationship to the Center," which represents something unconditional in the lives of all members, like a shared revelation, a charismatic leader, or a much treasured value. Buber thinks pure relation entails a direct "participation" in the life of the Center.[79]

Moreover, Buber believes that God wants to be permanently reflected in the world, which can only happen through relations. In partly metaphorical, partly literal parlance, he tells us that "everything desires to become a sacrament,"[80] since God wishes to redeem God's beloved creatures. That is how the Shekinah wants to reunite all of creation. A positive response to God's loving address can increase the divine Presence here and now. To the extent that it opens us up to relation, love enables us to honor the sacramental "function" of relation. Without the continuity of pure relation, meaning is not fully actualized and the life of dialogue is impossible.

Boff agrees with Buber on love's practical implications. For him, it represents "the power of giving, of surrender, or the capacity to accept the other as other."[81] His view assumes a dialectic between power and love. The capacity to accept others as they are implies a power dynamic, and accepting the other is a powerful move. When it contains power, love is more than sentimentalism. And, power is more than sheer manipulation when it is used with love. For example, the love of the powerless for the powerful, who manipulate and abuse the powerless, is

[78] Buber, *I and Thou*, 163.
[79] Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber's Concept of the Centre and Social Renewal*, 20.
[80] Buber, "Interrogation of Martin Buber," 88.
[81] Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation* (New York: Crossroads, 1986), 9.

"powerful" inasmuch as it can generate a positive transformation in both. In a situation of oppression, love is real only if it can change how we treat one another. On the other hand, the love of the economically powerful for the downtrodden is but a farce, unless one's inherited or amassed power is put to use for their good. Only when the economically powerful decide to share what they have can they begin to love those whom they have so far exploited or ignored. In sum, love without power is either false or void of effects; and power without love is sheer domination.

Contra Buber, however, Boff believes that love is both "Pathos and Eros." As pathos, it has the capacity to be affected and to affect. Being human implies the capacity to feel interactively (with) the other, but love is not a feeling. Like Buber, Boff thinks the "primary relationship" is one in which two persons can feel "without distance," a "being with, not above;" and a "communing in the same reality."[82] As eros, love is the primary energy or "movement." Playing with the Greek myth, Boff explains that because Eros arose to create and enliven the world, we can say that erotic love has a divine origin and a sacred purpose. Every creature that moves becomes joyful, filled with life, invigorated by God's love. Eros "empowers" life.[83] Since this vital energy is freely given, Boff believes, eros connects humans through oblative love.

The oblation that eros represents is for Boff a compelling sign that caring is the epitome of love. For him, because eros is so vital and because it is oblative, the primordial vocation must be caring.[84] In contrast to sentimentality, caring means a compassionate decentering of one's self-obsession, a movement that creates space for the accommodation of the other as an other.

---

[82] Boff, *Saint Francis*, 10.
[83] Leonardo Boff, *Come, Holy Spirit: Inner Fire, Giver of Life and Comforter of the Poor*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015), 53.
[84] Leonardo Boff, *Saber Cuidar: Ética do Humano, Compaixão Pela Terra* 8th ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2022), 33.

Sincere caring can momentarily overcome our desire for power and self-gratification. Instead, caring expresses our desire for infinite beauty, truthfulness, and justice. We care for one another because we desire to "experience" these ultimate goods together, in relation. We actually seek plenitude, by taking care and being cared for, because we crave to share and multiply that which we treasure the most. For instance, care is the first "response" that a newborn should receive. Throughout life, we rely on the care of others, and care for them, because we acknowledge one another's intrinsic dignity.

Simply said, we care for that which has an intrinsic worth in our view. Taking care is for Boff the root of all of the human excellences and all that is of value. Consequently, there must exist a truly human dignity between whomsoever cares and is cared for.[85]

Boff's view of caring resonates with Buber's "turning to the other." Caring and turning are the "basic vocation" and "primordial act" in their respective systems. Both emerge in the sphere of instrumental relations. After all, it makes no sense to "turn to" or "care for" the neighbor when she or he is already being embraced in our core. Yet, turning is different from caring, and from love in general. Turning indicates one's deliberate openness and commitment to enter into pure relation, which is the threshold into the precinct of the divine love. In contrast, human love is a responsiveness that is powered by God's love, and which grounds the actualization of meaning. From Buber's perspective, caring could be an effect of being transformed in pure relation. From Boff's perspective, "turning to the other" is perhaps the major expression of the human vocation to caring. From both sides, it is a way to "actualize God." The

[85] Leonardo Boff and Mark Hathaway, *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 305–306; Boff, *Saint Francis*, 10.

received meaning, which facilitates the co-acknowledgment of intrinsic dignity, calls the participants to love (care for) the other.

In this way, love is the responsiveness or vocation that grounds the dialogical "renewal" of intrinsic dignity. It is the perfect response that a "dialogical being" can give to the neighbor and to God. Once again, dialogue is "a relation one enters into by an existential decision and commitment to realize a truth."[86] In practice, love grounds the dialogical "attitude" which comprises the existential decision and commitment to realize a relational truth. Here, to "realize" means to understand and materialize something in the world. Love allows us to "materialize" that which we have acknowledged in pure relation, namely that each of us has an intrinsic dignity.

The Bible is Boff's compass in the journey of dialogue. He believes that we become human dialogically in the Bible.[87] We are "dialogical beings" because our capacities to love and enter into relation are cardinal or intrinsic to who we are—"hearers and respondents of God." A "dialogical personhood" comes to being through interpersonal interactions[88] that eventually point to the human-God relation, but nevertheless actually happen in human-human contacts. Since we are, by divine design, God's "hearers and respondents," we are meant to receive and respond to the divine love poured into human life. Also, we desire to multiply that divine love by turning to the neighbor. So, God's loving address and our responses to it are not only the two poles of a

[86] Mendes-Flohr, "Martin Buber's Conception of the Center and Social Renewal."
[87] Leonardo Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo* 11 ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes), 63.
[88] Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 62; Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace* trans. John Drury (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1979), 142; Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Cristo Libertador: Ensaio de Cristologia Crítica Para o Nosso Tempo*, 19th ed. (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2008), 186.

sacred dialogue: they constitute our core, which is forged in community. In human dialogue, we can actually meet God's love and show love for God.[89]

Boff's model of human love is Jesus, who did not expect reciprocity from those whom he has liberated. Our decision to love through dialogue defines who we are, assuming Buber's and Boff's views. Because Jesus has given the most perfect response, Boff believes he is a sacrament of the encounter with God and a model for human love. In Jesus's life and teachings, Boff emphasizes five assertions that show his love and dialogical excellence. All of them commend love without reciprocity: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31); "love your enemies" (6:27); "Father, you have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23); "We are participants of the divine nature" (2 Peter, 1:4).

The fifth love-statement is Jesus's exceptional care for the poor. Jesus has shown that perfect love implies a disinterested and mutual care for and among the disinherited. We are meant to protect and increase the dignity of all, but the most responsive love attends first to the hungry, the naked, the sick, the widow, the foreign, and the dispossessed precisely because they have been robbed of their God-given dignity. Because Boff accepts Jesus's model of human love, his understanding of caring entails more than an openness to accommodate the other; that understanding implies attending first to the dignity of those who live without it. A "dialogical being" starts to fulfill her/his vocation to care (Boff) by restoring and protecting the intrinsic dignity of the socially vulnerable.

Now we may be able to draft a tentative response to our question, "What does it mean to 'put meaning into practice' by meeting the poor as a Thou, such that their intrinsic dignity can be acknowledged and respected?" The short answer is that love grounds the dialogical renewal of

[89] Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of Sacraments* (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press, 1987), 47.

dignity because it undercuts social hierarchies. Since the divine love is the medium of meaning (revelation), and since a human love-response can undercut social hierarchies, love can sustain a kind of dialogue through which the participants can acknowledge their dignity in instrumental relations.

The renewal of intrinsic dignity requires only a minimum of reciprocity. Even if one's care is not reciprocated by the neighbor, they may still develop a "dialogical dignity." From a micro-social standpoint, one's disposition to equalize relations that have been hitherto imbalanced is an invitation to enter into dialogue. And, the neighbor's acceptance or rejection of the offered support is already a response to one's decision to actualize meaning. In practice, though, it is not the economically powerful, or the otherwise socially superior, who usually initiates this type of dialogue. Instead, it is the vulnerable person who often takes the initiative. Our basic needs and aspirations can speak for themselves, through a common language that reaches out to any fellow human who is minimally willing to hear (Buber) and feel (Boff) them. Insofar as a manifest need or unfulfilled aspiration can form an invitation to enter into dialogue, our reaction to it already constitutes a response. That is, a positive or an omissive response is immediately given as soon as one person is present.

Also, one's "existential commitment" to meet the other-in-need is a response to the Creator and Giver of intrinsic dignity. God is incidentally present in my response, even if it elicits no reciprocity. The neighbor's address, my response to it, and the neighbor's acceptance or refusal should suffice. Since love is a responsiveness not conditioned by reciprocity, the renewal of intrinsic dignity is dialogical, even if only a low degree of mutuality is present. Also, it does not require that the same relata—the participants of relation—re-engage. Obviously, the goal is the protection of the participants' material and spiritual wellbeing. Yet, regardless of its

completion, a dialogue has already been initiated solely by virtue of one's attempt to "actualize God in the world." In an unjust society, the sincere and manifest intention to help the poor obtain solace is, per se, mutually dignifying. Furthermore, the poor's acceptance can momentarily restore the intrinsic nature of their dignity.

Finally, we can try to "locate" dialogical dignity. Since intrinsic dignity can be renewed through a love-enabled dialogue, its locus is the dynamics of the dialogue between two persons. Love is the grounding responsiveness of both the reception of meaning and of its realization. Somehow, it can "compensate" for the absence of reciprocity in instrumental relations. Since the restoration of intrinsic dignity does not require that the participants be fully present to one another, as in the Thou, this type is more prominently dependent on the capacities commonly associated with the soul-aspect of personhood.[90]

To recapitulate, the meaning which can "only be put into practice" is a revelation and it communicates divine love. By "putting it into practice," a person can momentarily restore the lost "intrinsic-ness" of dignity. This restoration is implied in the task of "actualizing God in the world," which depends on being open and committed to meeting every other as a Thou, as an intrinsically worthy human. The dialogical restoration does not require that the same relata reengage. The Thou calls them to put meaning into practice and, inasmuch as they have a memory of their intrinsic dignity, they therefore have the capacity to acknowledge the dignity of others.

In Brazil, social hierarchies underpin and modulate all instrumental relations, and they thus pose a greater challenge for the "actualization of God." Against all inertia, however, the revealed meaning calls us to acknowledge and protect the dignity of all, starting with the poor.

[90] See chapter three for my definition of "soul."

Love enables such acknowledgment, by means of opening our existential eyes and hearts to each other's objective and subjective particularities. Only then can we see again our innermost value. Love can undercut social rank, regardless of reciprocity and presence. Consequently, the "locus" of dialogical dignity is the dynamics of a love-enabled dialogue, in which the soul-aspect (capacities) might have a more prominent appearance than the body-aspect (totality of relations).[91]

For example, although someone may fail to welcome another in their full human particularity, they can develop a different type of engagement. Notice that someone who enjoys a superior social position may welcome another into one's home, offer her or him one's benevolent attention, and also engage her or him in kind and attentive conversation. Notice as well that one may always affirm another's status as an equal member in their community. Still, one can miss a "something More" in the other's presence. Nevertheless, after the imagined encounter, one can reengage the other, and perhaps ask her or him whether that which has been sought has now been found. That can be done without expecting anything in return. Perhaps the other may also fail to re-engage, by denying the one a second chance. If there is between them a socially determined gap, that can hinder the possibility of pure relation. Maybe the gap contributes to the lack of full responsiveness. A new door can be opened by one's willingness to care for a stranger, if momentarily, and by the other's acceptance of one's delayed attention.

3. **The Dialectic of Erotic and Divine Love in The Song of Songs 1:5–7**

So far, I have postulated that dignity is twofold in accordance with our twofold attitude—turning and bending back. Also, I have tentatively pinpointed the "locus" of each type. An

[91] I discuss the two aspects of the person in chapter three.

intrinsic dignity can be perceived in the physical and corporal space between two persons who are reciprocally present. In relations that *a priori* serve the purposes of utility and security, dignity becomes relative. Yet, its intrinsic nature can be restored when two people engage in a love-enabled dialogue, which emphasizes the capacities associated with the soul-aspect.

It would be a crass mistake to infer a dualism regarding the place of dignity. To be clear: human dignity lies neither in the physical body, nor in the body's abilities (soul) only. Rather, it is always between two entire persons. We cannot conclude that the body "has" or "shows" an intrinsic dignity, to the exclusion of the soul-aspect, while, on the other hand, the person's abilities to dialogue and love are exclusive of the "soul." In reality, the two types and places only accentuate different aspects of personhood—rather than separated beings—since they do not exist in and of themselves. Thus, the assumption that the intrinsic type is essentially "bodily," whereas the dialogical pertains more intimately to the soul, is also inaccurate.

In fact, the two types and places of dignity only accentuate different aspects of personhood, rather than implying different substances or beings. Neither do they exist in and of themselves, nor they are in opposition to one another. As stated in the previous chapter, a person is always, at once, and entirely, a body and entirely a soul. Yet, in order to organize our ideas about the two places of dignity, it has been necessary to discuss the two aspects in relation to one another. Although they are always one, in instrumental relations they may appear to be two fundamental dimensions of one and the same person; in pure relation, they appear totally integrated and present to the neighbor. The "both/and" logic holds true in both instances of our search for the locus of dignity.

Hence, when I postulate that an intrinsic dignity exists inter-corporally, between two persons, I only emphasize the sacramentality of pure relation and the mutuality of the recognition

of dignity. As Buber clarifies, a sacrament is a "binding of meaning to the body,"[92] and the Shekinah is present between two persons who meet in reciprocity. They can mutually acknowledge their dignity, in that interpersonal space, because God is sacramentally present there, and a divine meaning is revealed there. Also, by claiming that love can enable the dialogical renewal in hierarchical relations, I only underscore that a certain type of responsiveness can be an antidote to hierarchy. While the full person articulates such responsiveness (love), it emphasizes the role of the soul-aspect.

Plainly, intrinsic and dialogical dignity are complementary polarities that imply one another because they refer to the same human dignity, only they represent two different moments and kinds of relation. The momentary prominence of the body-aspect, in the acknowledgment of intrinsic dignity, and of the soul-aspect, in its renewal, can complement one another, but they too refer to the same and one person. Also, on the one hand, the renewal of dignity assumes its prior acknowledgment. On the other, its mutual acknowledgment would be ineffective if its intrinsic nature could not be restored.

Yet, regardless of their unity, the two aspects may occasionally appear to be "separated" in instrumental relations. Depending on the circumstance, we may focus more intensely on one of them. Occasionally, such a difference in intensity may falsely indicate a difference in relevance. At times, such a gap can be falsely assimilated as a difference in worth. For example, when I swim intensely, I may think that "I" am only the physical expression of the material body in movement. At other times, when no physical movement is apparent, and "I" am at rest reflecting on some idea, I may feel that "I" am only my conscious capacities at play. When I feel sick, I may deem the physical expression of my body to be the most precious aspect of my

[92] Buber, "Symbolic and Sacramental Existence," 165.

person. In contrast, when I feel elated or at peace, I rejoice in my blissful and tranquil consciousness (soul). If this natural and temporary sense of disproportion becomes intermittent, it may lead me to attach different "values" to the different aspects of my person. Imagine, for example, the high esteem that an Olympic athlete cultivates for her or his physical prowess, and the indebtedness that a consummate writer feels for her or his own ideas, memories, and conversations. Moreover, since what we call "body" has traditionally been associated with physical movement and "soul" with the self-conscious capacities, we have become prone to attach different values to each of them, and we develop such appreciation relationally. An Olympic athlete may believe that she or he competes with other bodies, and a revered author that she or he converses with other souls. In physical competition and in conversation, respectively, one's physical and self-conscious existence are perceived in relation to other "bodies" and "souls," but they nevertheless remain two facets of the same being.

Buber reminds us that this apparent and relationally perceived value-gap serves the purpose of personhood development. The discovery of otherness and the growth of self-consciousness go hand in hand with the capacity to "notice" a false separation momentarily when we focus on different aspects of life. The "I" is formed and becomes self-aware in and because of a "primordial distance" between our physical bodies. All of it starts with the early discovery of bodily otherness. For Buber, a child begins to realize the actual distance between her or him and the mother at the moment of birth, when their bodies are separated. Gradually, the child transposes such bodily distance in order to create an imagined distance between her/his own body and soul. The incipient "I" then begins to realize and advance her/his innate capacities. Children begin to discover and master their physical, emotional, and intellectual abilities when they notice how these can be controlled by one and the same bodily agent. The child becomes an

"I" by developing her/his capacities after she/he realizes that she/he is no longer the body of her/his mother.

Therefore, the functional but false separation depends on otherness, of which the body is the first sign. Since otherness becomes the most apparent in our physical particularity, and the body has traditionally (yet falsely) been associated with physicality, we can say that the "body" is otherness's first sign. No person has two bodies, and no body comprises two persons at the same time—except, perhaps, during pregnancy and in the case of conjoined twins. From the digits and the eye pupils, to the exceedingly complex mental processes that comprise one's temperament, there are no two entirely equivalent physical and conscious persons. Because a "bodiless" relation is absolutely impossible, and since the body is the first sign of otherness, we can assume that the capacity to comprehend the humanity of the other starts in one's body.

In instrumental relations, the two aspects may at times form a duality, rather than a dualism. This duality is merely "functional," rather than permanent and fundamental, because its (false) poles are not in opposition. While a duality does not imply the opposition of the two poles, a dualism does. A good example of dualism is Thomas's hylomorphic view of the person, which I analyzed in chapter one. A good example of duality is in Buber's "I-Thou" and "I-It." For Buber, they represent the two interdependent attitudes or "primal words." Thou relations imply the acknowledgment of otherness, which is discovered in the "primordial distance" that characterizes "It" relations. On the other hand, the sacred "purpose" of pure relation is the maximization of the divine presence in the world. By striving to meet every body as a Thou, we can retrieve the intrinsic nature of dignity.

In pure relation, the body and the soul aspects of the person form a dialectic. In it, they assume neither dissimilar and only apparent "values," nor disparate levels of intensity. A

dialectic implies more than a duality. In dialectical relation, the two poles are inter-complementary. Theologically, a dialectic is both a phenomenon and a hermeneutical device. Here, I borrow from Paul Ricoeur's extensive and creative use of this methodological tool. In numerous instances, Ricoeur has studied two given interrelated subjects that initially appeared to oppose each other, but nevertheless ended up revealing their complementary. Sometimes, the two studied poles were actually co-constitutive, but they were never equivalent.[93]

A clarifying illustration of the dialectic between the two aspects of personhood can be useful at this jointure. The Black Brazilian theologian Cleusa Caldeira provides a good example in her translation and interpretation of Song of Songs 1:5–6. By grounding her reading on a dialectics of erotic and agapeic love, she proposes a dignity-retrieving understanding of the presence of Black (African) women in the Bible. The proposed complementarity of the two kinds of love confirms the actual unity of the different aspects of the person in pure relation.

Caldeira is a Bible scholar and theologian whose scholarship focuses on Black and feminist exegesis and hermeneutics. Although theological anthropology is not her main focus, her theological corpus points to a more refined intellectual treatment of the body in general, and the bodies of Black Brazilian women in particular. Because the dignification of dark and female bodies is a leading goal and a premise in her exegetical work, Caldeira's project opens a promising and refreshing pathway in the theological landscape of Brazil. However, because the spinal cord of her intellectual production is biblical, and the Scriptures do present a dualist tendency at some points, Caldeira's scholarship has yet to confront the anthropological problem

[93] David Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time: Selected Essays*, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 220, electronic edition.

of dualism head on. In brief, her re-dignifying interpretation needs to let go of all dualist reminiscences.

Traditionalist exegetes are prone to de-sensualize the voices and bodily images that compose the Canticle, which they do by superimposing their dualistic assumptions. As Caldeira reminds us, Biblical scholars are more than inclined to counterpose the roles of the body and the soul, the profane and the sacred, woman and man, and of erotic and agapeic love,[94] in the Scriptures. Dualists usually exacerbate the seemingly contrasting features of the two poles in order to arrive at a much desired end result—that the Songs speak allegorically of the divine and the human love. As Mendes-Flohr points out, understood literally the Songs would be a scandal for the traditionalist. For many religious interpreters, its vivid imagery displaying sheer sexual desire and affection between a man and a woman, remains eyebrow-raising and must be tamed. Still, we all believe that the Canticles were written with the ink of the divine inspiration, so very few would dare to challenge their canonicity. The problem arises precisely because of the dualist's difficulty in accepting that divine revelation is erotic. In a culture that stubbornly opposes evil and good, body and the soul, eros and agape, women and men, and black and white, God cannot have erotic relations with humanity, nor can human sexuality be a locus of revelation. Perplexed, the dualist exegetes opt to spiritualize what is simultaneously carnal and divine, in this way minimizing the Song's wellspring of revelatory meaning. The commonplace but forceful solution is to contend that the poets of Solomon extol a purely agapeic divine love through erotic allegories that could stir the prude's spiritual sensibilities. Their myopic solution relies on a false correspondence between the "beloved" and Christ, and the "lover" and the

[94] Cleusa Caldeira, "Hermenêutica Negra Feminista: Um Ensaio de Interpretação de Cântico dos Cânticos1.5–6," *Estudos Feministas* 21, No. 3 (Sep.–Dec. 2013): 1190.

Church.[95] In other words, it replaces actual masculine and feminine human bodies for a (female) corporate body (Church) and the (male) second person of the Trinity (Christ).

For Caldeira, however, the Song affirms, with unabashed literality, a self-evident and sublime truth of being human: erotic love is sacred, and it pervades all spheres of life, particularly the human-divine relation. Revelation *is* erotic because eros is a part of being human. Consequently, wherever and whenever eroticism is suppressed, relationships of dominium, exclusion, and oppression can emerge and thrive.[96] According to Caldeira, the body of poems titled "Song of Songs" was compiled in the post-exilic period, around the year 538 BCE. At that time, the priestly elites of Israel had idealized a project for nation reconstruction that elevated the power of the patriarchs. Historians explain that Israel's leaders had planned to isolate Yahweh from the feminine deities, who were worshiped in Judah. The all-male elite had decided that Yahweh ought to be their only God and be worshiped as a masculine Lord forever. Because of this pungently patriarchal climate, the presence of feminine voices of the Songs is remarkably meaningful. They represent not only a challenge to men's religious and political hegemony, but also an affirmation of women's dignity, starting with their bodies.

Caldeira reminds us that the Bible has been manipulated in order to reinforce negative stereotypes of Black women in Brazil. Particularly during the colonial period, men have used it to portray Black women as "witches, slaves, sensuous, and sinners." The most harmful exegetical abuse is the one which supports a negative stereotype of Black women's bodies.

[95] Caldeira, "Hermenêutica Negra Feminista."
[96] Caldeira, "Hermenêutica Negra Feminista."

Indeed, only rarely does the Bible refer explicitly to African, "colored," or "Black" women.[97] Among the very few instances, we have the verses of Songs 1:5-6, which Caldeira translates from the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia:[98]

Negra eu sou e (sou) bela

Filhas de Jerusalém

Como as tendas de Quedar

Como as tendas de Salma

Não (!) vejais a que eu sou negra

Que me avistou o sol

Os filhos da minha mãe ficaram raivosos comigo

Puseram-me a guardar os vinhedos

A vinha que era minha não guardei

Here is my free translation of Caldeira's translation:

I am black and beautiful,

O daughters of Jerusalem,

Like the tents of Kedar

Like the curtains of Solomon.

Do not (!) gaze at me because I am black,

Because the sun has looked upon me.

My mother's sons became angry with me;

[97] Numbers 12:1; 1 Kings 10:1–13; Matthew 12:38–42; and Luke 11:19–32 may be the only instances.
[98] Caldeira, "Hermenêutica Negra Feminista."

They made me the keeper of the vineyards,

My own vineyard I have not kept

Although Caldeira does not translate the subsequent verses, I think it is important to highlight them:

You, whom my soul loves, tell me

Where do you pasture your flock?

The first verse is crucial. Caldeira translates the Hebrew particle "vav" as "and:" *I am black and beautiful*. The Patristic and contemporary translations prefer to translate "vav" as "but," which implies that the black color of the woman's body is a hindrance to her beauty. The so-called "Fathers of the Church" think that the author's beauty depends entirely on her faith and penitence. Since it dismisses her natural and God-created black beauty, the traditional understanding also represents a condemnation to the sensuality of women's bodies, especially of Black women's.

Caldeira highlights the use of allegories in the Patristic dissociation of bodily blackness and beauty. Ambrose, for example, wrote that the woman of Songs 1:5–6 was "black by virtue of her fragility, but beautiful by virtue of the faith sacrament." Cassiodorus said that she was "black by her body, but beautiful by her merit." Gregory of Nyssa's severance of blackness and beauty was sterner: "black because of her sinfulness, *but* beautiful by virtue of her love." Perhaps Gregory of Elvira's synthesis was even more telling. For him, a person could not be black *and* beautiful at the same time. Probably no other Early Christian engagement with this text has gone lower than Origen's with his loathsome contrasting of bodily blackness and his imagined

whiteness of the soul: “Black by the ignominy of the race, but beautiful by virtue of her penitence and faith… Black by sin, but beautiful by virtue of her penitence and faith.”[99]

Among contemporaries, many have inherited the dualist racism of some of the Fathers. Other have attenuated it. The nodal question continues to be whether the Hebrew word “vav” in the first verse means “and” or “but.” Some commentators advocate a solution that starts with the second half of the passage. Since the sun has “damaged” the women’s sons, they postulate, we can infer that her skin has been harmed, which would have tarnished her beauty. Hence, she declares that she is black, but, still somewhat beautiful. It is noteworthy that today’s commentators still construe blackness only figuratively and bodily: her skin has been “darkened” by the sunlight.

Although no one knows for sure whether the Hebrew poet voice was actually African and female, the dignity of today’s Black women’s bodies is at stake in this translation. Songs 1:5–6 is extremely meaningful because it starts with a self-presentation (“I am”), which emerges from the author’s familial and racial self-identification (“black and beautiful”), which is addressed to a group of women (“daughters of Jerusalem”), and culminates in a love-declaration (“You, whom my soul loves”). The author’s self-love and capacity to love another human implies an acknowledgment of her being loved by God in the first place. Notice that the inaugurating words represent a process of individuation (“I am”), which implies the recognition of otherness. Also implied is the idea that individuation happens relationally and trans-generationally. Irrespective of the social and political dereliction of woman in the post-exilic period, the likely Black female poet “is” (“black and beautiful”) because she descends from Hagar (the tents of Kedar and Salam), who had met God personally. She is courageous enough to speak to the “daughters of

[99] Caldeira, “Hermenêutica Negra Feminista.”

Jerusalem" in spite of the Patriarchs' political and religious authority. And her "soul" loves somebody else because God loves her, a black and beautiful body that descends from Hagar. She affirms that her social value and dignity depend on her ancestry, her body's blackness and beauty, and on divine-erotic love, rather than "despite" them.

Caldeira emphasizes that the author's bodily beauty and blackness are genealogically or ancestrally grounded. First, the Arabian communities of Kedar and Salma (Solomon) had Afro-Asian origins. The tradition tells us that both Kedar and Salma descended from Ismael, who descended from Hagar, the Egyptian slave and priestess whom Abraham expelled from his family. Second, Hagar had been a concubine. According to Caldeira, biblical concubines are priestesses and/or visionaries who have received their powers in a personal encounter with God. After Hagar and her son Ismael were banished from Abraham's house, she went into the desert and there she met God. Indeed, the Bible is quite laconic about the social and religious roles of Black, African, or dark women, but it tells us that God has spoken directly to Hagar, the Egyptian priestess (Genesis, 16:13–14; 21:17–18). Her theophany resonates in the background of Songs 1:5–7, particularly when the poet speaks of her descent, blackness, and loving soul. Like Hagar, who was intimate with God and held spiritual powers, the strong woman of Songs 1:5–7 had faith in herself and affirmed her unified dignity in two ways, through her body ("Black and beautiful") and with her soul ("You, whom my soul loves").

Caldeira's reading implies that eros and agape, or sensuous and divine love, are inter-complementary aspects of one and the same love, thus, the dualist dissociation of personhood is a fantasy, maybe a fetish. The love of the author's soul for somebody else emerges from her self-love, which is centered on her black, female, and beautiful body—the totality of herself expressed in all types of relations, as Ivone Gebara would agree. And God has created her body.

Moreover, her blackness and beauty derive from her family genealogy, which links to Hagar, the priestess who met God in the desert. "I am" means that God has created her and loves her the way she is, and because of who she is in her family lineage. "Black and beautiful" means that God loves her black body-self, which/who is beautiful because it is a divine piece of art and sacrament. The concluding passage, starting with "my soul loves," means that divine and erotic love are actually indivisible. God loves us erotically because we are embodied creatures; our souls love others because they, too, are embodied creatures. So, all love is erotic and agapeic, i.e., sensuous and grounded in the divine love.[100]

4. Conclusion

To recapitulate: I have made three interconnected claims in this chapter. First, that an intrinsic dignity can be mutually acknowledged in the inter-corporeal space between two persons who meet in reciprocity. Since a divine presence is refracted in that interpersonal space (Buber), and a bodily "relatedness" grounds the human reality (Gebara), the "place" of intrinsic dignity is inter-corporeal, in a physical and sacramental sense.

Second, I have claimed that the intrinsic quality of dignity can be momentarily restored by a love-enabled dialogue. A "dialogical dignity," as I call the outcome of such restoration, is formed in the dialogical dynamics which can emerge in the sphere of instrumental and hierarchical relations. The soul-aspect of personhood has a prominent role in such restoration because it represents our capacities to love and enter into dialogue. As a basic form of human

[100] Cleusa Caldeira, "Dizer Deus e o Humano no Contexto da Pós-Modernidade" *Iterações* 14, No. 25 (2019): 1983–2478.

responsiveness (Buber) and a vocation to accept and feel the other in her or his objective and subjective particularity (Boff), love can temporarily undercut social hierarchies.

Third, I claim that just as the intrinsic and the dialogical dignity form a dialectic in which one assumes and depends on the other, the two aspects of personhood are dialectically presented in pure relation. Conversely, they form a functional duality in the instrumental sphere. Always, they are mere representations or expressions of the one and same person. The dialogical renewal of dignity, through instrumental relations, implies a prior acknowledgment, in pure relation, but such recognition would be substantially ineffective if the intrinsic quality of dignity could not be constantly renewed. Likewise, erotic love is as sacred as agapeic love because there is no such thing as a bodiless, un-erotic, or purely "spiritual" love—all love is erotic. Alone, the capacities associated with the soul-aspect could not love somebody. Instead, in the love of and for the body—the full person—humans can address God, which nurtures the soul-related capacities. For example, the author of Songs 1:5–6 announces that her "soul" loves someone else because she loves her black and beautiful "body," which has been created by a loving God and descends from Hagar (Caldeira).

We love one another because we crave beauty, truthfulness, and justice, among other ends that can only be pursued in relation. Our desire to "experience" such plenitudes together, as a "we," bespeaks our hope to partake of the infinite source of human dignity. Deep down, we know that we come closer to such a Source when we ensure that everyone can live with a minimum of dignity. We know it inasmuch as our own dignity is at stake in our acknowledgment of the other's. In a profoundly hierarchical society, however, an effective response assumes much more than a mutual acknowledgment, which is nevertheless a powerful start. Buber had hope in the socially renovative power of constant and genuine dialogue. However, his ideas were

not developed in view of the gruesome hierarchy that dominates in Brazil. A society that believes in the “natural” superiority of certain individuals and groups, and that grounds many of its institutions in a dualist idea, needs to secure more than the possibility of dialogue. After all, the “value” hierarchy may be as deeply ingrained in Brazilian culture as dualism is ingrained in theology.

Chapter 5

A Theology of Human Dignity: Living With Dignity Today in Brazil

On November 15, 1889, one and a half year after the abolition of slavery, Dom Pedro II, the second Emperor of Brazil, was deposed in a military coup captained by Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca. On that day, the new military ruler proclaimed Brazil's transformation into a republic. Four days later, before da Fonseca's eyes, the philosopher and mathematician Raimundo Teixeira Mendes unfolded the prototype of the national flag he had envisioned for the newborn state. Da Fonseca approved the project, and it soon became Brazil's official flag. The green rectangle represents the Bragança dynasty of Portugal, the family of Brazil's first Emperor, Dom Pedro I. The yellow rhombus symbolizes his wife Maria Leopoldina's Austrian family, the Hapsburgs. The navy sphere with white stars depicts how the clear night sky of that November 15 was visible in Rio de Janeiro. Each star in that "sky" corresponds to one state of the federation. The sphere-sky is centered by the Southern Cross constellation and crossed by a white band with green capital letters that summon citizens to "Ordem e Progresso."

Visibly, the colorful Brazilian flag suppresses the nation's people of color, who nowadays constitute at least fifty-eight percent of the population. But the people are not the only thing missing in their own national icon: the flag also erases the "principle of love." In his graphic masterwork, the philosopher-mathematician obeyed the new military government's command to articulate distinctly positivist symbols, and to embed them in the geometric forms and colors of the two European royal families. Teixeira Mendes, who was an adept of August

Comte's "Religion of Humanity" and founder of the Positivist Church of Brazil, borrowed from Comte's mantra, "L'amour pour principe, l'ordre pour base et le progrès pour but." He kept the notions of order and progress but suppressed the "principle of love" in his transposition.

Nowadays, after 134 years of counterfeit and flimsy republicanism, innumerable other coups, and continuing social injustice, Brazilians still celebrate the proclamation of the imposed republic every November 15, a national holiday. However, few of them wonder why Da Fonseca and Teixeira Mendes dismissed the positivist's principle of love but highlighted "order" and the aim of "progress" as the basis and heart of the national emblem. Because of Brazil's longstanding culture of political illegitimacy, manipulation, and violence, nowadays even fewer Brazilians would ask themselves why "progress" must assume "order" in the first place, and what really is the meaning of this word in their flag: for the hierarchical order of human existence is self-evident in the full palette of social relations. Even fewer would dare to question what lurks beneath the rationalistic (positivist) instantiation of the flag that we Brazilians have nevertheless learned to love and call ours.

Hierarchy has always been the unspoken "principle," "base," and "aim" of Brazilian society and exclusivist progress. Handpicked and as it were polished to a shine by the representatives of a few aristocratic families, the "Ordem e Progresso" maxim nonetheless hints at a truth about the country—namely, that the elite's progress depends on an illegitimate and oppressive order. The coordinating conjunction "e" ("and") standing between "Ordem" and "Progresso" would be more accurately portrayed with the preposition "for." A certain comprehensive arraignment is necessary in order for the elite to achieve progress. Back in 1889, while daydreaming with the economic and cultural potentials entailed in the newborn ideal, the elite intended to transform a nation made of recently freed African descendants and Indigenous

peoples into a tropical France, yet without any measure of *fraternité*. As symbolized by the flag's colorful suppression of people of color and by its hegemonic display of positivistic and royal-familial symbols, hierarchy remains the unofficial dominant value of Brazil's decadent and racist elite.

By formulating a theological response to the perniciousness of the "value" of hierarchy in Brazilian culture and society, this dissertation has made two basic contributions to theological-anthropology and liberation theology,[1] and one contribution to Jewish philosophy. The first is critical—that hierarchy has both a theological facilitator (dualism) and implication (gradation of dignity). My research shows that the body-soul dualism is a major organizer of the value of hierarchy, which in Brazil is publicly instantiated in *a priori* prejudiced institutions that promote wealth concentration and racial persecution, but also the oppression of women, immigrants, LGBTQAI+, and other socially vulnerable people. In the anthropological and liberation subfields, no other study produced either in Portuguese or English has convincingly and systematically shown the theoretical and practical complicity of dualism in the formation of institutions that organize Brazilian public life. Besides pointing to the theological facilitator of hierarchy, this dissertation has explored its centerpiece theological implication—that hierarchy produces an actual gradation of human dignity—by articulating the variables of economic power and social status.

The dissertation's second contribution is constructive, and I have developed it through chapters two to five. Together, those chapters outline an alternative theological conception of dignity formulated with resources that prioritize the perspectives of Brazilians currently living without it. A redefinition is more than vital—first, because of the materially humiliating and

[1] Black theology is a major branch of the liberation theology family.

spiritually painful consequences of the dualist contributions to the hierarchy; second, because contemporary scholarship is prone to accommodate uncritically the secular and political understandings that surged amid European and North-Atlantic debates during the post-war period[2]; third and most important of all, because all theological-anthropological conceptions elaborated so far anchor dignity in the "soul" and/or overemphasize the soul's role in their attempted justification of its universality and divine origins. To put it bluntly, my research exposes and analyzes the empirical and theological reasons why the conceptions of dignity that predominate today—dignity as the soul's inherent attribute, divine gift, or moral capacity—are flawed. Particularly, I interrogate Thomas's view, which depicts the soul as the holder of human dignity. Perhaps, the twentieth-century theological "reception" of the secular concept is as dualist as the early-modern exaggerations of Thomas's dualist anthropology. Both tend to overlook the material body and instead juggle with metaphysical abstractions in order to erase or subsume the body's inherent dignity to the supposed supreme worth of the rational soul.

Instead, I advocate that dignity is only perceptible as human acts and that it has immediate material implications. The re-conception for which I have advocated throughout comprises four adjacent revisions. Together, they form a basic model for a "theology of human dignity." In chapter two, I researched the meaning and nature of dignity for poor and Black Brazilians: a redemptive and rebellious act. To this day, no other academic engagement with the Black and Black-feminist theological literatures has proposed that dignity can be considered a human act with redemptive connotations. The same could be said of chapter three's central idea—a dignity-oriented notion of personhood—which innovates in the subfields of theological-anthropology and liberation theology. To my knowledge, no theologian has yet defined the

[2] See more on this topic below.

human person according to the poor's actual quest for material and existential dignity in a hierarchical society. Finally, chapter four's interdisciplinary and interreligious search for the "places" of dignity is yet another original contribution, this one to the scholarship on the Jewish philosophy of Martin Buber, and liberation theology.

Certain that such a re-conception must take as its starting point the situation of those who occupy the lowest social positions, I have organized my critical and constructive contribution through the question, "What is human dignity for people who are forced to live without it in Brazil?" The question obviously emphasizes a an empirical problem: dignity is not equal, much less universal, since so many humans are deprived of the minimum conditions for a well-lived existence. Before being able to formulate an answer, however, I had to investigate the causes of the radical empirical discrepancy in the actual levels of human worth. I reflected on the rationale for such prior investigation in chapter one: if the meanings of dignity and personhood assume one another, they must likewise reflect the meaning of being a person who has been forced to live without or with only a modicum of human dignity.

The adjective "human" before "dignity" implies much more than a qualification; it participates in the notion's very constitution. By virtue of what does a person have a human dignity? When we speak of the worth of the other forms of life, such as "animal dignity" or the "Earth's dignity," we are talking about an entirely different type. For after all, humans are the only beings who are capable of creating value about and for themselves and all others. Precisely because humans can create and attach values, the dignity of all other species and things may or may not be considered a "value," but this is not true of human dignity. The distinctiveness of the intrinsic worth pertaining to the creator of all values cannot be another value. Instead, it is the defining "factor" of this very type of being—the human.

Hence, the first chapter sought to explain two issues: the theological rationale undergirding the causal linkage between the actual living person and her/his dignity, and the historical processes through which such linkage and rationale have been conceived, implemented—and violated. Because Brazil's ruthless social and political panorama is germane to the meaning of human dignity, our journey has begun with a critical confrontation of two interdependent assumptions: that it is an innate divine gift, and that it is universal and equal, since it is believed to be intrinsic to the "soul."

In the first chapter, I claimed that dignity's assumed divine origins and universality are premised on a specific type of dualism. Traditional and modern theologies posit a fundamental separation between the body and the soul, whose innate rationality underpins the universality of *dignitas*. In the commonplace view, the body passively receives and enjoys the supposedly higher metaphysical worth of the soul. In the same traditional view, the human weight is always given to, inherent in, or possessed by the soul. Through my critique, I have shed light on the thus far hidden theological "cost" or "consequence" of positing automatic and universal dignity: body-soul dualism and the oppression of bodies of color. A fundamental body-soul division and hierarchy must be assumed in order to defend the divine origin and universality of dignity as a divine present, human constituent, or absolute value that is "possessed" solely by virtue of "being" or "having" a human soul.

Certainly, Thomas Aquinas's dualism has been the most accepted and widespread in Latin America. In great part, the persuasive power of his Christianization of Aristotle's hylomorphism and substance dualism derives from the extraordinary role that Catholic institutions and leaders have had, and still have, in the shaping of Brazil's popular and intellectual cultures. One can observe the active involvement of his dualism in the formation of

Brazilian culture in the historical and intellectual developments of intrinsically hierarchical institutions. Thomas's resuscitation of Aristotle's dualism has maintained a fundamental separation between form (soul) and matter (body), elevated the first above the second in the order of creation, and localized the (indirect) origin of dignity entirely in the soul, which can supposedly create, use, and leave the body for the purpose of knowing God cognitively. For the angelic theologian, the soul was a "substantial form," given that it naturally needs "matter" (a body) in order to pursue its goal of knowing God cognitively. Thus, the person was a soul-body "composite" that becomes automatically dissolved in the moment of death. Being a "substantial" form places the soul between all matter and other, purely rational and naturally "disembodied" forms, like the angels. Since the soul is a form, it can survive the death of the body. As unnatural as a "bodyless soul" can sound, Thomas has understood the "disembodied mode of existence" to be not only possible but also superior exactly because the soul was a form. Its capacity for reason denotes its nature and enables the human disembodied soul to know things in a way that is more similar to angelic knowing, which can supposedly bring us closer to God. Thus, although embodiment is our natural status, Thomas does suggest that relatively speaking the body hinders the soul's cognitive capacities and pursuit to know God.

On the colonial fields of Brazil, theologians and missionaries have misused Thomas's dualism as a Christian justification for official instruments of control. The general manipulation has relied on a false correlation: since the soul could have two modes of existence—embodied/inferior and disembodied/superior—the person could have different degrees of dignity according to their manifest capacities. After the theologian's and missionaries' transplantation of Thomas's metaphysical binary logic to the social organization, dualism has served an important

political role, namely, the creation and instantiation of instruments of control that underpin a hierarchical system.

On the ground, the transplantation also resonated with the racist intonation of the entire colonial project. The more "rational" and civilized a body seemed to be, the more dignity its corresponding soul must have had, since rationality was the defining and most sacred capacity of the soul. In contrast, the more "bodily"— meaning the less civilized and "rational"— the less dignified a person was deemed to be. In the missionary power-thirsty judgment, the colored (African and Indigenous) body was automatically deemed to be uncivilized and less rational—although it had to have a soul, if only so that it could be converted. Hence, in the missionary view, the dignity of the assumedly "bodily" people was naturally inferior to that of the civilized, white, and so-called "rational" persons.

I have raised this original claim by analyzing the central theological input in the formation of three notoriously hierarchical institutions. First, I have claimed that the voluntary servitude of the Indigenous peoples was a pervasive and influential legal doctrine in Brazil: the exaltation of the (European) soul's rationality, to the detriment of the uncivilized body's materiality, has long supported the idea that colored and uncivilized bodies live in the state of nature, even though they have a soul. Specifically, this construct has functioned as a logical premise of the natural-law doctrine of the voluntary servitude of the Indigenous and African peoples, a doctrine which assumes (or else more overtly commands) that they freely and spontaneously serve the supposedly rational-civilized-rational soul—and moreover allegedly do so for their own good.

Second, dualism is the basic fundament for the hierarchical (Roman) structure of the Colonial Church in Brazil. The belief in the sacred and absolute authority (*sacra potestas*) of the

Head of the ecclesial Body signifies that all other members are directly submitted to His personal command. In this understanding, the Pope is the supremely qualified interpreter and exclusive mediator of Christ in the world. Moreover, the Church's condescending attitude of a "mother and teacher" (*mater et magistra*) before all of humanity is a self-legitimizing and falsely "apostolic" doctrine which affirms the Pope's exclusive custody of Revelation. The Pontiff is allegedly the only supremely qualified interpreter, and thus is deemed to possess an infallible knowledge of the Scriptures, because Jesus would have bestowed such power on Peter, the "first Pope."

Third, Gilberto Freyre's counter-attack to dualism has backfired and given birth to the myth of racial democracy. Freyre was really fond of Franciscan simplicity and affection but abhorred Thomistic rationalism. He thought of the latter as diametrically opposed to the Brazilian ethos. To him, Brazilians are sensuous, playful, emotionally complex, ingenious, and, above all, racially mixed. To him, the national soul has been formed out of the natural, harmonious, and progressive mixture of the European, African, and Indigenous races. Freyre thought that this allegedly perfect miscegenation had elided all major racial differences and neutralized conflicts, which according to him has elevated Brazil to an exemplar among the democratic nations. Thus, nobody is a racist in a land where all races have comingled so intimately. However, the myth of Brazil's formation and racial democracy only veils Brazil's anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence. In so doing it inhibits racial consciousness and justice initiatives.

Chapter one therefore concluded with the affirmation that dignity is *not* in reality a divine gift which is universally "possessed" by virtue of being a human soul; nor is it equal: race, wealth, and gender, for example, determine the "amount" that each person can have in such a hierarchical and racist system.

However, let it be repeated that Thomas's dualism has been a theological facilitator rather than a concurrent cause of the empirical dignity hierarchy. Indeed, it has been nothing less than an obliging intellectual associate and witty cultural facilitator of the innermost value of Brazil—hierarchy. Perhaps it is the major theological tenet behind the national "order," which only advances the interests of the economic elites. Still, we should not crucify Thomas's rectification of Aristotle's substance dualism and blame it for the nation's social and economic disgrace. Thomas probably amended Aristotle's dualism—with the biblical doctrines involving the fates of the soul and the body, like the resurrection and the eternal life—because he saw a practical value in it. Hylomorphism and substance dualism were able to help him forge a theological explanation for eternal life.

Likewise, we should not exclusively blame the social malady of hierarchy on the two or three threads of missionary theology that landed in Brazil, starting with the Jesuit Manoel da Nóbrega's arrival in Bahia in 1549. In truth, the Portuguese brought with them a heavily hierarchical worldview, which the missionaries and theologians only ratified, expanded, institutionalized, and propagated. The dualist ideas of Thomas, his interpreters, and commentators have been insidiously misused, both as theological-philosophical cornerstones and legal justifications, for the development of a grand pyramidic structure.

In the Early Modern period, a few influential Thomists radicalized the body-soul separation. One of them the Pope had tasked with training Jesuit missionaries who were enlisted to serve in Brazil. Francisco Suárez was a prominent Jesuit theologian associated with the School of Salamanca and a founder of what would be later labeled as "Early Modern Scholasticism." Due to his extraordinary academic achievements, the Pope decided to make him the chair of

Theology at the University of Coimbra (Portugal), where he served from 1597 to 1617.[3] Suárez was likely the world's major theologian during his lifetime, and his widely read *Disputationes metaphysicae* is said to have influenced numerous rationalists and dualists, most notably René Descartes, who cited it copiously. In Coimbra, Suárez was the theological mind and head of the Society of Jesus's Colégio de Coimbra, which was founded at the request of Portugal's King Dom João III. The King wished to intensify the Jesuit presence in the Portuguese colonies of India, Africa, and Brazil. Suárez's Coimbra College formed the souls and minds of all influential Jesuits sent to Brazil, including Manoel da Nóbrega and José de Anchieta,[4] whose ideas really played a decisive role in the creation of legal, political, economic, social, familial, and religious institutions. Via Coimbra, a farfetched version of the Thomistic dualism reached the missionary hearts and minds that had a heavy hand in the construction of Brazil. Yet, if the radicalization of Thomas's body-soul dualism did become ingrained the popular culture, it could not of itself have emplaced the innermost value that undergirded a thoroughly hierarchical society.

Thus, dualism became the justifying and practical "logic" of the intrinsically hierarchical institutions which the colonizer designed for the New World. I conclude from my research on the cause of the hierarchy that the role of the Thomist ontotheological conception of personhood was more of a facilitator and legitimizer than a concurrent cause of hierarchy in colonial and post-colonial Brazil. Since 1500, it has vindicated legal, political, and religious instruments of control by anointing them with a Christian-rationalistic oil, thus giving them an authoritative aura. While I have particularly focused on the voluntary servitude of people of color, the Roman religious-

[3] Rui Lobo, "Coimbra's College of Jesus and College of Arts During Francisco Suarez's Time" *Conimbricences*, October, 28, 2019. http://www.conimbricenses.org/encyclopedia/coimbras-college-of-jesus-and-college-of-arts-during-francisco-suarezs-time/ (accessed July 12, 2023).
[4] A. E. Maia do Amaral, *A Conimbriga Urbe ad Orbem* (Coimbra, Portugal: Biblioteca Joanina, 2016). https://www.uc.pt/informacaopara/visit/jesuitas (accessed July 12, 2023).

political structure of the Church, and the myth of racial democracy, many other institutions have drunk from the same fountain that affirms the superiority of the soul in relation the body. Intoxicated with the dualist idea, these institutions exalted the metaphysical opulence of the "rational" and white soul and neglected the dignity of the "material" and dark body. Via the institutionalization of hierarchy, dualism thus contributed to the development of a "unity-in-hierarchy," which permanently begets and renews relations based on command and obedience. Just as the body obeys the soul, so the socially vulnerable obey the powerful. Out of such relations, a gradation of dignity emerges, for social existence determines the actual "value" of a person.

As a mode of analysis for the first chapter, I formulated a hermeneutics of suspicion with Leonardo Boff's theological-anthropological reading of Brazil's social injustices and Marilena Chaui's sociological and political critique of Brazilian authoritarianism. I chiefly followed Boff's model to identify the underlying theological themes of the hierarchical Church and how they have become essential to Brazilian society. Chaui focused on the intellectual and cultural history of illegitimate political authority. I have followed her analytical focus in my own interpretation of the theological-historical developments.

If the first chapter insisted that dualism is the facilitator and legitimizing logic of the hierarchy, the second investigated the meaning of dignity for people who currently occupy the lowest rungs on the social ladder. Its absence in people's lives presses the responsive theologian to look for an alternative mode of conception.

Chapter two claimed that the poor, who lack dignity, realize their own dignity by "creating" it, rather than "possessing" it. As I investigated their realization of dignity, I departed from the premise that people who lack it know it best since they have no option but to develop

the conditions for a dignified life. By developing such conditions, the poor "realize" dignity's meaning. Thus, for them dignity is something much closer to a human act than a divine gift for all humanity. To raise this original claim, I investigated how poor and Black Brazilian communities cultivate the material and immaterial resources for them to live with a minimum of wellbeing. Also, I discovered that they use collaboration and a down-to-earth epistemic sensibility in order to discern what is "real." Brazil is indebted to African traditions in infinite ways, including how Brazilians know things and cultivate knowledge. Over the centuries, Black Brazilian epistemic responsiveness has originated in Africa but the Christian ideal of redemption has subsequently modified it. Through it the poor and Black distinguish what types of action have the potential to improve life.

In Africa and for Black Brazilians, dignity is appreciated in the person's manifested capacity to enhance common wellbeing and wealth. Having dignity and acting for the communal good go hand in hand because being and knowing serve a single purpose: the abundance of life. Being well physically and spiritually means having dignity and implies using one's energies and knowledge for the benefit of the community. When a person dedicates themselves to that higher purpose, we know that they "have" dignity. Hence, "having" it depends on "doing" certain commonly beneficial acts. Also, knowing about something implies the responsibility to use such knowledge for the common good. Given that knowledge of reality and the communal wellbeing are so integrated, the higher one's manifest potential to increase the communal dignity, the more "real" is one's action. So, the more it is assimilated into the collective experience as being affirmative of everyone's dignity, the more a given act is considered "real." African dignity has in this way been subsumed into the Brazilian ethos in the form of human acts.

Black Brazilians have not only incorporated but also adapted their knowledge of dignity as communally valuable contributions. During the long experience of slavery and the ongoing process of liberation, their down-to-earth sensibility incorporated elements from Christian spirituality and wisdom. Traditional knowledge in particular has been transformed during its encounter with the Christian notion of redemption. The "act" of dignity gained a redemptive connotation the moment communities realized that all labor dedicated to their mutual wellbeing fulfills the divine will for the oppressed. In sum, dignity is redemptive in a liberation sense.

As I sought to show, the central images of the books of Exodus and Genesis have been particularly important in this process; they indicate that human action can be redemptive inasmuch as it advances the divine will for the oppressed. In Exodus, God's liberation of the Jewish people from the Pharaoh's captivity and the political covenant with them have influenced the Black view of dignity. In order to participate in the divine and continuous act of liberation, the people must honor the covenant. On the other hand, the human-divine alliance is a reason for political and social action since it summons everyone to please God through service to the socially vulnerable.

Genesis introduces the salvific plot of which the oppressed are the protagonists (Exodus) and redemption the end. It depicts us humans as capable beings and co-responsible protagonists in the ongoing story of creation. Read in tandem, Genesis and Exodus merge the stories of God's created universe and created people. Since they converge at the goal of redemption, they actually integrate one and the same narrative. In Genesis, God intends that all creatures live freely and harmoniously. In Exodus, among all creatures, God has chosen to liberate the oppressed, whom God loves and for whom God cares above all others. For the same reasons, God has created (Genesis) and summoned (Exodus) them to love and care for one another. Since God has chosen

the oppressed to enter a love relation, they must likewise reflect God's love for the poor. So all acts that demonstrate love for the poor by increasing their dignity enhance the human-divine trajectory toward redemption. Exodus and Genesis present a life-and-death question rather than a body-and-soul dualism: the same God who creates and gives life also liberates the oppressed from death at the Pharaoh's hands.

Likewise, the divine image must be reflected in "life," meaning in social and personal interactions, rather than in the soul. Likewise, in Black Christianity from Brazil, the knowledge-act of dignity happens through human collaborative acts for the "creation" and development of communal wellbeing. Such acts are redemptive insofar as they align with God's liberative intent and work. Finally, the "redemptization" of dignity begets a different Black view of the divine image, one that entirely rejects the influence of dualism.

I made my argument through a critical and comparative conversation between Black, womanist, and Black-feminist theologians from Brazil and the US, mainly Cleusa Caldeira and James Cone. They debate the practical meaning and implications of the materiality of liberation for the Black view of dignity. Thus, the conversation is geared toward a more refined and precise definition of dignity and it moves by probing the relation between it and the materiality of liberation. The fulcrum of the conversation is the question of dignity in the reality of material duress and oppression. Both Caldeira and Cone believe that Black and Black feminist theologies fundamentally aim to develop and retain material and spiritual wellbeing for poor Black communities. They also agree that the body and the soul are united and that their union is a prerequisite for human dignity. Thus, dignity is fundamentally inseparable from the work and goal of material liberation.

However, Cone and Caldeira define liberation differently and their differences have an impact on their respective understandings of dignity. Caldeira thinks that liberation essentially refers to a "protest for human dignity," while Cone believes it to be a fundamental "freedom to be" in relation to God, self, and community. While they affirm the materiality of dignity and of liberation, as protest and as freedom, they nonetheless reaffirm an invisible dignity. In other words, they believe in the innate dignity of Black communities and persons irrespective of a situation where material dignity is evidently missing. They affirm that Black and poor communities have dignity irrespective of the economic and financial duress that they face on a daily basis. A dignified livelihood implies having access to decent employment, health care, quality education, nutritious food, time for leisure, and a number of other items. I contend that protest (Caldeira) and "freedom to be in relation to God, community, and self" (Cone) are necessary but insufficient conditions for the achievement of material wellbeing. Thus, liberation is incomplete without a minimum of material dignity.

Relying on my alternative view of the *imago dei* and the debate on the materiality of dignity in relation to liberation, I conclude that acts of dignity reinforce the union of the body and the soul. Human life has a purpose, which is also the presupposition of our existence. Black Brazilians tells us that living with dignity is that purpose because they reflect God in their acts, which is another way of saying that God's image is reflected in their lives and that "doing" dignity is both our purpose and a reflective sign of the divine image. In short, life "intensifies" whenever a person performs dignifying deeds. Since human life implies the indivisible union of what we call "body" and "soul," we can infer that the two aspects of one and same person become more "united," and our reflection of the divine image intensifies when we affirm dignity with action. In this sense, we can say that dignity is an "act" that strengthens the person's life,

materially and spiritually. Finally, the Black response to hierarchy is also a retort to dualism, since it affirms that the body and the soul represent two sides of one and the same person.

Chapter three sketched a dignity-oriented personhood by building on the Black insight that dignity "unites" the body and the soul aspects. As I said in chapter one, the definitions of dignity and personhood are interdependent because of their empirical symbiosis. Any notion of personhood must include the reason why a person has or should have human dignity, particularly in a hierarchical society like Brazil's. Since dignity necessarily implies personhood, the reason for its actual lack integrates the re-conception of personhood. While in chapter one I investigated that reason (dualism and hierarchy), in chapter two I took it as a point of departure for my re-definition of dignity (as an act), and in chapter three I assumed such re-definition in order to sketch a view of the person as such. I did so by taking seriously the Black insight that persons who actually live without dignity become more self-integrated and self-realized when they affirm their human dignity with action that benefits the community. The defining lack prompts my theological search for the causal relationship between the capacity for the enactment of dignity and the meaning of personhood. Therefore, the driving question of chapter three is: "What is a person who does dignity (affirms it with action), and relatedly, what is its significance for those who seek material dignity?"

In order to reconceive personhood from the perspective of humans who "create" the conditions for them to live with dignity, I explored a dialectical view of the two basic aspects of the person. I articulated Gebara's relational view of the body and Leonardo Boff's Christological-cosmological insights on the soul. I did so through conversation. The Gebara-Boff anthropological dialogue was productive because their agreements and disagreements generate a new perspective on the matter. Basically, they agree that the conventional concepts of "body"

and "soul" are ambiguous, imprecise, and historically embedded in dualism. For them, the person is always entirely a "body" and entirely a "soul," even though we usually employ these words when we refer to those human qualities that can be perceived materially and immaterially, respectively. As Boff summarizes, the body-person and the soul-person are mere symbols of different aspects or qualities pertaining to a single human existence. Also, they both agree that the bodily quality or aspect is foundational and predominates. For Gebara, its predominance derives from the fact that all living beings are "bodies in relation." For Boff, it is a biblical truth and a sign that humans are the "consciousness of matter," i.e., a soul-filled type of body which has attained maximal capacities in evolutionary history—and the Resurrection marks the apex of that evolution.

Gebara and Boff agree that a human person is basically a "body," but they place different emphasis on each aspect. While Gebara's theological-anthropology stresses the person as body through and through, Boff's cosmology-infused Christology of liberation explores the Christological powers of the person as conscious agent ("soul"). The non-oppositional and non-dualist contrast represents an opportunity for the re-conception of the person. As Gebara teaches us, the "body" is the entire way through which a person exists, interpersonally, socially, and environmentally. Underlying her point is the idea that a person is a "collective dimension," meaning that we exist only in relation. Being the entirety of one's interactions, the body represents much more than a biological organism with well-defined anatomic boundaries. Rather, it encompasses, for example, the inter-human ties upon which it depends in order to survive and thrive. Since the living, physical body depends on a number of material and immaterial sources which can only be obtained through interactions, we can say that it exists socially, economically, politically, and environmentally.

On the other hand, I claim that what we call "soul" is an attribute of the body, the full person in the totality of her/his relations. My reframing reflects my appropriation of Boff's definition of the soul as the "consciousness of human matter." He believes that the Resurrection has permanently integrated the human reality into the divine abundance, which has "maximized" all of our capacities. Among all of the Earth's species, we humans best reflect the divine image, which Jesus's birth and resurrection have potentialized. Since the resurrection is corporeal, in a Pauline sense, it is at once bodily and spiritual. In light of Boff's interpretation, what we call "soul" signifies the body's enhanced capacity for consciousness, and it entails a large range of physical, cognitive, psychological, and spiritual abilities. As a result, what we call "soul" is the potentially conscious and capable body (the full person).

Clearly, my proposed dignity-oriented personhood involves two presuppositions. First, the body and the soul are not two different beings or "substances," but rather two aspects of one and the same person. Second, we can say that they "form" a unity only because life is corporal. The soul and the body exist "corporally." Recall that Thomas understands that the soul (a form) creates the body (a matter) and unites with it, forming a soul-body "composite of unmixed substances." In contrast, my dignity-oriented approach shows two different representations that refer to the same being, which only exists corporeally. In other words, the seeming "unity" of personhood is a direct consequence of our intrinsically corporeal existence. In reality, there is no actual "unity" between the body and the soul since these are theological representations of two qualities or aspects of our single, corporeal type of existence. Nevertheless, the word "unity" continues to be helpful in a theological universe that remains by and large dualist. An intelligible and incisive response to the longstanding tradition of dualism demands the use of such biased vocabulary. Using dualist jargon, I conclude that the "unifying" factor of personhood is neither

the rationality of the soul nor the materiality of the body, but rather the corporeal nature of human life. By "corporeal nature" I refer to the implications of a certain Christian truth that may have been neglected or overlooked in modern and contemporary strands of theology: God has chosen to incarnate in order to live a human life, and by so doing to fulfill the divine promise.

Doing dignity is self-transformative. A person is a body with the potential to perform dignifying acts consciously. Assuming that the body is the entire way in which we exist, in interpersonal and social relations, and that the soul includes the potential for doing good, then dignifying deeds can transform their agent. The central claim of chapter three is that the more someone performs such mutually beneficial deeds, the more one's relations improve, the more one's corporeal and conscious existence becomes integrated, and the more one's "life" improves. The more a person acts for the liberation of the poor, the more the two aspects of personhood become integrated, and the more the whole community is liberated.

I have called this superiorly integrated person the "spiritual-body." However, the sense in which I use that term is less Pauline than it is liberative: a spiritual-body is not a being, but rather a specific mode of living that honors both our corporeal existence and the spirit of liberation that shall direct it. While every person is potentially a spiritual-body, only those who toil for economic, social, political, and environmental liberation actually maximize their bodies (or total person) and souls (or capacities).

To recapitulate, the poor and Black person creates the conditions for communal wellbeing, and in so doing her/his body and soul become more "integrated," which indicates an elevation in the realization of one's capacities. Yet people who can create their wellbeing are also able to discern where their dignity is and what it entails. Thus, chapter four answered the important question, "Where is human dignity located?" and the final section of this fifth chapter

drafts an illustrative list of fundamental items that must integrate a life lived with a minimum of dignity.

In chapter four I claimed the existence of least two types and locations of dignity, depending on how two persons meet. The first kind is a God-given, innate, and intrinsic attribute that becomes perceptible in the interpersonal space between two actual, "bodily persons" who meet in pure relation. Drawing from Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue and Gebara's notion of "body relatedness," I claim that intrinsic dignity can be acknowledged in the inter-corporal or -personal "space" formed whenever two persons are reciprocally present. There is a Divine presence in such a moment and place of increased mutuality, when and where the participants can confirm one another's integral and individuated humanity. Contained in such confirmation is the acknowledgment of one another's intrinsic and specific dignity. Although every person has an intrinsic dignity, it only becomes "effective" or "apparent" after its mutual acknowledgment—a human act.

The second type is in reality the retrieval of the "intrinsicness" of the first. As soon as the participants of pure relation disengage and the intense mutuality ceases, dignity becomes relative, extrinsic, and fungible—a value among other values. As such, it becomes an object that can be manipulated. However, as Buber teaches us, when two persons become reciprocally present they can receive a divine "meaning," which is unknowable but can be felt as a "presence as strength, in the[ir] being." This meaning-presence-strength continues with the person after the encounter, pressing them to "actualize God in the world." In other words, the previously received divine meaning keeps pushing us to meet every person with full mutuality and presence. Consequently, it also prompts us to renew the "intrinsicness" of the neighbor's dignity dialogically, through love. So, I have claimed, the enactment of meaning can be considered a

dignity-restoring act. I can "actualize God" in the world by striving to re-enact the prior and mutual acknowledgement of intrinsic dignity.

In the instrumental sphere of relation, which is ruled by utility and involves low levels of reciprocity, dignity is nevertheless recoverable through a love-enabled dialogue. Only "social" love has the power to neutralize the gaps that a hierarchical culture imposes. Love is a pathos or affect (Boff) that is spontaneously erotic or bodily (Gebara). However, social love is a responsiveness aimed at the good of the other (Buber). Since the capacities to love "socially" and to enter dialogue have been historically associated with what we commonsensically call "soul," I conclude that the "soul" is the aspect of personhood more prominently active in the dialogical renewal of dignity. For the same reason, I have called this type "dialogical." There are at least two types of dignity and none of them can be automatically "enjoyed" since they all require acknowledgment and protection.

The two aspects of the person seem to form a dialectic in pure relation, where intrinsic dignity can be acknowledged; and they seem to form a duality, rather than a dualism, in instrumental relations, where dignity's intrinsicness can be restored. Using Caldeira's feminist translation and interpretation of Songs 1:5–6 as an example, I emphasized that agapeic and erotic love are complementary because our corporal existence has two complementary qualities or aspects. The Black woman who has likely authored Songs 1:5–6 declares her social value and self-love, and grounds them in her African ancestry, her body's blackness, and physical beauty. In contrast to Thomas, who posits a dual and hierarchical personhood, Caldeira's interpretation portrays a body-soul duality that aspires to become a dialect through love. As a duality, they need one another; as a dialect, each one exists because of the other. Always, they represent two human aspects, rather than two beings, substances, or things.

Ironically, the assumed greater worth of the rational soul has had a substantial role in the formation of a decidedly bodily culture. In Brazilian popular culture, the "body is a fundamental value"[5] but its worth is unevenly distributed. The fundamental problem is the assumed superiority of the "rational soul" which, during the colonial period, has given rise to both tacit and official types of control. Under its evaluative logic, the whiter and more "civilized" the body is, the more brilliant and rational the soul must be. Hence, from a macro perspective, while the Brazilian people may form one soul, in practice that people has varied degrees of dignity. Against dualism and the crimes that it incentivizes—particularly the material and moral suffocation of colored bodies—the poor and Black person believes her or his dignity to be a redemptive and rebellious act. The more a person acts for communal wellbeing, the more she/he affirms human dignity, the more she/he realizes her/his capacities, the more she/he becomes a "spiritual-body." Because dignity can only be realized relationally, we can say that there are at least two types. An intrinsic kind can be mutually acknowledged in the interpersonal and inter-corporeal space formed between two persons who enter pure relation. The other is perceptible in instrumental relations, when two souls dialogically and momentarily retrieve dignity's lost "intrinsic-ness."

1. Bearing the Fruits: Living With Dignity Today in Brazil

Having discussed the "why" of dignity (dualism and hierarchy) as well as its "what" (act), "who" (body-soul union), and "where" (between two persons and in dialogue), we can finally examine its "with" and "when." In other words, we can finally ask, "What does it mean to

[5] Miriam Goldenberg, *O Corpo Como Capital*: *Estudos Sobre Gênero, Sexualidade, e Moda na Cultura Brasileira*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Estação das Letras e Cores, 2015).

live with human dignity today in Brazil?" The two final "w-inquiries" must be raised together, since the "with" or meaning and the "when" or time imply one another.

On the ground, the meaning of living with dignity is always plastic and socially determined;[6] it is objectively fluid because its concrete elements emerge from the specific material and cultural developments of a given period. Thus, the objective meaning of a dignified life can change within a relatively short time span. For instance, only forty years ago, having reliable and permanent access to the internet could not be considered essential to living with dignity. Conversely, maintaining an online "presence" today, particularly on social media platforms, has become so basic that it could be considered a part of one's personal identity—even though our digital and face-to-face personas seldom match. A similar shift is perceptible in the medical field. Certain technologically advanced diagnostic processes and treatments, such as those that employ robotic or laser surgery, can no longer be considered luxury items for patients in need.

However, material and technological progress is not all that matters. Dignity is also subjectively fluid. Actual persons exist not only in the ever-changing material world, but also in dynamic intersubjective contacts. As I have claimed in chapter two, a person who lacks dignity actually discovers it after making a certain personal decision, which only happens in one's material and social reality. Just as actual persons are "made of" the interactions and contacts that form their social environments, so too personal decisions are born within and largely shaped by social, cultural, economic, and political forces. Likewise, dignity's time is not only historically or objectively contingent, but also interpersonally or "intersubjectively" determined. In other

[6] Besides being fiercely contested. For example, it is evoked by both sides of contemporary ethical debates on the end of life and abortion.

words, its *when* depends as much on personal or inter-subjective events as it is molded by sweeping cultural and material innovation.

When poor and Black Brazilians decide to live with dignity, their personal relations can be positively and materially affected. The decision to obtain or experience that which everyone deserves, solely by virtue of being alive, is so brimful of autobiographical meaningfulness that its significance "spills out" of one's inter-personal universe, into the public dimension. In the era of instant digital communication, the life-affirming attitude, initiative, and achievements of the undignified can rapidly "go viral" and form both famous and anonymous role models. They are so contagious partly because they convey an implicit and much-needed statement of agency: "Although I have been forged in a certain society and culture, I do have the powers and abilities required to co-produce positive changes in my personal story and community." As the case of the Agbara founders demonstrates, the poor and Black person's initiative confirms that we are agents, by divine design and will. However limitedly, intermittently, and constrained by the hierarchical forces, everyone can and must interfere in the course of her or his own life.

Even though its repercussions can be a gift to the future generations, the meaningfulness of one's decision to live with dignity is always rooted in the present. Grammar can help us compare the two temporal poles. From the objective, the "when" is always "today," an adverb of time. From the inter-subjective, it is a substantive "now." As an adverb, time modifies the meaning of dignity, which is materially and culturally shaped. For example, when I say, "Tomorrow, dignity will mean more than today," I foresee an increase over a period of time. On the other hand, as a substantive, it represents the decision to live well—as well as every human person deserves. For example, the interjection, "Dignity now!" poses a demand that is always interpersonal, be it the immediate access to the basic resources needed for the development of

common material prosperity, or for a fair opportunity to pursue one's earnest aspirations in the arts, the creation of knowledge, or spirituality. The "now" of "dignity now!" is a substantive insofar as it integrates the very meaning of dignity, rather than causing a modification in it. In fact, the sentence says "now-dignity." In this way, the substantive and inter-personal "now" introduces a new meaning by installing a presence. In a word, the interpersonal time expresses the decision to actualize dignity immediately, whereas the historical time expresses a change in meaning.

Since the meaning of living with dignity is both culturally shaped and interpersonally instantiated, we can conclude that its time is humanly determined (objective) and decided (inter-subjective), rather than divinely ordained. On the one hand, our intrinsic dignity is not "self-effective," for it does not originate directly from our personhood or "being." On the other, although God creates and gives us dignity, we are in charge of acknowledging, enacting, protecting, and increasing it—that's the lesson of and for Black and poor Brazilians.

While dignity's "today" and "now" can hint at its general meaning and meaningfulness, the actual significance of "living with it" can only be construed in a tangible situation. Because the expression qualifies a person's "life," its meaning always depends on objective and subjective human factors. Hence, I use it to signal the positive consequences of those deeds that affirm dignity by generating wellbeing for and by people who lack it. In other words, for them, "living" with it means "doing" it, and an "act of dignity," so to speak, does not pertain to any specific type of human activity, like thinking, feeling, or talking; nor does it constitute a separate category. Rather, the decision to redirect life to an upward trajectory is puissant yet embedded in manifold small, seemingly insignificant moves. As an act, dignity belongs to all kinds of doings that are collaborative and can in fact improve the communal and individual lives of those living

without it. As such, it is at once an affirmation of individual agency, a declaration of human sacrality, and a decision to live together in consonance with both assertions. Since any deeds can potentially comprise such affirmation, declaration, and decision, the abstract meaning of living with it is indistinct.

Deep down, every soul dreams of boundless happiness, embodied in all sorts of material and immaterial perfections and achievements. Yet, while it can be inspiring, the idea of a "maximum" dignity is a vulnerable creature's perfect illusion. We perplexedly witness how constant technological, scientific, and economic progress elevates the standards of wellbeing, at least for a few. We are made to dream high. In this vein, perhaps the utmost good that any living soul can attain is by establishing a lingering sense of the Sacred present in all corners of life. Spirituality can be cultivated, for instance, through a reverential connection with the family, the neighbor, the natural world, the arts, wisdom, other types of knowledge, including the natural sciences, prayer, contemplation and meditation, and mutually beneficial communal engagement. In any case, a "spiritualized" soul, which justifiably dreams of limitless happiness and realization, is first and foremost a realized body. Indeed, the life of and for the spirit is embodied. As such, it presents us with needs and aspirations that, if unfulfilled, can terminate with life. Recall that the body is how we exist in the world, totally and in relations, since there is no such thing as a bodiless life.

Hence, if the soul-aspect can be represented by the desire for the unattainable maximum, the body-aspect utters the indispensable minimum. Assuming that our embodied life is a creation of God, who is the Source of all dignity and who wills that we live abundantly, then the minimum must be theologically discernable and universally attainable. The discussion of what it means to live with it is one of the most pressing theological questions in a radically hierarchical

setting. First, there is a sharp material and social gap in the actual levels of human dignity. Second, the standards of wellbeing as well as the meaning of "humanity" continue to change quickly. Because the human end is to live well and plentifully, theology must permanently re-define dignity. However, even that is not enough: a theology of human dignity for Brazil ought to advance and organize the basic lessons given by the bodies of those who strive to actualize it.

Inspired by the underlying logic of Galatians 5:22–23 and Isaiah 11:1–2,[7] I propose an analogical experiment. Like our intrinsic dignity, the gifts and fruits of the Spirit are gracefully bestowed seeds that must be cultivated in order to germinate and flourish. Everyone receives them, but they only become manifest to those who "live according to the Spirit," i.e., abide by certain biblical and communal directives for the good life. For instance, while love, peace, wisdom, and knowledge are innate capacities, they only become "active" and apparent in mutually beneficial interactions. Likewise, the fruits of dignity require a propitious environment, in which they can be acknowledged, protected, and enhanced, in order to become actual. Since the fruits only "blossom" in such actual occasions, they inevitably belong in our embodied existence. Therefore, we can and must understand them from the body's perspective. The same orientation applies to dignity, which is likewise a divine gift but nevertheless can only be realized in community.[8]

Departing from this premise, I sketch an abridged, piecemeal, and merely illustrative list with six "fruits of dignity," which are objective signs that a given person lives with dignity in

[7] Galatians 5:22–23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Isaiah 11:1–2: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord." (NIV).
[8] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for Fall: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teachings and the US Economy* (Washington, DC: NCCB, 1986), ix.

Brazil. As signs, the items below do not "constitute" dignity; however, they can indicate a minimum degree of recognition, protection, and cultivation. I have constructed my list with recollections derived from my experience serving as a *pro bono* attorney for several years in the Morro do Turano, a large favela (poor community) in Rio de Janeiro.[9] There, I realized that those who lack dignity know it best and can speak of it logically, effectively, and formally.

The healthy body: Being able to obtain the means to enjoy reasonably good health, according to contemporary and local standards. To be sure, the notion of "good health" is relative, due to genetics, age, culture, weather, profession, regional standards of living, etc. Yet, regardless of such variables, everybody should be able to obtain whatever is considered necessary for them to live actively, comfortably, and long, given the contemporary and local medical and nutritional standards. In order to maintain a state of general good health, all Brazilians should at least have access to advanced medical and dental treatments; state-of-the-art medication; a clean and resourceful environment, including water sources and air; adequate time, space, and the access and means needed for the regular practice of physical exercise or sports; reasonable leisure or resting time; affordable, nutritive, toxic-free, and organic food; effective mental health services; a respectful and rewarding work environment; and be able to develop the social skills required for the preservation of edifying friendships.

The financially stable body: Enjoying sufficient financial stability, so that all members of the household can feel free to take risks and dedicate their energies to the advancement of some area of human excellence, like the arts, the sciences, business, the professions, politics, the production of knowledge, sports, culture, or religion. According to Brazil's Central Bank,

[9] I served the community through the Nossa Senhora das Dores Parish, which was supervised by Fr. Paulo Sérgio Angeloni, OSM.

financial stability is the long-term and enduring maintenance of the regular functioning of the intermediation systems (debt and credit). The calculation of macro-economic stability employs a number of variables, like wealth, several types of assets and debts, systemic risk management, buffers, liquidity coverage ratio, and leverage ratios. Transposed to the household level, a minimum degree of stability would in practice mean the capacity to maintain favorable financial operations during an economic recession. In practice, it entails a basic financial education; access to affordable housing and a low interest rate mortgage; the capacity to invest/save at least 10 percent of one's household income regularly; a retirement plan that can guarantee adequate health care, medication, food, clothing, transportation, and leisure; enough savings for at least six months of median household expenditure; and low-rate student and business loans.

The economically participative body: Having an active and equal participation in the systems of economic production. Strictly speaking, production is the transformation of nature and its energies into economically valuable or useful goods or services, with the use of intelligence and technology. For instance, a book is produced with ideas, paper (tree), and printing, or some alternative digital publishing method. However, from a theological perspective, production means more than the intentional creation of value: it is a sacred right, since it is one of the ways in which humans can participate in God's continuous creation. The continuity of creation can be inferred in Genesis 1:24–31, which narrates a set of chronologically arranged divine acts. Each verse starts with "And God said" or "And God made," conveying a succession of events. First, God creates light, then the earth and all of its inhabitants, including human beings. Finally, God encumbers humanity with stewardship of all creation, and concludes that all "is very good." Theologically, economic production assumes the continuous and sustainable human-divine transformation of the world; thus, it is sacred. Accordingly, theology must declare

that active and equal participation in the systems of production is a human right. Keeping in mind their specific capacities and dispositions, all have the right to participate actively in it and enjoy a fair share of its results. In practice, the emplacement of God's agents in the divine creative process can be fulfilled through formal employment or private businesses ownership, so long as these options provide a minimum of financial security in times of unemployment, sickness, disability, old age, or other type of unintended lack of livelihood. In any case, all persons who are economically active have the innate right to take care of a portion of this sacred and common creation, as well as the right to learn the newest knowledge and obtain the technologies that can facilitate the most advanced methods of production. Also, the wealth that production generates creates responsibilities, for the right to be economically productive entails a counterpart obligation. A biblical litany of authors make it clear that wealth implies social responsibility. For example, Timothy 6:17–18 advises, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy. That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate."[10] Jesus has confirmed this obligation in two ways; first, by declaring that God's Reign is for and by the poor (Luke 4:18); and second, by advising us to seek first God's Reign and righteousness, "and all these things (wealth) shall be added unto us" (Matthew 6:33).

The politically participative body: Participating actively, equally, and effectively in the political life. Again, the focus is the poor. Theologically, the political assessment of a given society should start with the poor's situation. The Bible admonishes all members of the political community to fulfill their special obligation to the economically and socially subjugated. In the

[10] My emphasis. King James Version.

Hebrew Bible, Yahweh is the absolute protector of Israel, to the extent that Yahweh looks out for the poor and the otherwise vulnerable. Israel's political "identity," which is substantially grounded on the Covenant, emerges from the new nation's just and benevolent approach to its lowest members. Indeed, God intends for Israel to be a just people because "justice and judgment are the foundations of your throne" (Ps 89:15). In the Gospels, the sign of God's Covenant is once again to be found in how we deal collectively with the socially vulnerable, who are the true agents of God's transformation: Recall that Jesus's opening public words are, "He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Today, political participation is an extremely complex notion that involves several others, like democracy, citizenship, nationality, identity, economic power, social mobilization and organization, protest, speech, and the family. In brief, political participation comprises any activity that can affect how the community understands, organizes, and advances itself. Looking at it from a modern perspective, and considering the biblical injunction, political participation can be gauged according to the status and the efficiency of human and social rights. Assumed in my claim is the idea that democracy is not a political order, but rather, a social organization that prioritizes both formal and effective rights—the degree of efficacy in their implementation through policies; that values and encourages social conflict; and that affirms the people's sovereignty over the capitalists'.[11] The more that social and fundamental rights are effectively enjoyed and protected, the more the poor members of a given society enjoy political participation, broadly construed. Thus, a minimum degree of participation is to be established in view of a the basic and actual rights enjoyed by poor communities, such as universal suffrage (equal voting rights); the right to organize and mobilize;

[11] Marilena Chaui, "Escritos de Marilena Chaui: O que é a Democracia?," Youtube, August, 21, 2018, educational video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDJQ7CC6IAo.

the right to supervise and hold accountable governmental and private offices, institutions, and representatives; the right to a safe and clean environment; the right to affordable housing, health care, food, transportation, and social security services; the right to education; labor rights; voluntary, protected, and respectful speech, in both physical and digital spaces; and so forth.

The joyous body in the family and in community: Experiencing respectful and joyous familial and communal relationships. In its manifold arrangements, the family continues to be the cellular unit of society. As such, it is responsible for the first-level of education of the future citizenry, including in that education the transmission of values, sapience, and affective dexterity. In the family, we begin to discover who we are and can become, by learning who our nearest and dearest are and have been. Because they form a basic social unit, familial ties should be governed by love and respect. And since they represent a living encounter of past and future generations, they should foster freedom and innovation. At a minimum, however, the family constitutes a space for common joy: a powerhouse for the delight, bliss, gaiety, and rejoicing of every member. Think of the joyous family as an emblem of felicity and self-confidence that we can all perpetuate or extend into the broader social institutions, where we form communities. In order to be a joyful environment, familial and communal members must promote compassion, solidarity, cohesion, mutual reliance and reverence, understanding, patience, balance, diligence, and some common faith, ideology, or purpose.

The thriving cultural body: Living in a thriving culture that praises humanity, celebrates its material, intellectual, and spiritual accomplishments, critically improves its moral and political status, and affirms the sacredness of every body. A culture is the most precious and durable asset of a people; it is a living organism that generates, transforms, and synthetizes the meanings of being human, with the use of elements from the material reality and the universe of

ideas, sentiments, and beliefs. Through the manipulation of tangible and intangible goods—physical objects, technologies, tools, utensils, stories, beliefs, values, symbols, and language—it spurs and permanently modifies our self-understanding and interactive patterns. A thriving culture is vibrant and enthusiastic about specific elements of human dignity. In the Brazilian case, which presents multiple and intertwined cultural traditions, perhaps the emphasis on the body can be considered a common denominator. In dance, music, food, sculpture, painting, theater, cinema, poetry, literature, and so forth, we celebrate and transmit our shared love for the colored body. The prominence of African and Indigenous aesthetic and ideological elements is undeniable in what we imprecisely call "the Brazilian culture." In general, it understands the body and the soul as two aspects of the same sacred being. Likewise, it depicts the colored body with divine hues, through which a human dignity permanently shines.

A theology of human dignity for Brazil is indispensable, and it focuses on the poor and Black body. Its development is crucial because the permanent violation of a sacred and human right creates an existential and social imbalance. For those who live without it, but nonetheless strive to realize and grow it, dignity is something much closer to an act than an abstraction. Such tension has an "existential" feature, since it is a "lived" truth that confronts us all with a call for action; and, its truthfulness is "embodied," in the sense that the body is the aspect of personhood that is most immediately involved in the struggle for the realization of dignity. From within that tension new questions might arise, which can constitute a theology of human dignity.

In Brazil, the tension is secured and amplified by dualism, which I have attempted to replace with a dialectical approach to the two aspects of personhood. In other places, the same tension might derive from or be implicated in different theological questions. I hope my research can stimulate comparative inquiries with a special focus on the theological foundations or

"camouflages" that different national or regional cultures have adopted in order to secure their own endogenous expressions of hierarchy. Perhaps against the commonplace perception, hierarchy is by no means a phenomenon pertaining exclusively to Third-World and BRICS countries; nor it is a museum piece sitting in the Ancient, Medieval, or colonial halls. In fact, as I have tried to show, it is a living and fundamental part of today's world, and we are currently witnessing both new and old hierarchical trends arising or resurging in many materially wealthy countries—oftentimes in the format of authoritarianism. A hierarchy of human persons is the motor of any authoritarianism. Although Brazil is an obvious case, the rulers of many modern democracies commonly rely on different hierarchical mechanisms of population and wealth management. This global situation presents new and not-so-new questions: How to assure that every member of society in fact enjoys the benefits of collective life, irrespective of the hindrances of a hierarchical system? What would a non-hierarchical society look like? What are the theological presuppositions and implications of a non-hierarchical political system for our times? If there are any non-hierarchical models in the Scriptures and the history of Christianity, are they a utopia, an artifice, or a feasible option?

Also, new theological definitions of dignity are urgently needed that do not merely echo the modern political notion. Intrinsically theological constructs could in fact amend and improve the political notion instead of merely corroborating it. The concept of dignity has developed amid post-war events, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948),[12] The American Convention on Human Rights (1978),[13] and the promulgation of several national constitutions in the twentieth century. Though not without heated debates and a fierce opposition

[12] Preamble and arts. 1; 22.
[13] Arts. 5.2; 11.1.

by the orthodox, both Catholics and Protestants have gradually lodged the new idea into their respective doctrinal shrines. The Vatican II Council (1962–1965) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) exemplify the incorporation on the Catholic side. In their religious reception, these and other ecclesial documents basically refer to fragments of the Scriptures and the tradition in order to uphold a supposedly perennial faith in the intrinsic, absolute, and permanent value of all creation, particularly humanity. To this day, they have merely confirmed the secular notion, postulated by in political documents, that dignity is an intrinsic value of all humanity and a universal status protected by the law.

The uncritical "Christianization" of the political notion erroneously suggests a flat dignity. Yet, from antiquity to Vatican II, from Jerusalem to Rio, it can differ considerably. In order to assume a false monolithic meaning, we must likewise assume a uniform conception of personhood. However, the meaning of being a human person, too, varies greatly from place to place and from time to time. Did David, Job, Jesus, Augustine, Luther, and Martin Luther King, Jr., for instance, believe in the same creation-based, abstract, and "automatic" dignity? How about their respective views of personhood? Future research on women's perspectives could be equally provocative and productive. For example, what did Deborah, Esther, Mary Magdalene, Clare of Assisi, Mother Theresa, Sojourner Truth, and Dulce of the Poor say about dignity?

Transhumanism is poised to prompt several new lines of inquiry. If our dignity assumes or affirms intrinsically human capacities, will we need another definition once technologies like artificial intelligence *de facto* increase our powers? What about those persons who do not have access to such technologies?

Finally, a "theology of human dignity" is only complete when the preposition "for" can *de facto* replace the preposition "of." A theology for human dignity is the expected culmination

of all presuppositional critique, reflection, and conversation. Such a theology would comprise an audacious but basic plan with feasible ideas for the disinherited and humiliated to live with dignity.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Amin, Samir. *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013.

Ammicht-Quinn, Regina; Junker-Kenny, Maureen; Tamez, Elsa eds. *The Discourse of Human Dignity.* London: Concilium SCM Press, 2003/2.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Scriptum super IV libros Sententiarum,* 1254–1256.

———. *De ente et essentia*, 1256.

———. *Summa contra gentiles* I–IV, 1259–65.

———. *De principiis naturae*

———. *De substantiis separatis*, 1260–1272.

———. *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 1261–1264.

———. *Sententia super De anima*, 1265–1268.

———. *De unione Verbi incarnati*, 1268.

———. *De spiritualibus creaturis*, 1269.

———. *De anima* (*Questiones disputatae*), 1269–1270.

———. *Summa theologiae* I–IV, 1265–1272.

———. *De mixtione elementorum*, 1273.

———. *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* trans. C. I. Litzinger (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1964).

Arendt, Hannah. *Between Past and Future.* New York: Penguin, 2006.

Azzi, Rioland. *A Cristandade Colonial: Um Projeto Autoritário*, vol. 1. Brazil: Paulinas, 1989.

Barreto, Luís Filipe. *Descobrimentos e Renascimento: Formas de Ser e Pensar nos Séculos XV e XVI*, 2nd ed. Lisbon, Portugal: Imprensa Nacional, 1983.

Barros, Marcelo. "Jesus de Nazaré, Orixá da Compaixão: Elementos de Uma Cristologia Afro-Brasileira." *Identidade!* 12 (2007).

Barros, Marcelo. *O Sabor da Festa Que Renasce: Para Uma Teologia Afro-Latíndia da Libertação.* Brazil: Paulinas, 2009).

Bilateral Working Group of the German Bishops' Conference and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany ed. *God and the Dignity of Humans*. Lutheran Theology: German Perspectives and Positions, vol. 2. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2022.

Boff, Leonardo. *O Evangélio do Cristo Cósmico: Busca da Unidade do Todo na Ciência e na Religião*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1971.

———. *Jesus Cristo Libertador: Ensaio de Cristologia Crítica Para o Nosso Tempo*. 19th ed. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1972.

———. *Atualidade da Experiência de Deus*. Rio de Janeiro: CRB, 1974.

———. *A Graça Libertadora no Mundo*, 2nd ed. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1976.

———. *Destino do Homem e do Mundo: Ensaio Sobre a Vocação Humana*, 4th ed. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1976.

———. *Via-Sacra da Ressurreição: A Paixão, a Morte e a Ressurreição na Vida de Cada Pessoa.* Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1983.

———. *Encarnação: A Humanidade e a Jovialidade de Nosso Deus*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1985.

———. *Vida Para Além da Morte: O Presente, Seu Futuro, Sua Festa, Sua Contestação*, 9th ed. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1985.

———. *Vida Segundo o Espírito*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1986.

———. *A Trindade, a Sociedade e a Libertação*, 2nd ed. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1986.

———. *A Ressurreição de Cristo: A Nossa Ressurreição na Morte*, 7th ed. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1986.

———. *Paixão de Cristo, Paixão do Mundo*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1987.

———. *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Ática, 1993.

———. *Graça e a Experiência Humana*: *A Graça Libertadora no Mundo*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1998.

———. *Coríntios*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Objetiva, 1999.

———. *Experimentar Deus: A Transparência de Todas as Coisas*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Verus, 2002.

———. *Ethos Mundial.* Petrópolis, Brazil: Sextante, 2003.

———. *Virtudes Para um Outro Mundo Possível*, 2 vol. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2005.

———. *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo*, 11th ed. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2003.

———. *Homem: Satã ou Anjo Bom***.** Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Record, 2008.

———. *Ética da Vida*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Record, 2008.

———. *Evangelho do Cristo Cósmico: Busca da Unidade do Todo na Ciência e na Religião*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Record, 2008.

———. *Sacramentos da Vida e a Vida dos Sacramentos: Ensaio de Teologia Narrativa*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2014.

———. and Jürgen Moltmann. *Há Esperança Para a Criação Ameaçada?* Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2014.

———. *Come, Holy Spirit: Inner Fire, Giver of Life and Comforter of the Poor*. trans. Margaret Wilde. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015.

———. *Memórias Persistentes e Inquietas de Leonardo Boff: Traços Autobiográficos*. São Paulo, Brazil: Ideais e Letras, 2016.

———. and Tomás De Kémpis. *Imitação de Cristo e Seguimento de Jesus*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2016.

———. *Reflexões de Um Velho Teólogo e Pensador*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2018.

Bromley, Daniel W. *Sufficient Reason: Volitional Pragmatism, and the Meaning of Economic Institutions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 20th ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Buber, Martin. *Eclipse of God*, 2nd ed. Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Press, 1952.

———. Martin Buber, *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1960.

———. *The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays* trans. ed. Maurice Friedman. New York: HarperCollins, 1960.

———. *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

———.*The Knowledge of Man: A Philosophy of the Interhuman*. trans. Maurice Friedman and Ronald Gregor Smith, ed. Maurice Friedman. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

———. *A Believing Humanism: My Testament, 1902-1965.* Trans. Maurice Friedman. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.

———. *Kingship of God*, 3rd ed. trans. Richard Scheimann. London: Allen and Unwin, 1967.

———. "Reply to My Critics," in *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*. ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman. The Library of Living Philosophers 12. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1967.

———. *I and Thou.* Transl. Walter Kaufman. New York: Charles Scribners, 1970.

———. *Pointing the Way*. Transl. Maurice Friedman, 2nd ed. New York: Schocken, 1974.

———. *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies.* Ed. Nahum N. Glatzer. New York: Schocken Books, 1982.

———. *Ecstatic Confessions.* Ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr. Transl. Esther Cameron. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985.

———. *The Prophetic Faith.* Trans. Carlyle Witton-Davies. New York: Collier Books, 1985.

———. *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*. Transl. Maurice Friedman. Introd. by David B. Burrell, C.S.C. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988.

———. *Buber's Way to "I and Thou:" The Development of Martin Buber's Thought and His "Religion as Presence" Lectures.* ed. Rivka Horwitz. New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988.

———. *On Intersubjectivity and Cultural Creativity*. Ed. and introd. by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

———. *On Judaism*. Ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, Foreword Roger Kanenetz. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

———. *Ecstatic Confessions. The Heart of Mysticism.* Ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, trans. Esther Cameron. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996.

———. *Paths in Utopia. Trans.* R.F. Hull. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996.

———. *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant.* Introd. Michael Fishbane. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998.

———. *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation between Religion and* Philosophy. Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 1999.

———. *Biblical Judaism: Eighteen Studies*. Ed. N.N. Glatzer. Introd. by Harold Bloom. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

———. "Revelation and Law." In Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning*. Ed. N.N. Glatzer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002, pp. 109–18.

———. *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings*. Ed. Asher D. Biemann. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

———. *Between Man and Man*. Trans. by Ronald Gregor-Smith. Introd. Maurice Friedman. London, New York: Routledge, 2002.

———. *Two Types of Faith*. Trans. Norman P. Goldhawk. Ed. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003.

———. *The Way of Man according to Hasidic Teachings*. Trans. Bernard Mehlman and Gabriel Padawer. Foreword, Paul Mendes-Flohr. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013.

———. *Between Man and Man*. trans. Ronald Gregor Smith. Mansfield Center, CT: Martino, 2014.

———. *The Prophetic Faith*. Trans. Witton-Davies. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Burrell, David. *Aquinas: God and Action*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Burrow Jr., Rufus. *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2006.

Butler, Judith and Athanasiou, Athena. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014.

Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* New York: Verso, 2010.

Caldeira, Cleusa. "Hermenêutica Negra Feminista: Um Ensaio de Interpretação de Cântico dos Cânticos1.5–6," *Estudos Feministas* 21, No. 3 (Sep.–Dec. 2013): 1190.

———. "Dizer Deus e o Humano no Contexto da Pós-Modernidade" *Iterações* 14, No. 25 (2019):1983–2478.

———. "Teoquilombolism: Black Theology between Political Theology and Theology of Inculturation," *Perspectiva Teológica* 53, No. (Jan–Apr., 2021): 137–159

Callahan, Allen Dwight. *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.

Cândido, Antônio. "A Sociologia no Brasil." *Tempo Social* 18, No. 1 (2006): 271–301.

Carvalhães, Cláudio and Fábio Py. "Teologia da Libertação," *Cross Currents* 67, No. 1 (2017): 340.

Chauí, Marilena de Souza. "500 Anos: Cultura e Politica no Brasil," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 38 (1993): 51–52l.

———. *Brasil: Mito Fundador e Sociedade Autoritária*. São Paulo: Perseu Abramo, 2000.

———. *Cultura e Democracia: O Discurso Competente e Outras Falas*, 8th ed. São Paulo, : Cortez, 2000.

———. *Manifestações Ideológicas do Autoritarismo Brasileiro*, 2nd ed. São Paulo: Perseu Abramo, 2013.

Chenu, Marie-Dominique. *Introduction a l'étude de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*. Paris: Librarie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1993.

———. *Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la théologie*. Paris: Seuil, Points, 2005.

Cone, James H. *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.

———. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. 40th anniversary ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018.

Congar, Yves M. J. *Thomas d'Aquin: Sa Vision de Théologie et de l'Eglise*. London: Variorum Reprints, 1985.

Corecco, Eugenio and Libero Gerosa,. *Il Diritto Della Chiesa*. Vatican: Jaca-Amateca, 1995.

Corecco, Eugenio, “Natura e Struttura della ‘Sacra Potestas’ nella Dottrina e Nel Nuovo Codice di Diritto Canonico,” *Communio* 75.

Cornell, Drucilla. *Law and Revolution in South Africa Ubuntu, Dignity, and the Struggle for Constitutional Transformation.* New York: Fordham, 2014.

Cory, Therese Scarpelli. *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

da Cunha, Manuela Carneiro. “Imagens de Índios do Brasil.” *Estudos Avançados* 4, No. 10 (1990): 91–119.

da Nóbrega, Manuel. *Cartas dos Primeiros Jesuítas do Brasil*. ed. Serafim Leite. São Paulo, Brazil: Comissão do IV Centenário da Cidade de São Paulo, 1954.

———. “Se o Pai Pode Vender a Seu Filho e se Hum se Pode Vender a Si Mesmo: Respostas do Padre Manuel da Nobrega ao Padre Quirício Caxa.” Serafim Leite, *Cartas do Brasil*.

da Rocha, José Geraldo and Conceição da Silva, Cristina. “Ser Agentes de Pastoral Negros no Contexto da Realidade Brasileira,” *Cross Currents* 67, No.1 (March 2017): 245.

da Silva, Marcos Rodrigues. “Teologia Afro (ou Negra) da Libertação: Balanço e Perspectivas” *Horizonte* 11, No. 32 (Oct.-Dec., 2013): 1769–1776.

Davis, F. James. *Who Is Black? One’s Nation Definition*, 10th ed. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

de Acosta, José. *De Procuranda Indorum Salute*. ed. L. Pereña et al., vol. 2. Madrid: CSIC, 1984.

———. *Obras Completas*. ed. Hélio Viotti. São Paulo: Loyola, 1984.

de Carvalho, José Murilo. “O Motivo Edênico no Imaginário Social Brasileiro,” *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 13, No. 38 (1998).

de Castro, Eduardo Batalha Viveiros. *A Inconstância da Alma Selvagem*. São Paulo: Cosac y Naify, 2002.

———. “O Mármore e a Murta: Sobre a Inconstância da Alma Selvagem,” *Revista de Antropologia* 35 (1992): 21–74.

de Holanda, Sérgio Buarque. *A Visão do Paraíso: Os Motivos Edênicos no Descobrimento e Colonização do Brasil*, 2nd ed. São Paulo: EDUSP, 1969.

de Oliveira, Marco Davi. *A Religião Mais Negra do Brasil: Por Que Mais de Oito Milhões de Negros São Pentecostais*. São Paulo: Editora Mundo Cristão, 2004.

De Vasconcelos, Simão. *Crônica da Companhia de Jesus do Estado do Brasil*. Lisbon: Henrique Valente de Oliveira, 1663.

———. *Notícias Curiosas e Necessárias das Cousas do Brasil.* Lisbon: Da Costa, 1668.

de Victoria, Francisco. *Relectio De Indis*, J.M.P. Prendes ed. Madrid: CSIC, 1984.

———. *On Homicide & Commentary on Summa Theologiae IIa-IIae Q. 64 (Thomas Aquinas)* trans. John P. Doyle. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997.

Dewan, Lawrence. *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006.

do Salvador, Vicente. *História do Brazil: 1500–1627*, 7th ed. São Paulo: Itatiaia/EDUSP, 1982.

dos Santos, Juana Elbein. *Os Nagôs e a Morte.* Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1976.

Dupré, Louis. *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.

Düwell, Marcus; Braarvig, Jens; Brownsword, Roger; Mieth, Dietmar eds. *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Filho, Mário José Maestri. *Depoimentos de Escravos Brasileiros*. São Paulo: Ícone, 1988.

Fernandes, Florestan. *A Revolução Burguesa no Brasil: Ensaio de Interpretação Sociológica*, 2nd ed. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Zahar, 1976.

Franca, Padre Leonel. *O Método Pedagógico dos Jesuítas: O Ratio Studiorum*. Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 1952.

Freitas, Décio. *Palmares: A Guerra dos Escravos*, 3rd ed. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1978.

Freyre, Gilberto. *Casa-Grande & Senzala: Formação da Família Brasileira sob o Regime da Economia Patriarcal*, 48th ed. São Paulo: Global, 2003.

Friedman, Maurice. *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1955.

Friedman, Howard Steven. *Ultimate Price: The Value We Place on Life*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021.

Fukuyama, Francis. *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and The Politics of Resentment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

Gandavo, Pero de Magalhães. *Tratado da Terra do Brasil e História da Província Santa Cruz*. São Paulo, Brazil: Itatiaia/EDUSP, 1980.

Gebara, Ivone. "A Mulher Faz Teologia: Um Ensaio para Reflexão." *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira,* 181 (1986): 5–14.

———. "Women Doing Theology in Latin America." In Elsa Tamez, *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989.

———. "Cristologia Fundamental." *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira*, 190 (1988): 259–272.

———. *As Incômodas Filhas de Eva na Igreja da América Latina.* São Paulo: Paulinas, 1989.

———. *Levanta-Te e Anda: Alguns Aspectos da Caminhada da Mulher na América Latina.* São Paulo: Paulinas, 1989.

———. *Conhece-Te a Ti Mesma.* São Paulo: Paulinas, 1991.

———. *Poder e Não-Poder das Mulheres.* São Paulo: Paulinas, 1991.

———. *Vida Religiosa: da Teologia Patriarcal à Teologia Feminista: Um Desafio para o Futuro.* São Paulo: Paulinas, 1992.

———. "The Face of Transcendence as a Challenge to the Reading of the Bible in Latin America." In *Searching the Scriptures, Volume One: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 172–86. New York: Crossroad, 1993.

———. *Trindade Palavra Sobre Coisas Velhas e Novas*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1994.

———. "Brazilian Women's Movements and Feminist Theologies." *Waterwheel* 10, No. 3 (1997): 1–8.

———. *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999.

———. *Rompendo o Silêncio: Uma Fenomenologia Feminista do Mal*. Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2000.

———. "Ecofeminism: An Ethics of Life." *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion*, ed. Heather Eaton and Lois A. Lorentzen. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

———. *As Águas do Meu Poço: Reflexões Sobre Experiências de Liberdade.* São Paulo: Editora Brasilience, 2005.

———. "Feminist Theology in Latin America: A Theology without Recognition." *Feminist Theology*, 16, No. 3 (2008): 324–331.

———. and Maria C. Bingemer. *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.

Gerosa, Libero. *Canon Law*. Germany: Lit. Verlag, 2002.

Gilson, Étienne Gilson. *Le Thomisme. Introduction au Système de Saint Thomas D'Aquin.* Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1922.

Gomes, Flávio dos Santos. *Mocambos e Quilombos: Uma História do Campesinato Negro no Brasil*. São Paulo: Claro Enigma/Companhia das Letras, 2015.

González, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol 1. New York: Harper One, 2010.

Harding, Rachel. *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.

Hayes, Diana L. *Forged in the Fiery Furnace: African American Spirituality*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002.

Howard, Thomas Albert ed. *Imago Dei: Human Dignity in Ecumenical Perspective*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013.

Holt, Thomas C. *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 180.

Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.

Jewett, Paul K. and Shuster, Marguerite. *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human: A Neo-Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 1996.

Joas, Hans. *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013.

Kateb, George, *Human Dignity*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2014.

Kepnes, Stephen, *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Kilner, Paul. *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015.

Kretzmann, Norman. *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2 vol. New York: Clarendon, Oxford University Press, 1997, 1999.

Leite, Serafim. *Breve História da Companhia de Jesus no Brazil, 1549–1760*. Lisbon: Livraria A.I., 1938.

Lisska, Anthony J. *Aquinas's Theory of Natural Law: An Analytic Reconstruction.* New York: Clarendon, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Lloyd, Vincent *Black Dignity*. *The Struggle Against Domination*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022.

Magesa, Laurenti. *African Religion: the Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998.

Marable, Manning. *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society.* Chicago: Perseus Book, 2015.

Margalit, Avishai. *The Decent Society* trans. Naomi Blum. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Maritain, Jacques. *St. Thomas Aquinas*. New York: Meridian Books, 1964.

Matory, J. Lorand. *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

McGinn, Bernard. *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Biography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.

McKenzie S.J., John L. "Body," *Dictionary of the Bible*. Milwaukee, MN: Bruce Publishing Company, 1965.

Mena-Lopez, Maricel et al. "Bíblia e Descolonização: Leituras Desde Uma Hermenêutica Bíblica Negra e Feminista da Libertação," *Mandrágora* 24, No. 2 (2018): 115–144.

Mendes-Flohr, Paul. "Martin Buber's Conception of the Centre and Social Renewal" *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 18, No. 1 (June 1976): 17–26.

———. *From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber's Transformation of German Social Thought*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989.

———. "The Aporiae of Dialogue: Reflections on Martin Buber's Non-Noetic Conception of Faith," *Intersubjectivité et Théologie Philosophique*, Marco M. Olivetti ed. *Archivio di Filosofia* 69 (2001).

———. "The Desert Within and Social Renewal: Martin Buber's Vision of Utopia," in *New Perspectives on Martin Buber*, ed. Michael Zank Religion in Philosophy and Theology 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.

———. *Love, Accusative and Dative: Reflections on Leviticus 19:18.* The B. G. Rudolph Lectures in Judaic Studies. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007.

———. *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019.

———. *Cultural Disjunctions: Post-Traditional Jewish* Identities. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021.

———, ed. *Martin Buber: A Contemporary Perspective.* Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002.

Mitchell, Beverly E. *Plantations and Death Camps: Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008.

Mittleman, Allan L. *Human Nature & Jewish Thought: Judaism's Case for Why Persons Matter*. Library of Jewish Ideas, vol. 7. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, trans. M. Douglas Meeks. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984.

Moura, Clóvis. *Rebeliões da Senzala*, 3rd ed. São Paulo: LECH, 1981.

Moyn, Samuel. *Christian Human Rights.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

———. *Human Rights And the Uses Of History*, 2nd ed. New York: Verso, 2017.

———. *Os Quilombos na Dinâmica Social do Brasil*. Maceió, Brazil: EDUFAL, 2001.

Muranga, Kabengele. "Origen e Histórico do Quilombo na África" *Revista USP* 28 (Dec.-Feb., 1995–1996): 56–63.

Nascimento, Abdias. *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro: Processo de Racismo Mascarado: Processo de Racismo Mascarado*. Brazil: Ipeafro, 2016.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Economic Justice for Fall: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teachings and the US Economy*. Washington, DC: NCCB, 1986.

Nkulu-N'Sengha, Motombo. "African Epistemology" *Encyclopedia of Black Studies* 8th ed. Molefi Kete Asanti and Ama Mazama eds. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005.

North, Douglas C. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions Series. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

———. *Understanding the Process of Economic Change*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Nyerere, Julius K. *Man and Development.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Pádua, Jorge H. "Teologia Negra da Libertação: Expressão Teológica dos Oprimidos na América Latina" *Estudos Teológicos* 39, No. 2 (1999): 143–166.

Pagán, Luis N. Rivera. *Evangelización y Violencia: La Conquista de América*. San Juan: CEMI, 1991.

Phelps, OP, Jamie T. "Black Spirituality" in *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States* ed. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, OSB. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988.

Pires, Dom José Maria. "Teologia Afro," *Perspectivas Teológicas* 34 (2002): 89–104.

———. "O Deus da Vida nas Comunidades Afro-Americanas e Caribenhas" in *Teologia Afro-Americana: II Consulta Ecumênica de Teologia e Culturas Afro-Americana e Caribenha*. São Paulo, Brazil: Atabaque-Asett, 1997.

Prandi, Reginaldo. *Herdeiras do* Axé. São Paulo: Huciated, 1997.

Pegis, Anton C. *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in the Thirteenth Century*. Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1934.

———. "The Separated Soul and Its Nature in St. Thomas Aquinas," in Armand A. Maurer ed., *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies*. Toronto: PIMS, 1975.

———. *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in The Thirteenth Century*. Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978.

Petrusek Matthew R. and Rothchild, Jonathan. *Value and Vulnerability: An Interfaith Dialogue on Human Dignity*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2020.

Pita, Sebastião da Rocha. *História da América Portuguesa.* Lisbon: José Antônio da Silva, 1730.

Reis, João José. “Candomblé and Slave Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Bahia,” in *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic*, eds. Luis Nicolau Parés and Roger Sansi. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Ricœur, Paul. *Histoire et Vérité*. 3rd ed. Paris: Le Seuil, 1967.

———. *Le Conflit des Interprétations. Essais d'Herméneutique I*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1969.

———. *La Métaphore Vive*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1975.

———. *Temps et Récit I-III.* Paris: Le Seuil, 1983, 1984, 1985.

———. *Du Texte à l'Action. Essais d'Herméneutique I-II*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1986.

———. *Soi-Même comme un Autre*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1990.

———. *L'Herméneutique Biblique*. Paris: Le Cerf, 2000.

———. *La Mémoire, l'Histoire, l'Oubli*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2000.

———. *Parcours de la Reconnaissance: Trois études*. Paris: Folio, 2005.

Roberts, J. Deotis. *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, 2nd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

———. *A Black Political* Theology. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1974.

Rosen, Michael. *Dignity: Its History and Meaning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Rosenzweig, Franz. *The Star of Redemption.* Trans. William W. Hallo. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970.

Rousseau, S.J., Richard. *Human Dignity and the Common Good: The Great Papal Social Encyclicals from Leo XIII to John Paul II*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001.

Schilpp, Paul Arthur and Marurice Friedman, eds. *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*. LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1967.

Scholem, Gershom. “Martin Buber’s Interpretation of Hasidism: A Critique,” in *The Messianic Idea of Judaism, and other essays on Jewish Spirituality*. New York: Schocken, 228–50, 1995.

Scott, Rebecca J. et al., *The Abolition of Slavery and the Aftermath of Emancipation in Brazil*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988.

Shonkoff, Sam Berrin. "Sacramental Existence: Embodiment in Martin Buber's Philosophical and Hasidic Writings" Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2018.

Silva, Silvia Regina de Lima. "Abriendo Caminos: Teología Feminista y Teología Negra Feminista Latinoamericana," *Magistro* 1, No. 1 (2014): 82–96.

Sperling, Gene. *Economic Dignity*. New York: Penguin, 2020.

Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics*. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1955.

Tamez, Elsa, et al. *The Discourse of Human Dignity*. London: Concilium-SCM Press, 2003/2.

Tannenbaum, Frank. "Slavery, the Negro, and Racial Prejudice" in *Slavery in the New World: A Reader in Comparative History* ed. Laura Foner and Eugene D. Genovese. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969.

———. *Slave and* Citizen. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1992.

Tracy, David. *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time: Selected Essays*, vol. 1. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*.

———.*Treatise on the Resurrection*, trans. Ernest Evans. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1960.

Torrell, Jean-Pierre. *Initiation à Saint Thomas d'Aquinas.* Paris: Cerf, 1993.

Von Martius, Carl Friedrich Philipp. "Como Se Deve Escrever a História do Brasil." *Jornal do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 24, No. 6 (Jan. 1845): 381–403.

Walzer, Michael. *Exodus and Revolution*. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944; 1994.

Wood, Robert. *Martin Buber's Ontology; An Analysis of "I and Thou."* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969.