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need technical developments—even if we sought to reject them we would make them anyway.

But what we must do is to break with the idol of technology—the idea that we can achieve what is good—health, wealth, happiness and security—through the manipulation and control of our human and non-human environments. We must break with the idea that expertise is the key to problems, and the idea that human freedom comes from human control. We must break with the urge which drives us to accept the more sophisticated as the better; the vision that identifies progress with technical accomplishment; the vision that says humans can be brought to fulfilment by manipulating them as we would manipulate objects.

Breaking away from such an idol is different from and much more than ‘finding new values’—as if we could just decide, out of the air, to want something else instead. We cannot ‘make’ new values or ‘find’ them as if they lay about us just waiting to be picked up. An idol is fundamentally religious, and we truly need, both as persons and as a society, a religious conversion. We must search out our most fundamental beliefs and commitments—what we really believe human life is all about, what God calls us to. We must be prepared to live a life where we do what the Lord requires of us—‘to do justice, to show mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.’ We must believe, day by day, in factories, workshops and laboratories, that the kingdom of heaven is to the poor in spirit, that it is the pure in heart who shall see God, that the meek shall inherit the earth. These are not moral norms for some transcendent realm; they are touchstones for the development of technology. [p. 269](#)

Within such a commitment we will ask how we may serve our neighbour, particularly the poorest; we will not ‘externalize’ effects, but will explore and accept responsibility for the consequences of what we do. In so doing we will no longer be driven by the work of our hands. And in so doing, we can rejoice in and will need all of our technical skills and expertise. We may liberate technology even as we are liberated from it.

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The Right to be Human

Pablo Martínez

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INTRODUCTION

*You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created and have their being.*

We live immersed in a society whose atmosphere we breathe all the time. Like it or not, whether we realize it or not, our concepts and attitudes are moulded by the 'pattern of this world' ([Rom. 12:2](#)). In consequence, so is our whole outlook and behaviour. It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul urges his readers time and again in his letters not to allow themselves to be dragged along by the current of this world, not to pick up the ways of this age. As individual believers and as the Church we have a duty to review from time to time the extent to which our ideas and our conduct are a faithful reflection of biblical principles or are rather a subtle form of secularism.

One of the concepts that most demands our scrutiny today is the whole area of the rights and duties of man. Individualism leads to the dehumanization of others; we regard each other as objects rather than persons. The philosophy of instant gratification of desires (material, sexual or whatever) and, above all, ethical relativism make up a sociological picture in which the rights and responsibilities of man appear in very faded colours. 'Everything is alright, everything is allowed so long as it does not harm another.'

The problem is who decides, and when, that my behaviour is harming another. Because if I affirm 'my conduct harms nobody that can be a subjective truth, just the way I perceive it; but it does not necessarily correspond to an objective reality, and possibly my neighbour is thinking quite otherwise. Indeed, for today's Christians the topic of human rights and responsibilities is highly relevant. And believe it is we who are believers who have a clearer voice to raise on the topic in the midst of so much confusion and abuse. What is the message we must give? This article seeks to open up the answer briefly. [p. 271](#)

RIGHT FOUNDATIONS

First of all, and granted that it may be examined elsewhere in this issue, we must offer a brief summary of the biblical foundations of human rights. We will begin by approaching the question negatively. On what are human rights not based?

1. They are not based on the 'intrinsic goodness' of human beings—the idea—an old one—that 'we are all basically good'. Such anthropological optimism is anachronistic in a century that has seen some of the cruellest and blackest pages of human history. Nazi torture, the repression of dissidents by so-called medical and psychiatric means, the recent barbarity of the '*desaparecidos*'—those who have disappeared—in Argentina ... these are just a few examples of what we mean.

2. They are not based on total equality of temperament, ideas and aptitudes; the idea that we are all equal in ability, character, mental powers, and so on.

3. They are not based on any concession that the State makes, even though it may be a democratic one, nor even in the majority consensus which seeks or desires them. Even if, in free elections, human rights were voted down, we as Christians would have to stand up for them because they are a gift from God. He grants them to all men, independently of their personal or social situation or any other kind of external circumstance.

They are based on the right of God to carry out his purposes in relation to man, history and nation, so that:

Man is more fully human
Life is more worthwhile and full
Society is more just

It is interesting to observe that in the OT the judgement of God on the pagan nations was based essentially on their crimes against humanity, such as torture. We see this theme expressed powerfully in the minor prophets (see, for example, [Amos 1:3–2:3](#)).

They are based on the creation of God. They are rights written into the very nature of man called to fulfil himself as a person and to live in harmony with his fellows. One of the most distinctive traits of the Christian faith and of the biblical revelation is that it gives to man an intrinsic personal dignity. This too does not depend on any external circumstances but on the fact that we were created in the image of God and bear, every one of us, the divine imprint.

They are based on the redemptive act of God. God has a ‘right’ over [p. 272](#) us for a double reason: because he made us and because he ransomed or redeemed us. This act, moreover, increases the value and the worth of every person before God. Each and every one of mankind was ‘precious and of great worth in the sight of God’.

To sum up at this point, as Christians we defend human rights on the basis of eternal principles: it is not merely a humanistic motive of ‘a better and more humane society’. The defence of human rights is tightly bound up with the defence of the rights of God and the vindication of his name on Earth. God has the supreme right to be heard, adored and obeyed on Earth.

Hence we cannot speak of the rights of man without first mentioning ‘the rights’ of God. C. S. Lewis writes in *The Problem of Pain*: ‘the Christian has no more right than to be loved by God and even in this he must recognize that it is because He took the initiative’. There is no way that we can present our rights independently of God, seeing that all we are and have comes from him and his grace ([Ps. 24:1](#); [1 Cor. 4:7](#); [2 Cor. 5:18](#)). This is the first thing to realize; that for ourselves we have no right to lay claim to any right. It is only to the extent that we are children of God that we can and we must promote and encourage that which God desires to see on earth.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FROM SCRIPTURE

Here we can mention concrete aspects which appear clearly in the O.T. They are ethical principles which have as their aim (as we have already observed) that man should be more fully human and should respect the sacred dignity of his neighbour. This results in a more fulfilled life and a more just society.

We could summarize these ethical principles (‘rights’ if we want so to call them) in four distinct dimensions.

1. The right to life itself

This is the most elementary principle. From its beginnings in the mother’s womb until its end, life is a gift from God and must be respected as such. Only God is entitled to take away a human life. ‘Behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades’ ([Rev. 1:18](#)).

And from the beginning of life we see that the unborn child is created by God: ‘For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb’ ([Ps. 139:13](#)). He is also owned by God: ([Ps. 22:10](#)) ... ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, [p. 273](#) before you were born I set you apart’ ([Jer. 1:15](#)). And he is also purposed by God: ‘your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be’ ([Ps. 139:16](#)).

From the earliest moment of the biblical revelation, with Cain’s murder of his brother Abel, the right to life is clearly established. The words of God ‘What have you done?’ resound strikingly in our ears (see the account in [Gen. 4:10–11](#)). And this is a constant in

the commands of God: life belongs to him alone, he who has said that 'a bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not put out' ([Is. 42:3](#)). Life, as the gift of God, is the most elementary of all human rights. This dimension (nowadays highly controversial for the west with the subjects of abortion, euthanasia and suicide) might well be rounded off with the words of Dr. Douglas Johnson: 'A return to a rights personal relationship to God brings with it a desire and a power to do God's will that is not experienced by those who try to keep the moral law without Him'.

2. The right to food and shelter

Two of the basic necessities of human existence are food and shelter from the elements ([1 Tim. 6:8](#)). There are numerous allusions in both Testaments to our daily bread. A satisfactory minimum of food (and 'minimum' has reference to quality as well as quantity) is one of the Lord's 'concerns' for his children. From the first moments of Creation, giving Adam instructions on what he could eat ([Gen. 1:29-30](#)), through the provision of manna and other foods during the wanderings of the people in the desert, we find numerous examples of how God's will is an adequate supply of food and drink for the human being. It is interesting to observe that one of the sins the Lord frequently denounces through his prophets is the hoarding of foodstuff (cf. [Num. 11:31-33](#); [Ex. 16](#); and elsewhere), because that demonstrates a lack of trust in the Lord (cf. [Matt. 6:25](#)) and because when I abuse my right—in this case to food—I am robbing another of the same right. Amos, Micah, Habakkuk and others denounce this sin. The Lord teaches us to ask for 'our bread day by day'; anything further can become dangerous, especially if, by abusing my right, I am depriving my neighbour.

Obviously the concept of 'food' is closely linked to that of 'work'. 'By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food' ([Gen. 3:19](#)). Paul gave a rule to the church in Thessalonica: 'If a man will not work, he p. 274 shall not eat' ([2 Thess. 3:10](#)). The right to 'daily bread' is closely linked to the right to work that will enable that bread to be earned.

We could say more or less the same of the right to 'shelter'; a term which comprises not only clothing but a 'place to lay one's head'. That is how Jacob understood it when, in his situation of need, he asked God for three things: 'food to eat', 'clothes to wear' and to 'return safely to my father's house' ([Gen. 28:20-21](#)).

However, we must not confuse the 'right' with an end in itself here either. The house is for living and not living for the house! We have to bear in mind that our 'earthly tent' can be folded up at any moment ([2 Cor. 5:1](#)) and that we are here as strangers and pilgrims. The people of the O.T. had fallen into the error and sin of turning the dwelling place into an end and not a means: 'Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?' ([Hag. 1:4](#)). 'Give careful thought to your ways' (v. [5](#)) is what the Lord Almighty says.

3. The right to health

Here we mean the word 'health' in its most biblical sense, as the Hebrews understood it. Interestingly it is a sense taken over by the WHO in its definition. 'Health is the state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not only the absence of sickness'. It is the '*shalom*' of the Hebrews, the peace that is not only the *absence* of warfare but which is defined above all in positive terms: the *presence* of a wellbeing that touches our bodies, our minds and our relationships.

The great contribution of the biblical concept of health is its positive character and its holistic vision of man. 'Its positive character' because it is not simply defined in terms of the absence of sickness. I believe that the importance of preventive medicine has its origin here. Throughout the Bible we find a great emphasis on prophylaxis which culminates

especially in the laws of hygiene of the Pentateuch (see Leviticus). This is true to such an extent that secular Medicine recognizes Moses as the 'father' of Preventive Medicine. Why? Because God has always cared about this global, integral health of man. And none of his commandments have a capricious or arbitrary reason but rather all contain something of this preventive medicine. Note, for example, the commandment to 'remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour, but the seventh is a Sabbath [i.e. a day of rest] to the LORD your God' ([Ex. 20:8-10](#)). There is an element which has to do with the vertical relationship with God: [p. 275](#) the day is 'to' the Lord. But it also contains a basic principle, regular period of rest. To disregard this leads, as we see in many cases, to problems of exhaustion and stress. It is a benefit for the health of man himself. We can certainly affirm here that a life lived subject to God's principles will be 'health to your body and nourishment to your bones' ([Prov. 3:5-8](#)).

Health, physical, mental and spiritual, is a human right because God has always done battle against sickness, just as Jesus did during his earthly ministry. Hence the Christian, as his opportunities and gifts permit, is called to prevent sickness, relieve suffering and encourage everything that increases the wellbeing of his neighbour.

At this point we must call attention to a responsibility. Health care is not only a right but also a duty, seeing that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. When Paul tells Timothy 'Watch your life' I do not imagine he would have been thinking exclusively in spiritual terms ([1 Tim. 4:16](#); cf. [5:23](#)).

4. The right to hear the gospel

In secular terms we would call this 'religious freedom'. In Spain we have a long history of repression and persecution directed against the Gospel. For that reason I am very sensitized to this point, but I will be brief in my comments.

Every human being has the right to hear the message of eternal life that God offers in Christ and to respond to that message. And we see that the right to religious freedom is at the base and is the essence of every other human right. History offers numerous examples of how the principle of liberty of conscience and of meeting together to worship God freely (and not only at the individual level) has in the long run brought freedom for other activities such as education. As has been remarked elsewhere: 'The implications of religious liberty run through the core of all the other liberties: freedom of speech, of the press, of thought, etc. Because it aims to accept the principle that man is more than a subject of the State'.

These words, in conclusion, lead us back to what has already been said: the guarantee of the rights of man rests upon the right of God, the right which God has over man to be heard, worshipped and obeyed. The determination to be free can only be understood, ultimately, in the one who has said: 'You will know the truth and the truth will set you free' and 'I am the way, the truth and the life'.

Let us remember finally that my neighbour's rights are my responsibilities. Therefore as individual Christians, as God's Church, [p. 276](#) and as Christian families, we are called to encourage and promote all that bears upon the right to life, the right to food and shelter, the right to health and the freedom to worship the Saviour together. In this way we shall experience more fully the words of Jesus when he said 'I have come so that they might have life, and have it in abundance'.

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