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programme entails sacrificial living on our part, and when he comes again on that Last Day, he will judge us and assess us according to our obedience to his royal commands. He wants to make us kings just as he is King, but he will entrust such positions only to those who have obeyed him as he himself obeyed his Father.

It is possible that if confronted with it, most Christians today will reject this teaching, because it is too demanding. It is much more comfortable to live with a theology that offers only blessings and no demands. But wise people do not ask which theology is the most convenient; instead, they ask which teaching is true or, even better, which one comes from God.

My endeavour has been to capture the mind of God as it has been revealed to us in his inerrant Word and as it was understood by people who were challenged by the harsh realities of persecution, suffering, and martyrdom throughout history. This study has changed my own approach to life, and I pray that it will do the same for many others. However hard this teaching may seem, through it we come to understand that from the start of this difficult and exacting pilgrimage, all the way to its triumphant finish in our heavenly home, it is God who works his own extraordinary purposes in us, and it is he who will always merit all the praise and all the glory.

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Christian Faith and Human Rights

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1. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Are we—as citizens and as Christians—responsible for what we know? Should it make a difference to our lives, to our faith, to our understanding of God, when government agencies use all the intricacies of modern technology to devise ever more effective instruments of torture in order to maim and break the bodies and spirits of men, women and children?

- when 15 million children under the age of five die each year—that is 40,000 each day—because they don't have enough food, water and medical care; and when millions of those who survive are exploited by child labour and child prostitution?

- when ideologies of racism, apartheid and sexism—often undergirded with biblical arguments—deny equal chances to millions of people?
- when day by day students, union workers, pastors, and journalists disappear—the UN recorded 5,000 reported disappearances in the first three months of 1993—and are never seen again, because in their passion for truth and justice they opposed the political and economic establishment?
- when millions of refugees and asylum seekers exist under inhuman conditions and who, in addition, are despised as the outcasts of modern human society?
- when there is an increasing rate of unemployment, casting millions of people into a crisis of identity, and robbing them of a chance to care for themselves and for their families?
- when in all corners of our globe people are denied the religious liberty to worship and live the way their religious impulses demand?
- when over a billion people live in abject poverty with no hope of betterment?

What impact does this knowledge make on the conscience of Christians? Does this knowledge effect our faith in God? Are the denials of human rights only moral concerns that call for our charity, or are we also challenged on a deeper, a theological level?

As Christians we claim that the 'earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein' (Ps. 24:1); we confess that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (Jn. 3:16), and that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). But have we succeeded in inter-relating these claims of faith with the real world in which we live? Should the 'wretched of the earth' have a place in our theological reflection—and what should that place be?

I fear that as theologians and church members we have not succeeded in inter-relating the rich content of our faith with the ground of our faith, the 'poverty' of Jesus. How else can we explain that our churches are replete with people whose knowledge about the modern struggle for human rights is very limited; and even the little we do know, we have failed to relate to our faith in God? The impression is easily given that we can believe in God and worship him, and at the same time by-pass those whose human dignity is being spoiled, maimed and broken. Perhaps, we should allow Sigmund Freud to remind us that humans have developed subtle ways to deceive themselves. Even as Christians we remain sinners and as such we live in the constant danger that our perception and interpretation of the world is determined by our personal and national self-interest, rather than by our faith in Jesus the Christ. It belongs to the task of theology to measure our faith and our practice and ask whether they are still in touch with their source and content.

Many believe that today's challenge is: can the human race survive in a humane manner, or will the spiral of selfishness, violence and mistrust accelerate beyond our control? Can our individual and national selfishness be bridled? Are we able to develop a vision of human life that transcends our immediate national, social and religious interests, and as such may help us to develop structures that make human life possible for all people? Both as Christians and as citizens we are called to accept responsibility for what we know: 'Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin' (Jas. 4:17).

2. THE PROMISE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

It is the noble destiny of the state and of the law to provide structures of justice, peace, security and social welfare. The law spells out how human selfishness can be bridled, how the weaker members of society can be protected and how justice can be equally distributed. Legal structures implement what has been codified in the law. State and law

are not intended to be the instruments of the mighty and the powerful to further their interests. Rather, state and law must be servants of truth and justice and thereby show special consideration for those who have no voice, no power and no friends.

In the Old Testament, for instance, the law shows a special leaning towards the orphans, the stranger, the widow and the slave; and the kings are reminded not to exploit the poor and not to oppress the powerless. Jesus' own messianic mission is intimately linked with proclaiming 'good news to the poor', 'release to the captives', the 'recovering of sight to the blind', and setting 'at liberty those who are oppressed' (Lk. 4:18); indeed, eschatological salvation is promised to the poor, oppressed and tortured: 'Blessed are you … for yours is the kingdom of God' (Lk. 6:20–26). The earliest Christians affirmed that vision of reality when they sought and found the presence of Jesus not only in the preaching of the word and the proper administration of the sacraments, but also in the children (Mk. 9:36), the prisoner, the stranger and the poor (Mt. 25:31–46).

Today's challenge to the human family is whether the national function of law and state can be expanded into a global vision. Can we repeat on an international level what law and state should try to do on a national level? The need for such international structures is clear. All major socio-ethical problems are global problems: millions of refugees and asylum seekers; the ecology crisis; the nuclear arsenals; the world economic order and the problem of dependence; the vicious spiral in which the poor get poorer and the rich get richer. The promise of human rights is that the family of nations can agree on international structures that may pave the way to more peace, justice and social welfare in our world.

The human rights movement is not new. It has its origin in the struggle to understand and define human dignity and then protect that dignity against those who may want to deny or spoil it. Many historical impulses have shaped the modern human rights movement. There were the British, the French and the American Revolutions with their attempts to protect human dignity against the onslaught of state, crown and church, and at the same time to lay moral foundations for a more humane and therefore more promising future. They searched for a new authority to justify their opposition to existing institutions, and they found it in a higher law, a law of nature or of nature's God, a law inherent to the human being. This human rights tradition was fuelled and modified by the socialist movement and by the specific demands of the developing countries.

A decisive interruption in human history was caused by the second world war (1939–1945). Concentration camps, the attempt of genocide, and the first military use of nuclear bombs shocked humanity into the awareness that human ingenuity and technology can be used, not only to build, but also to destroy; that reason need not be the creative instrument of advance, but that it can also prostitute itself to serve the strategies of hatred, racism and fascism. People began to realize that the human family needed a universal morality that transcended the interest of individual nation states, and that international structures were required to implement such a global morality. The awareness of this need resulted in the United Nations Organisation and the *International Bill of Human Rights*. The United Nations (1945) was founded with the declared purpose:

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED

- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

AND FOR THESE ENDS

- to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
- to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of the principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
- to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS.

(Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, 1945)

In 1948 the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was issued. It has been hailed as one of the important landmarks in the history of humanity. It sets a standard of morality by which nations should measure their treatment of citizens and by which citizens could know their own rights and duties over against the state and the human community.

This 'Declaration' was followed, in 1966, by two 'Covenants' that provide legal codification and international juridical authority to the human rights contained therein: the *International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and the *Optional Protocol* to the latter covenant. For governments that have ratified it, this 'Protocol' allows individual persons to file complaints in human rights matters with an international Human Rights Committee. Together with the *Universal Declaration* these Covenants form the *International Bill of Human Rights* which sets a moral and juridical standard for the human community. Ninety nations have ratified these covenants and have thereby committed themselves to use all available urgency to implement these human rights in their area of jurisdiction.

The *Universal Declaration* and the *Covenants* are backed up by many more declarations and conventions that deal with the definition and effective implementation of individual human rights. Recent examples are the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* (1981), the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (1984), and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989).[1] A Convention on Religious Liberty, and a Declaration or Convention on Conscientious Objection are in the process of preparation. Under the auspices of the United Nations the human family of nations has therefore developed a substantial corpus of human rights which can—if they are implemented—provide the moral foundation for a future of more justice and peace. Today there is a theoretical consensus that 'human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of

[1] 1. The official human rights instruments are accessible in: United Nations, *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments*, Geneva, United Nations, 1988; a list of the countries that have ratified or signed the various instruments is found in: United Nations, *Human Rights: Status of Human Rights Instruments*, Center for Human Rights, New York, United Nations, 1987. These books are updated from time to time. Very informative is also: United Nations, *United Nations Action in the Field of Human Rights*, New York, United Nations, 1983, or latest edition.

all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of Government' (*Vienna Declaration 1993*, part II § 2 etc.).

What then is the content of human rights? Details can be gathered from the above mentioned documents. For a more general summary we may recognize the various traditions that have flowed into the modern understanding of human rights, and at the same time show our awareness of imminent challenges to which the human rights movement is responding.

There are, first of all, the so-called *individual rights*. They have evolved mainly from the 'western' concern to protect the dignity of the individual over against human and historical institutions like state and church, party and crown. They include the right to life, the right to freedom of thought, opinion, conscience and religion, the right of people to participate freely in free and frequent elections, the right to privacy and to fairness before the law, the right to equality, and the prohibition of torture, slavery and arbitrary arrests.

Secondly, there are the *social rights* which socialist countries have brought into the debate as a corrective to western individualism. Social rights include the right to work and to a fair pay, the right to leisure and the right to form trade unions, the right to social security, to education, to proper medical treatment, and to participate freely in the life of the community.

Thirdly, there are the rights that show special concern for the *developing nations* in the two-thirds world. These nations feel themselves trapped in a never ending spiral of dependence and they suffer under an unjust world economic order. For many in the two-thirds world the individual and social rights appear to be unobtainable luxuries. What good is the right to free speech if you can't read or write and have no way to receive information? What good is the right to life if you have no food, no water and no medical facilities? What good is the right to a national identity if you belong to the 12 million refugees who are considered the outcasts of modern human society? Human rights therefore also contain rights such as the right to self determination of nations, the right to a national identity, the right to asylum, and the rights to the basic necessities like food, water, shelter and medical treatment to make a life of human dignity possible.

Fourthly, in recent years the human community has begun to understand that the struggle for human rights is an illusion if we do not protect the environment which supplies the air, the water and the food that we need for our survival. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the vegetables we eat all become part of ourselves. We are intimately woven into the fabric of nature. But with our focus on ourselves, on history and on progress we have exploited nature so much that the word 'ecology crisis' is an understatement. The United Nations with the impetus from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, June 1992) is in the process of developing *rights of nature*.

Finally, let us not forget that with our activity or passivity we determine the life of future generations, our children and grandchildren. The tremendous debts which most developing countries have can never be paid back. These debts strangle the children before they are born. Nuclear technology creates waste with deadly radiation that lasts for thousands of years. The cutting down of the rain forests, desertification and the thinning of the ozone layer create climatic conditions which may spell doom for our children and grandchildren. We must therefore in all our decisions now consider the rights of *future generations*.

When we speak of human *rights*, we mean those rights that are codified in the *Bill of Human Rights*. They have the force of international law for all members of the United Nations. They have grown out of the conviction that human dignity needs to be defined and protected. Human rights have the purpose of protecting the dignity and identity of

human beings in the context of their society and the environment. They are defined and codified in legal documents, and they are implemented by legal structures. If a right is disregarded or broken, certain clearly defined sanctions should normally take effect. At the same time, the human rights tradition is a process by which the human community responds ever anew to ethical challenges and then seeks to provide those instruments and structures that best define and protect human dignity.

Human rights are 'human' in that they are inherent in the existence of human beings, they are the 'birthright' of every human being. These rights belong to people irrespective of their race, colour, religion, intelligence, nationality, profession, or sex.

As '*human* rights' they are by their very nature universally valid. During the recent World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (June 1993) a number of countries (chief among them China) made the attempt to relativize the universal nature of human rights. They argued that the content of human rights varies according to culture and context, and they claimed that the authority of human rights can be accepted only within the limits of national laws. Fortunately the world conference resisted these attempts to modify the universality of human rights and insisted: 'The universal nature of these rights and freedoms is beyond question' (*Vienna Declaration 1993*, part II 1). The universality of human rights implies, of course, that nations bring their own constitutions and legal systems into alignment with the human rights structures. Human rights precede national law and therefore have a critical function. It is a problem when nations refer to the principle of national sovereignty or cultural diversity in their interpretation and application of human rights. When the principle of universality is denied then an essential dimension of human rights is surrendered.

The same is true with respect to the *indivisibility* of human rights. Commitment to human rights implies an obligation to respect and implement all human rights. And the moral intention of human rights is, that each nation is challenged to focus on implementing those rights that constitute a problem in its cultural, political and economic context. In Vienna it was affirmed: 'All human rights are *universal, indivisible* and *inter-dependent* and *inter-related*. … While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of states, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms' (*Vienna Declaration 1993*, part II 3, emphasis mine).

3. CHRISTIANS FAITH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

As Christians we have good reasons to presume that the providential activity of God has been at work in the human rights tradition. Christians and churches, should therefore wholeheartedly participate in the struggle for the codification and implementation of human rights.

The biblical traditions portray God as desiring to make human life human. When his people are oppressed, God longs for their liberation, and he invites people like Moses to participate in that liberating activity. With the law codes in Israel special care is taken to ease the fate of the poor, the slave, the widow and the stranger. The prophets condemn those leaders in religious, economic and political institutions that are not concerned with protecting the dignity of human persons. Jesus announces liberation to the oppressed (Lk. 4:18f.) and promises grace to the poor, to the hungry and the sorrowful (Lk. 6:20f). He fleshes out the gospel by healing the sick, driving out demons and sharing his life with the marginal people of society. The earliest Christian churches accepted Jesus' passion for the

world by affirming the essential equality of all persons and by beginning to eliminate injustice from their own midst.

Indeed, we may safely say that the Psalmist gathers up the tendency and the intention of the whole biblical message when he hears God saying: 'Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute' (Ps. 82:3). And the writer of Proverbs relates this directly to God's action in history: 'the Lord will plead their cause' (Prov. 22:22). Moreover, 'those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honour him' (Prov. 14:31). It belongs to the privilege of faith to attend to God's healing, saving and liberating passion for the world. By our attitude and action we reveal who our God is.

We can even go a step further. The *content* of human rights is analogous to the Christian understanding of the human person. We saw that the human rights tradition is aware of the relational reality of the *humanum*. It therefore does not only speak of individual rights, but also of social rights. And at the present time there are attempts to integrate ecological rights and the rights of future generations into the human rights tradition.

It was a decisive break-through in our understanding of reality when it was realized that the human person, indeed all of reality, can be adequately understood only in *relational terms*. The essential nature of the human being is that he or she *receives* life, that human persons are responsive to someone and therefore responsible. Martin Buber has reminded us, however, that although human beings find their identity in the manifold fabric of relationships, the I—Thou relationship precedes the I—It relationship. This alone can protect the conscience from becoming functionalised for ideological interests. The relational network in which human beings experience, shape and live their human identity, includes the following dimensions.

There is, first of all, the *relationship that human persons have to themselves*. It belongs to the great achievements of the human rights tradition to assert and safeguard the inherent dignity of the human person. In and with our conscience we are aware of an identity that is uniquely ours; an identity that is not granted by crown, state, society, or religion, and that can therefore not be taken away by them. What God the creator said to Jacob summarises a theological conviction that is true for all human beings: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine' (Isa. 43:1). We also recall that Jesus healed concrete individuals and how he used the personal pronoun when he interpreted people's experience of God: '*Your* faith has made you whole,' From the view point of Christian faith we can therefore only hail those human rights that want to protect the dignity of the individual over against the encroachment of human and historical institutions like the state and even religious institutions. Individual rights, like the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to express one's opinion, the right to a fair and public trial, equality rights, protection against torture and slavery, but also the social rights, like the right to work, the right to education, the right to fair wages and the right to join a trade union are designed to protect the dignity of the individual.

At the same time we must distinguish between the dignity of the individual and individualism. The human conscience reminds us that human beings by nature are not individualists, but that we receive and shape our individual dignity in a network of life-giving relationships.

This brings us, secondly, to the religious dimension of life, our *relationship to God*. This may be somewhat controversial, at least in the 'western' world, but in light of the history of humanity as a whole, and considering the universal human experience, the burden of proof must be placed upon those who deny that the human being is inherently religious.

Long ago Saint Augustine prayed: ' … thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.'[2]

When we fail to recognize the essential God-orientation of humanity, then the danger is that either an ideology of individualism or of collectivism will result. The former results from the self-assertion of the individual, which, if not checked by faith in God and by social and ecological concerns, easily leads to a social Darwinism of the survival of the fittest. The consequences will be economic exploitation and political domination, with the resulting problems of social and ecological injustice. Collectivism results in an ideological socialism which tends to quench the creativity of the individual and thereby subdues an important characteristic that is necessary to build a just society. Martin Buber, probably having capitalism and socialism in mind, says:

> … if individualism understands only a part of man, collectivism understands man only as part: neither advances to the wholeness of man, to man as a whole. Individualism sees man only in relation to himself, but collectivism does not see man at all, it sees only society.[3]

We would therefore argue that if the God-orientation of humanity is denied, then everything else is in danger of becoming distorted. Instead of recognizing God as the ground of all being, the human ego usurps the centre of reality and makes itself the focus and reference point of all reality. It is therefore the conviction of Christians that the human conscience needs to be freed from the self-centred interest of the ego, and this liberation of the conscience to its true being comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Only when the conscience is freed from its immediate self-interest can it become aware of its freedom as a relational reality and can assume responsibility for this relational existence.

Any ideology that does not recognize the religious dimension to be an essential part of the *humanum*, and any institution that wants to limit or stifle the exercise of faith and the practice of religion, transgresses against the dignity of human beings. No human and historical institution can prescribe or demand that people should believe, but every institution has the duty to create room for the free exercise of religion. If this room is not granted, then the human conscience feels stifled and will seek ever new ways to exercise its religious thrust. Human rights therefore define and protect those aspects of life which have to do with the exercise of religious faith.

The third dimension of human relational reality is the *relationship among human beings*. While the conscience reminds us of our individual identity and dignity, while the experience of freedom, prayer, and worship is a constant reminder of our God-orientation, our loving and the need to be loved indicate that only in togetherness with others do we find our human fulfilment.

Jesus' messianic mission therefore included the formation of a *messianic community*. His togetherness with other people was a constitutive part of his own ministry. To share in his ministry, he called people to discipleship and created a community of men and women around himself. With them he met around the meal table, shared in their life, and commissioned them to share in his mission. However, he did not create a community of elitism or exclusiveness, but showed a radical openness to the outsider: the poor, the leper, the gentile, the women and the children. Indeed, for Jesus, to love God and to love one's neighbour belonged together (Mk. 12:29–31; Mt. 25:31–46). One cannot worship God whilst hating one's neighbour (Mt. 5:23f).

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[2] 2. 'Confessions,' Book 1, cited from *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. VII: Augustine: Confessions and Euchiridion, (London: SCM, 1995), p. 31.

[3] 3. 'What is Man?', 1938, in Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Collins, 1961), (1947), p. 241.

This emphasis of Jesus' life resounded in the ministry and experience of the early church. For Paul, one's relationship to God through Jesus Christ has a reconciling effect on human separation: in Christ there 'is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28). And the writer of 1 John asserts: 'whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.' (1 Jn. 4:8, cf. v. 16). 'Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.' (4:20). Thus, for Jesus and the early church it was clear that one's relationship to God and one's relationship to one's fellow human beings were a constitutive part of human identity.

This relational dimension of human existence is recognized in the human rights declarations and conventions. Human rights therefore do not only contain the individual rights but also safeguard the conditions and structures of human life together. They recognize the family as the basic unit of society. They assure the right of free assembly. They safeguard the self determination of national and cultural units. They speak about the participation of the individual in cultural, political and religious life. They call for good working conditions, for fair wages, for trade unions, and for social security. They provide for a fair judicial system, for the education of children, and for a proper provision for holidays and leisure time which allows people to live and enjoy life together. They forbid the exploitation of other human beings such as by slavery and torture. Human rights therefore recognize and safeguard the human and the Christian conviction that to be a true human being one needs to have creative relationship to one's neighbour.

A fourth dimension of human relational existence is our *relationship with nature*. As human persons we are bound into the delicate fabric of our environment. Nature provides the context in which we discover ourselves, in which we praise God and love our neighbour. Nature provides the sustenance for our life. It is the space that invites and enables human creativity.

The biblical story explicates the human relationship to nature. According to Genesis 1:26–28 it is part of the human *imago dei* that the human person must exercise responsible rule—that is what 'to have dominion' originally meant—over nature. Nature is part of God's creation. In it the human person is given a special place (Gen. 1–2; Ps. 8). Adam names the animals, and God determines that the plants and the animals are to provide sustenance for human life. But two things must not be forgotten. *All* human beings have a right to share in the fruits of the earth, and an *exploitation of nature for selfish ends* is excluded by the assertion that nature is part of God's creation. It was especially the Semitic wisdom literature which underlined the fact that in our relationship to nature we confront the holiness of God himself.[4] Also the interesting biblical details that God's covenant with Noah included 'every living creature' (Gen. 9:9f.), and that human salvation includes the redemption of nature (Rom. 8:18–25), point to what Gerhard von Rad called the 'existential relationship' between human beings and their environment.[5]

If human rights are designed to define and protect human dignity, then human relationship to nature must be defined and protected. The human rights tradition has recognized this dimension of human existence in the right to enjoy a healthy environment, and the ecological rights which are designed to protect the delicate balance of nature. Related rights include the right to an equal share of goods, the right to shelter, food, and adequate living conditions, the right to work, and the right to own property as the

[4] 4. Compare Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972).

[5] 5. Ibid. p. 303.

products of human labour. Countries have the right to use their natural resources and the duty to protect their natural wealth against human exploitation. If humankind destroys the delicate ecological balance, it is destroying the garden which provides the sustenance and context for human survival.

We finally mention the importance of an active, creative and constructive relationship with history and therewith our *relationship to the future* and our responsibility for future generations. We have seen so far: conscience gives us the awareness of our individual dignity, prayer and worship remind us of our relationship with God, love points to the need of a relationship with our fellow human beings, and the very substance of life and work shows that we are an integral part of nature and the cosmos. In addition we need to recognize that, on the one hand, we are products of the past historical process, and on the other hand, we are able through responsible decisions and actions to participate in shaping our own future. History is not a succession of predetermined events, but it is an ongoing process which we, through our decisions or non-decisions, our activity or passivity, our responsibility or irresponsibility, will help to determine.

This fundamental observation that human beings are called to responsibility and are, whether they like it or not, shapers of human history, is also an important aspect of the biblical message. Jesus called men and women to share in his ministry and mission. The apostle Paul emphasized that faith in Christ does not eliminate human responsibility but inspires it. He does not only call Christians to responsible living—'If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit' (Gal. 5:25)—but he explicitly states that he himself, and Christians in general, are called to be 'fellow workers' with God (1 Cor. 3:5–11, cf. 2 Cor. 6:1). In using not only *doulos* or *diakonos* to describe Christian ministry, but also *sunergos*, Paul raises a theological claim for himself and his helpers.[6] This in no way detracts from Paul's emphasis on grace. Living out of the grace which God has revealed in Jesus Christ does not eliminate human responsibility, but, on the contrary, it calls for it.

The human rights tradition recognizes our being woven into the historical process by defining and protecting those rights which help us to exercise this part of our nature. On the individual level we think of the right to liberty and security of person, the right to education, the right to move freely within one's country, to freely leave one's country and return to it, the right to participate in political, economic, and cultural decision-making, the right to marry and establish a family, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, the right to free assembly, the right to form trade unions and to strike, the right to rest, leisure, and freedom of expression. On the national level it includes the right of self-determination and the right freely to dispose of one's natural wealth and resources.

We need to pause here and remind ourselves that human rights are not *necessarily* identical with the content of the Christian faith. As Christians we presume that God is providentially at work in the human rights tradition, and therefore we have a positive and expectant attitude toward human rights. But this does not relieve us of the task to participate critically in the codification and implementation of human rights. In each situation we need to relate the resources of our faith to the human rights concern at hand. In doing that there may emerge special emphases which the Christian faith may have to offer.

As Christians we claim, for instance, to have a plausible answer to the ontology crisis with respect to law in general and to human rights in particular. Human rights are by definition universal and therefore presuppose a universal morality. In the past, Natural Law theories have served to provide an ontological basis for such universal morality. However, although originally Natural Law theories had the critical intention to curb the

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[6] 6. Georg Bertra, '*sunergos* … ', in TDNT VII (1971), p. 875.

self interest of peoples and nations, in fact they have proved to be inadequate as the moral foundation of universal law because they have the inherent tendency to validate the *status quo* in any given social order. Slavery, war, racism, and the subordination of women have all been validated with natural law theories. Thus the ontological basis for a universal morality remains an unsolved problem.

That such a foundation is necessary has always been felt. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* speaks of 'the *inherent dignity* and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family' (Preamble, my emphasis), and it asserts in §1: 'All human beings *are born free* and equal in dignity and rights. They *are endowed* with reason and conscience … ' (my emphasis).

The intention of these formulations, pointing toward a moral foundation for human rights, is clear. They want to underline the universality of human rights, and they want to assert that the dignity and freedom of the human person is superior to human and historical institutions like the state, the law, and the church. Historical institutions neither granted nor invented these rights, therefore they also cannot take them away. They must recognize these rights, do everything in their power to implement them, and create circumstances so that all human beings can fully enjoy and exercise their rights.

But the problem comes when one tries to define, understand, and explain the *moral foundation* for human rights. What does it mean that a person has certain 'inherent' and 'inalienable' rights; that people are 'born' with certain rights which no one can take away from them; that human beings have these rights 'by nature'? If people 'are endowed with reason and conscience', who or what endows them with such?

The most one can say at the present time, is that there is an emerging consensus that human rights are grounded in the *human person*. But then the difficulty is how the human person is to be understood and defined. Is it basically an individualistic being, or is it basically a social being? Is the reality 'God' constitutive for understanding the human person or is it not?

We face a similar question when we ask how we can arrive at a universally valid *content* of human rights? What are the criteria for deciding between right and wrong? If human rights are seen basically as agreements between people and nations, would such rights not basically mirror the social values of the people who make such agreements? Would not this merely mirror and maintain the *status quo*? And if this is not the case, as the references to the moral foundation in the human rights documents have indicated, must we then not try to define a moral foundation in such a way that it can also question and criticise our present value systems?

The problem and the challenge is clear: unless a universally valid moral foundation for human rights is discovered and agreed upon, human rights will be increasingly emptied of their validity and authority, and they will continue to be misused in the ongoing ideological warfare. The dawning awareness that all humankind is in the same boat and needs to face the challenge of human survival together, may provide the necessary motivation to arrive at a moral foundation that can provide both legitimacy and clearer content for human rights.

As Christians we refer to God as creator and sustainer of heaven and earth with respect to the foundation of a universal morality, and we point to revelation as a discernible content to define and protect human dignity.

A further illustration as to how Christian faith can provide a special emphasis is the reminder that even the most noble human rights can be misused and are therefore in need of constant interpretation. From the Christian point of view we do not only affirm the equality and equal dignity of all human persons, but we insist on a definite and intentional leaning towards the protection of the weak, the sick, the poor, and other marginal people

in a society. This alone can safeguard human rights from becoming a soft weapon in the ideological cold war. This alone can help human rights to fulfil their aim of paving the way to a free, just and peaceful human society. The same is true with the symbol of freedom. Our 'western' understanding of freedom tends to be individualistic and nationalistic. We claim the freedom to do what we like, with the corollary that we must respect the freedom of others. With this definition we overlook, however, that every 'other' becomes a possible limiter of my freedom and thus a potential enemy. The resources of faith remind us that freedom is a relational reality so that I can only be truly free together with the 'other'. The liberated conscience will therefore understand other human beings not as potential enemies, who constantly threaten to limit its freedom, but it will seek the welfare of others, knowing that they are potential sources of life and freedom.

As a final illustration we mention that although the Christian faith will encourage people to become aware of their rights and to claim them in their pilgrimage of liberation, the resources of faith also entail the power *not* to claim one's own rights if this is seen to be more conducive in paving the way for justice and peace.

4. OUTLOOK

The promise of human rights is that they may provide the moral foundation for the humane survival of the human race. The greatest problem in respect to human rights is the lack of implementation. If we as Christians and as churches can presume that the providential activity of God is at work in the human rights tradition, then it must be part be part of the mission of the church to make its contribution to the codification and implementation of human rights.

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Reconciliation: A Reality or Simply Political Correctness

Allison Howell

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To live under a curse imposes a heavy burden, but the Kasena, Builsa, Frafra and Sisaala people of Northern Ghana have the legacy of a double curse in their past. They share the same curse of sin that the whole human race has been under, but they also have had to face the curse of slavery and the disruption that it has brought to life. The Builsa,