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Voices from the Lutheran Communion



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FAITH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Voices from the Lutheran
Communion

The Lutheran World Federation

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Faith and Human Rights:

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Introduction

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) views engagement in the search for social and economic justice and the promotion of human dignity as fundamental elements of a holistic Christian ministry and witness. As declared at the LWF's Sixth Assembly held in Dar es Salaam in 1977,

Advocacy for justice is an essential, integral part of the mission of the church. It belongs inherently to the proclamation of the word. Justice under the law of God is a witness to the universal sovereignty of God's law over all his creation.¹

Human rights law—encompassing both civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights—provides a set of legal definitions and tools for the promotion and protection of human dignity, and for the pursuit of justice. Although the terminology of human rights is not to be found in biblical texts, nevertheless,

This does not mean that the Bible does not provide an adequate basis for theological reflection on human rights. ... The dignity of human beings, the chief reason for human rights, arises from the idea of persons being created in the image of God".²

Although it would be wrong to claim an exclusively Christian ethical basis for what must, after all, be a universal struggle for human rights in all religious and cultural contexts, there is indeed much in Christian teaching and theology that enables churches to 'own' human rights as an essential part of their ministry. In the quotation above, Botman invokes the principle of *imago dei*—the doctrine that all people are created in the image of God. Some of the writers in this present publication also

¹ Statement on "Socio-political Functions and Responsibilities of Lutheran Churches," LWF Sixth Assembly, Dar es Salaam, 1977

² Russel Botman, "The rights of the individual, the rights of the community and their relationship", an article published in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches' *Semper Reformanda*, vol. 48, no. 3 (September 1998)

conceptualize the community's and church's concern for human rights on the same basis. Pfrimmer cites *imago dei* as the first of three theological convictions which provide the framework for churches' involvement in human rights.³ Henriksen insists that "human rights issues should be a part of every Christian's life" based on a realization that "'the other' is also created in God's image."⁴

Despite the vast diversity of humankind, all human beings are "creatures made in the image of their Creator. As such, they are capable of reason, choice, creativity, imagination, love and virtue. Any assault on the life or dignity of the individual is an affront to his [or her] Maker."⁵

Moreover, the very birth, ministry and death of Jesus Christ is itself the most powerful demonstration of the inherent value that God, through God's love, invests in humankind. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3: 16). As Altmann observed,

... grace radicalizes respect for human dignity, in that it attributes this dignity to the free will of God and not to nature. Over against the multiplicity of ideological and social claims such as production and property, culture and property, culture and power, the valuing of the human being for what he or she is, even and especially in deficiency, weakness, impotence, and marginality, returns us to the path that leads to Jesus of Nazareth, born in a stable and killed on a cross.⁶

In dying for our sins, Christ made the sufferings of the world his own. He also expressed most clearly the consequential implications of the human dignity in which his sacrifice was to be invested. Loving God and re-enacting God's love for humanity is expressed in fulfilling the commandment to love one's neighbor, and is manifested when our neighbor is able to say,

³ David Pfrimmer, ...

⁴ Jan-Olav Henriksen, ...

⁵ Joseph Loconte, "Christianity and Human Rights", paper presented at the Fourth Annual Lilly Fellows Program National Research Conference, p.2

⁶ Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. Mary M. Solberg (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) p. 41

Introduction

...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me (Matthew 25: 35–36)

To his bewildered disciples, and to each of us today, Christ declares that “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me” (Matthew 25: 40).

What remains is to answer the question famously posed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? In Bonhoeffer’s own understanding, Christ confronts us in the here and now precisely as the neighbor in need. So the question may equally be asked: Who is the neighbor in need through love of and care for whom we may express our love of God?—for as Bonhoeffer concluded, “what is nearest to God is precisely the need of one’s neighbor.”⁷

The purpose of this publication is not so much to explore the intricacies of theological argumentation in support of human rights—although some of the contributors have reflected on this aspect in their articles. It is much more an attempt to share how some people from within the communion of churches that is represented by the Lutheran World Federation have sought to respond to this question, and have found the answer in all those who are the victims of human violence and injustice.

The contexts in which the various contributors live and work are very different, and the nature of their respective engagements in the struggle for human rights highly diverse. Kanyoro appeals for reflection on the gender equity consequences of the fact that both “[m]en and women are made in the image of God; each one of us is baptized into Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection.”⁸ Chetty promotes the sharing of stories as a symbolic act of solidarity, as well as a reminder of the commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22: 39). Manohoran works for the human rights of Dalits (formerly known as ‘untouchables’) in a context in which the effects of the ancient social order of India remain a powerful obstacle to the realization of those rights.⁹ One of

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p.137

⁸ Musimbi Kanyoro, ...

⁹ Vincent Manohoran, ...

the most basic principles of human rights is that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”,¹⁰ while the fundamental presumption of the caste system is that they are not. Ojulu works for peace and against the spread of the HIV-AIDS pandemic in a context in which ethnic divisions and traditional practices promote conflict and disease.¹¹ Keppi and Dietrich highlight the challenges of addressing the needs of rural and indigenous communities in Brazil, the first of which might be education.¹² As Keppi says, quoting Sao Gabriel, “people can only fight for the rights they know.”¹³ Frado strives to be a voice for the voiceless at the United Nations headquarters in New York,¹⁴ following the example of the Lutheran theologian O. Frederick Nolde who did so much to help form the basic framework of modern human rights law and of the United Nations organization.¹⁵

The contributions to this publication of these and other contributors serve as recognition that they and many other Lutherans around the world are fully part of the struggle for human rights, for the human dignity that those legal principles seek to protect and promote, and for the neighbor in need. Their examples also provide evidence that, whatever our own circumstances and contexts, there is something for each of us to do in this struggle.

¹⁰ UDHR, article 1

¹¹ Ojod Miru Ojulu, ...

¹² ...Keppi, ...; Mozar Dietrich, ...

¹³ Keppi, ...

¹⁴ Dennis Frado, ...

¹⁵ Peter Weiderud, ...

Otto Frederick Nolde: A Human Rights Pioneer

Peter Weiderud

Can churches really make a difference in international affairs? In a world in which politics is mostly understood as an expression of power and self-interest, can faith have an impact? Why should power structures listen to the church?

Having spent the best part of my life with one foot in the church and the other in politics or governmental affairs, I have had many opportunities to argue for the importance of the church's involvement in political and international affairs. Much of the church's more recent involvement can be connected to the work of Otto Fredrick Nolde, who made a significant impact on politics and international affairs. Together with other committed colleagues and people of faith, the American Lutheran seminary professor from Philadelphia made a remarkable contribution to the foundation of the United Nations (UN) and to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR).

Nolde was chosen by the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) community as its representative at the UN's tenth anniversary celebration, held in San Francisco in 1955. During the UN's first years he was widely recognized as the most influential NGO representative. Nolde and his team greatly influenced the wording of the UN Charter and secured the establishment of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) that prepared for the UDHR. He was asked to draft the article on religious freedom and to comment on the others.

Nolde was born in Philadelphia in 1899, the son of German immigrants originating from Darmstadt. He was the third of four children and the only boy. German was the language spoken at home as well as in church. In 1908, following an illness, his father, who had worked in the carpet industry, found only occasional employment. The family had to make sacrifices so that Otto could continue his education. Otto's older sister had to leave school and get a job to support her brother's high school education. Otto proved to be a very talented student and won a scholarship to Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. After graduating, he moved onto the Lutheran

Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP). After receiving his B.D. and his ordination in 1923, he began to study for a Ph.D. in education.

From 1925, through the depression, the “New Deal”¹, and the years immediately prior to WWII, he divided his professional life between university teaching and congregational life. He married and had four children. There is no evidence that Nolde showed any interest in politics or international affairs during those years.

His wife Ellen Jarden came from a wealthy Presbyterian family. She was a well-regarded teacher of English with progressive ideas and a strong interest in international affairs. Her encouraging support and the backing of the family fortune were very important during Nolde’s first years of national and international ecumenical peace work.

In spring 1942, he attended the Delaware, Ohio, National Study Conference on International Affairs which led to an invitation to the Federal Council of Churches’ Commission to Study the Bases of a Just and Durable Peace (CDJP). In 1944, he was appointed Executive Secretary of the Joint Committee on Religious Liberty, almost immediately after having become dean at LTSP. He continued to teach until 1962, but his post became progressively more administrative.

The CDJP was chaired by John Foster Dulles, the son of a Presbyterian minister and professor of theology. Dulles was a prominent figure in the Republican Party and appointed US Secretary of State in 1953 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. He held this position until his death in 1959.

During the critical years of the church’s contribution to the formation of the new world order after the war, Dulles and Nolde worked closely together. Even though they disagreed on policy issues, Dulles continued to appreciate Nolde telling him, “It is too bad I’m not in a position where I can share my reasons with you. But any time you want a job as assistant secretary of state, it’s yours.”²

The CDJP published several studies on postwar reconstruction. The most useful production was entitled “Six Pillars of Peace,” a popular

¹ The New Deal was a program initiated by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 to create relief, create jobs and stimulate economic recovery for the citizens of the USA following the Great Depression.

² John Nurser, “For All Peoples and All Nations—Christian Churches and Human Rights,” (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), p. 28.

digest and summary of the CDJP's "Statement of Political Propositions." Copies were sent to congregations all over the country, with money coming in and a broad concern on postwar reconstruction emerging.

The six propositions stated that,

I. The peace must provide the political framework for a continuing collaboration of the United Nations and, in due course, of neutral and enemy nations.

II. The peace must make provision for bringing under international supervision those economic and financial acts of national governments that have widespread international repercussions.

III. The peace must make provision for an organization to adapt the treaty structure of the world to changing underlying conditions.

IV. The peace must proclaim the goal of autonomy for subject people, and it must establish international organization to assure and to supervise the realization of that end.

V. The peace must establish procedures for controlling military establishments everywhere.

VI. The peace must establish in principle, and seek to achieve in practice, the right of individuals everywhere to religious and intellectual liberty.³

International travel became difficult during the war and there were therefore few opportunities to "internationalize" this ecumenical concern. In order to validate internationally the concerns expressed in the "Six Pillars of Peace," the CDJP convened a Round Table on international affairs in Princeton in July 1943. A few British and Australian delegates traveled to the USA, while other countries had to be represented by people already living in exile in the USA.

The "Six Pillars of Peace" offered important correctives to the draft blueprint for the UN that was produced at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in Georgetown, Washington, DC, in 1944. An appeal was made for the incorporation of human rights provisions into the charter, the establishment of the CHR, and the recognition of the "great powers", while also granting every nation, great and small, a voice. At the founding conference of the UN in San Francisco, Nolde and other members of

³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

the church delegation strongly pleaded that the UN must not just be seen as a state instrument. Rather, it must also give expression to the aspirations of the people of the world. The lack of this, they argued, was one of the main reasons why the League of Nations had failed. Therefore, they urged for a preamble stating this vision and the inclusion of an article that would guarantee people direct access to the UN's deliberations.

When it was signed at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco on 24 October 1945, the preamble to the UN Charter read, "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 [sic]."⁴ The CHR was accepted and an article providing for consultation with NGOs was included.

Looking back at the role the churches played in the formation of the UN, US Secretary of State Dulles, stated:

As originally projected at Dumbarton Oaks, the organization was primarily a political device whereby the so-called great powers were to rule the world [...].

It was the religious people who took the lead in seeking that the organization should be dedicated not merely to a peaceful but to a just order [...].⁵

The year following the birth of the UN, the CDJP organized the meeting in Cambridge at which the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) was formed jointly between the World Council of Churches (WCC), which was in the process of formation, and the International Missionary Council. The CCIA was created to ensure an effective relationship between the churches and the new global body's leadership. It was also to provide the means necessary to represent the WCC member churches at the UN. Nolde became its first director.

The CCIA was one of the first international NGOs to be granted consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was

⁴ www.un.org/aboutun/charter/preamble.htm .

⁵ Dwain D. Epps (ed.), *The Churches in International Affairs, Reports 1995-1998* (Geneva: The World Council of Churches, 2002), p. 96, accessed at www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/churches-in-ia-1995-98.doc.

instrumental in helping shape the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the United Nations (CONGO), with the help of specialized committees in New York and Geneva in such areas as human rights, disarmament and development. For many years the CCIA provided immeasurable leadership. Nolde's biographer even notes that CCIA staff were often highly regarded in the UN's inner circles both for their expertise and the pastoral role several of them took with diplomats and senior officials.

For the CCIA, engagement in human rights work was of immediate concern. Having succeeded with the CHR, the foundation was laid for the adoption of the UDHR. Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the CHR, which adopted the UDHR on 10 December 1948. Nolde and his staff worked closely with her and the CHR. He played a significant role in the drafting of the UDHR, contributing particularly to the formulation of Article 18 on religious liberty:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.⁶

At the time, much of the energy in the churches regarding the protection of religious freedom originated in the Protestant missionary movement. Many hoped that the new postwar international institutions and rights would serve as instruments to promote Christianity. The campaign for religious liberty depended on a particular religious point of view; it required an explicit religious foundation.

Nolde gradually modified his opinion.

As early as 1944, Nolde concluded that a strongly parochial bias would weaken the appeal of human rights for those who did not share his Protestant outlook, or, for that matter, any religious outlook at all. [...] he said, that "freedom demands a broader base than can be offered by religion alone," and, moreover, that ideas about extending religious liberty needed to be placed in a "secular context."⁷

⁶ Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, at www.un.org/Overview/rights.html.

⁷ Nurser, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. xi.

By “secular context” Nolde evidently meant a common, religiously impartial moral space shared by peoples of different fundamental commitments and identities.

Having contributed to the drafting of the UDHR, Nolde and the CCIA staff went to work on issues such as decolonization, peace and war, refugee protection and relief, the status of women, women in development, eradication of poverty and racism. Through the regular production of a pre-assembly memorandum, which was circulated to all permanent missions at the UN headquarters, the CCIA brought the WCC’s positions on the growing number of items on the General Assembly’s agenda to the attention of the delegations.

In 1969, Nolde retired from the CCIA and returned to his house a mile away from LTSP. His first wife Ellen had passed away in 1961. He remarried in 1966, to a colleague from the WCC, Nancy Lawrence, who was also from Philadelphia. Nolde died suddenly in 1972 and was therefore not directly involved in the events of the 1980s that helped to end the Cold War, the strengthening of human rights, and the improved dialogue between East and West. However, he had played an important role in the preparation for some of these developments such as regularly pressing Dulles to keep doors open to the Soviet Union.

The years leading up to Nolde’s retirement were perhaps the most difficult for him. The sophisticated structures he had built up and staffed for engagement with the UN were beginning to be questioned within the WCC. Some people argued that these structures were an inappropriate use of available resources and less relevant to the churches’ new style of campaigning.

The primarily healthy tensions between engagement and resistance, pragmatism and proclamation, involvement and isolation in relation to political challenges have always been and continue to be present in the ecumenical movement. During his three decades of service to the churches, the ecumenical movement, and international affairs, Nolde was able to develop and refine the art of engagement, pragmatism, and involvement better than anyone else. If we measure the result of his work by the level of political impact on and improvement in many people’s lives, Nolde’s accomplishment was one of the most successful in the history of the ecumenical movement.

His most important legacy is having brought the voice of the voiceless and victims’ perspectives to the attention of the political decision mak-

ers and power structures. From the 1970s until the 1990s, when the UN's CHR work was at its peak, the CCIA was one of the first organizations to bring victims of human rights violations and church leaders from Latin America, Asia, and Africa to give direct testimonies of their situation. These were the days of military dictatorships in those regions. The testimonies contributed to the development of standards on torture, disappearances, extra-judicial killings, violence against women, and other topics.

At one of the CCIA's key consultations on human rights in 1974, in St Pölten, a group of fifty people from thirty-four countries reached a clear consensus on establishing a basis for Christian involvement in human rights. The consultation noted the emphasis of the gospel on the value of all human beings in the sight of God, on Christ's atoning and redeeming work that has given true dignity to the human person, love as motive for action, and on love for one's neighbor as the practical expression of an active faith in Christ. With this biblical undergirding of faith the participants were able to clarify what constitutes human rights for the churches as well as Christian responsibility.

A year after St. Pölten, the Fifth Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi was called to draw up the WCC's human rights agenda. In laying down the basis for its work, the assembly observed:

[...] the struggle of Christians for human rights is a fundamental response to Jesus Christ. That gospel leads us to become ever more active in identifying and rectifying violations of human rights in our own societies, and to enter into new forms of ecumenical solidarity with Christians elsewhere who are similarly engaged. It leads us into the struggle of the poor and the oppressed both within and outside the church as they seek to achieve their full human rights and frees us to work together with people of other faiths and ideologies who share with us a common concern for human dignity.⁸

In recent years, the CCIA, with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), has provided churches worldwide with an instrument to act together as they seek to address the root causes of

⁸ David M. Paton (ed.), *Breaking Barriers. Nairobi 1975. The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1976), p. 102.

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The EAPPI accompanies Palestinians and Israelis in non-violent action to address human rights violations and to carry out concerted advocacy efforts to end the illegal occupation.

Another recent example of strong church involvement in international affairs is the coordinated critique against the war in Iraq. On 20 March 2003, when the US-led coalition started the war, WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser declared the preemptive military attack to be immoral, illegal, and ill-advised. His was not a lone voice in the ecumenical family. During the whole Iraq crisis, the member churches of the WCC and other actors in the ecumenical family were able to maintain a clear, common and consistent language that was also in harmony with the voice of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC).

The CCIA and WCC produced many statements prior to the war. One of the most helpful was a result of a meeting during the German presidency of the UN Security Council in Berlin on 5 February 2003, convened by the WCC and CCIA, and involving heads of European churches, as well as the regional ecumenical organizations in Europe, the Middle East, and the USA. Together they sought a common language and response to the Iraq crisis.

The statement asked the general secretary of every regional ecumenical organization to join the WCC General Secretary in calling their respective members to join a global advocacy effort. Within a few days, there were 181 signatures from heads of churches that were handed over by the CCIA's UN office to the members of the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary General. The statement was translated into Arabic and efforts were made to increase awareness in that part of the world, from Lebanon to the Persian Gulf. In its editorial, the Lebanese newspaper, *An'nahar*, recognized the voice of the churches and challenged Arab leaders to do more of the same. Churches in the Middle East have especially welcomed the international Christian voice and unity, and grassroots communities stated that the WCC statements made them proud to be Christians.

This very important message supports the significant role and centuries-old presence of Christians in the Middle East and their key role as bridge builders between the so-called Western Christian world and the Muslim one.

Despite a unified ecumenical movement and considerable advocacy, the churches were unable to stop the war. However, they were able to

reach two very important achievements: (1) bringing the message to the Muslim world that this was not a Christian war against Islam, but an action taken by some governments; and (2) contributing clearly to the discussion concerning the illegality of the action by those governments.

Nolde's legacy was clearly present at the Ninth WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006. In the assembly statement on UN reform, there was a clear reference to the contribution of Nolde and his team:

When the UN was founded in 1945 it was guided by the vision: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to affirm faith in fundamental human rights, to establish the basic conditions for justice and the rule of law, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. People of faith inspired this vision and it has been the basis for the strong support that the WCC has rendered to the work and the aspirations of the UN and to the principle of multilateralism throughout its 60 years history.⁹

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and deserve protection and care. Human rights remain a continuing concern for the churches. Rightly so, because, as in other religious persuasions, the concepts of human freedom and dignity lie at the core of our Christian faith.

Nolde inspired many Christians to look at political involvement as an inescapable reality of Christian responsibility. The biblical promise of a new heaven and a new earth (*cf.* Rev 21:1) where love will prevail, continues to invite us as Christians to engage in the world. It is the contrast between that vision and reality that makes this invitation compelling and urgent.

⁹ www.wcc-assembly.info/en/theme-issues/assembly-documents/1-statements-documents-adopted/international-affairs/report-from-the-public-issues-committee/un-reform.html.

Hope for the World

Hans Morten Haugen

One of the contributions of the Church of Norway and other Norwegian Christian organizations to commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the UDHR in 1998, was the publication of the book, *Hope for the World: Human Rights and the Church*. The title seeks to capture the importance of the introduction of human rights in the arena of international law and its relation to the church.

Through the extensive ratification of human rights treaties, states have subsequently willingly bound themselves to international standards on how to treat their inhabitants. Expressing human rights concerns is no longer considered as interference in a state's internal jurisdiction. Moreover, while in the two 1966 covenants¹ people's right to self-determination is recognized as a human right, these provisions do not provide for territorial secession. Rather, these provisions state that people shall have the right to pursue their own development in the economic, social and cultural fields.

In this article, I hope to demonstrate that human rights can apply to many different situations. They can challenge unjust structures, as well as the decisions and procedures for developing such. Human rights are a great project of civil society. It has been influenced by many diverse faith traditions and civilizations, but its strength is sometimes hampered by the political powers that be.

Power and powerlessness

Human rights have been hostage to two very different “wars”: the Cold War and the War on Terror. The first of these resulted in the Western

¹ Universal Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights at www.hrweb.org/legal/undocs.html.

states, believing economic, social and cultural rights to be a socialist idea, championing civil and political rights. Meanwhile, the Eastern bloc, strongly supported by the developing world, tended to ignore civil and political rights and focused on economic, social and cultural rights.

A successful recovery took place in the 1990s, assisted by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's emphasis on human rights in his 1997 UN reform program,² as well as the strength of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Mary Robinson.

Of the many tasks identified at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights,³ all but one have been fulfilled. This indicates a great success. The remaining task is for all state parties to adopt an optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the main objective of which is to increase the efficiency of the supervisory machinery currently based only on national reports.⁴

Currently, the biggest challenge to the realization of human rights is the so-called War on Terror. This is not only a challenge because of the various efforts seeking to halt terrorist activity that have led to traditional civil rights being severely compromised, but also because the financial priorities have grave consequences for the realization of human rights. The financial costs of the War on Terror could have, rather, contributed enormously to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

The War on Terror, including Israel's handling of the Palestinian uprising, has moreover created an internationally polarized climate. This has, to a certain extent, paralyzed the work of the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR), which used to meet annually, consisting of fifty-

² The reform program was introduced by document A/51/950, and has subsequently been updated by documents from 2002 (A/57/387, *An Agenda for Further Change*), and 2005 (A/59/2005, *In Larger Freedom*), at www.un.org/reform/.

³ The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (A/CONF.157/23), at www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/FramePage/WCHR%20En?OpenDocument&Start=1&Count=15&Expand=2, includes in paragraph 40 a call for an optional protocol on individual petitions under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and in paragraph 61 a call for an optional protocol to the Convention Against Torture (CAT) to provide for inspections. Moreover, two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) have been adopted.

⁴ This is included in paragraph 75 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, at www.ohchr.org/english/law/vienna.htm.

three member states on rotation.⁵ A new Human Rights Council (HRC), with forty-seven member states meeting more frequently and having a higher status by being a subsidiary organ of the UN's General Assembly, has recently been adopted.⁶

While the increased status of the primary UN human rights body might be important, two fears regarding the HRC predominate. First, that it will be less accessible for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). During the Council's first session, 19–30 June 2006, NGOs had the same level of access as in the old CHR. In some cases, they had greater access to informal meetings during the Council, which had not always been the case with the CHR. This, however, may not be a precedent for future sessions. Secondly, that it will be a forum where human rights will be at the mercy of power politics to an even greater extent than before. However, the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances and of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the Council's first session represent important steps forward.

To a large extent, human rights are determined by power politics. The most powerful states have never had a country specific special rapporteur mandated by the CHR. Saudi-Arabia and China are two examples. It should be noted, however, that there is a special rapporteur on the "Occupied Palestinian Territories" (OPT), who is met with strong opposition from Israel.

Human rights are never "sensitive issues"

The uniqueness of human rights is that it is a human-centered legal system to which the states have actively decided to be bound. When ratifying a human rights treaty, parliaments have to review and sometimes amend their own legislation to bring it into conformity with the requirements of the treaty.

⁵ For more information, see www.reformtheun.org/index.php/issues/1732?theme=alt4

⁶ The vote was 170-4, see www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=17811&Cr=rights&Cr1=council.

Therefore, a situation in which a human rights claim is made can be determined in accordance with the relevant provisions of the treaties ratified by this state. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) contains many articles outlining the grounds for restricting the enjoyment of human rights. Public safety or public order, morality and the rights and freedoms of others are the most common restrictions on the exercise of human rights. Human rights, which under specific circumstances can be restricted, include freedom of movement, thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association.

Interestingly, the ICESCR contains no similar restrictions. Hence, there is no basis for restricting the enjoyment of these rights beyond what is provided for in article 4, outlining the general limitations. Justifiable limitations must be determined by law, be compatible with the nature of the rights, and introduced for the purpose of promoting general welfare. Not many limitations are able to meet all these requirements.

The method for solving a case involving human rights concerns does not differ from any other dispute. The primary method is to apply the law. Examples include determining whether obscure sects should be allowed to assemble and preach openly; whether the state can detain suspects without trial; or whether the city authorities can increase the monthly rent threefold due to the deregulation of the housing market where publicly subsidized housing is no longer offered. All of these cases can be determined by applying human rights provisions.

In addition to human rights, there are certain principles which are crucial in order to solve human rights disputes. These include non-discrimination and equity, information and participation, accountability and transparency. Ideally, these principles should be embedded in all aspects of public policy.

There are also concerns that human rights might promote individual claims and demands, rather than individual responsibility.⁷ In the common preamble to the ICESCR and ICCPR it is clearly stated, however, that an individual has “duties to other individuals and to the community

⁷ For an example of the latter, see the proposal by the InterAction Council (set up by previous heads of states) for a Universal Declaration on Human Responsibilities, see www.peace.ca/univdeclarticle.htm. While many religious communities endorsed the idea, the concern was that this proposal would risk diverting attention from the crucial task of holding states accountable to their human rights obligations.

to which he [sic] belongs.” This formulation is based on article 29, paragraph 1, of the UDHR. Awareness among the population of both their rights and responsibilities is an important prerequisite for the effective realization of human rights.

Promoting pluralism and opposing discrimination

Human rights explicitly acknowledge the rights of persons belonging to a minority to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and to use their language. Moreover, “peoples”, including Indigenous peoples, have the right freely to pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Combined with freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to take part in cultural life and the special provisions in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD),⁸ provides necessary safeguards for national, ethnic and religious minorities.

One of the most discriminated-against groups in India are the Dalits who, as well as those suffering from similar hierarchical systems in other states, represent neither a national, ethnic or religious minority, but are discriminated against simply on the grounds of their descent. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been actively working for their rights both directly and through the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN). Through their efforts, the committee supervising the ICERD has adopted a general recommendation regarding descent, in order to further protect the Dalits’ rights. Work in the UN on this issue is also undertaken by the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights,⁹ and endorsed by the Human Rights Council.

⁸ Article 2, paragraph 2, of the ICERD reads: “States Parties shall, when the circumstances so warrant, take, in the social, economic, cultural and other fields, special and concrete measures to ensure the adequate development and protection of certain racial groups or individuals belonging to them, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms [...]”, at www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/cerd.pdf.

⁹ The most recent resolutions being E/CN.4/Sub.2/Res/2004/17 and E/CN.4/Sub.2/Res/2005/22, at http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc_id=9960.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is not considered to be a human rights treaty. Moreover, the right to seek and enjoy asylum in other countries, which is recognized in article 14, paragraph 1, of the UDHR, is not set out in the subsequent treaties, with the exception of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), where a refugee child has the right to receive appropriate protection, in accordance with article 22, paragraph 1.

Two types of “refugees” are particularly vulnerable. First, people who are not citizens of a particular state are considered “stateless.” While two treaties regulating statelessness under the auspices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)¹⁰ exist, they do not provide for strong monitoring mechanisms. Recently, the UNHCR has been more active on this issue, but a questionnaire sent to 191 states in 2003 on issues relating to statelessness received responses from only seventy-four states.¹¹ This demonstrates that there is an urgent need to increase awareness of this matter.

Secondly, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) now far outnumber the world’s refugees, and are not subject to an internationally binding treaty. Obviously, IDPs are entitled to human rights protection, but they tend to receive less than adequate attention. The CHR had a special representative on IDPs, who assisted in the application of the guidelines approved by the Commission.¹²

Finally, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW) is the most recent and least known of the seven human rights treaties. The low number of ratifying states, thirty-two by 1 February 2006, are all “sending states”. “Irregular” and “documented” migrant workers are given fairly extensive and detailed rights in articles 8 through 56.

¹⁰ These are the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. They are ratified by only fifty-five and twenty-seven states respectively.

¹¹ UNHCR, Department for International Protection 2004, *Final Report Concerning the Questionnaire on Statelessness: Pursuant to the Agenda of Protection*, at www.unhcr.org/au/pdfs/2005GlobalRefugeetrends.pdf.

¹² For the mandate of the Special Representative, see www.ohchr.org/english/issues/idp/mandate.htm.

The LWF has been working in various fora for the rights of migrant workers. Since the WCC represented many denominations in the Campaign for the Ratification of the ICRMW, the LWF has also taken an active part in the work of the CHR and the new Human Rights Council.¹³

The mighty corporations

Human rights are currently unable to regulate the conduct of multinational corporations. While state parties have obligations under the human rights treaties, corporations are not subject to similar strict standards. States, however, do have an obligation, through the establishment of appropriate regulations and interventions, to protect their citizens against misconduct of private actors.

New forms of international cooperation involving corporations have recently emerged. First, the UN's Global Compact¹⁴ includes human rights in addition to labor, environment and anti-corruption. While it is frequently stated that the Global Compact is weak, both on the standards to be adhered to as well as the mechanisms for ensuring adherence, at least some mechanisms have been established to ensure adherence. More than 2,000 corporations and associations are part of the Global Compact and expected to report annually on their progress. If they fail to submit an annual report, they are considered "inactive" or "non-communicating" and listed accordingly.

Second, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI),¹⁵ which has a membership of 700 corporations and associations, has developed so-called Sustainability Reporting Guidelines which, under the rubric of "social performance and indicators", include human rights. While Indigenous peoples are explicitly included, there is relatively little awareness of

¹³ For the 1998 statement delivered at the 1998 CHR by LWF, WCC, World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and Conference of European Churches (CEC), see www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/uprooted/98hrc.htm.

¹⁴ See www.globalcompact.org. The businesses should "support and respect the protection of human rights," as well as "make sure that they are not themselves complicit in human rights abuses."

¹⁵ See www.globalreporting.org. GRI cooperates with Global Compact.

economic, social and cultural rights, except on the right to work and decent conditions at work. Interestingly, these aspects are not dealt with under the human rights section.

Third, the Business Leaders' Initiative on Human Rights, with a much smaller member base of only ten corporations,¹⁶ has initiated cooperation with the UNHCHR. Together, they published the "Guide to Integrate Human Rights into Business Management"¹⁷ in 2006.

This new cooperation with international corporations will presumably lead to the further development of important initiatives within the UN system. Based on the "UN Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Regard to Human Rights" adopted by the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the CHR established a "special representative on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises."¹⁸

Additionally, specific resolutions are increasingly referring to the responsibility of businesses with regard to human rights. One example includes two recent resolutions from the CHR on the right to adequate food, which reads,

Requests all states and **private actors**, as well as international organizations within their respective mandates, to take fully into account the need to promote the effective realization of the right to food for all, including in the ongoing negotiations in different fields.¹⁹

¹⁶ Members are from a wide diversity of organizations, such as Statoil (petroleum), Novo Nordisk (pharmaceutical) and Body Shop.

¹⁷ See www.ohchr.org/english/issues/globalization/docs/gihrbm-business.pdf.

¹⁸ The mandate set out in E/CN.4/2005/135, chapter II, section A, resolution 2005/69 includes "to identify and clarify standards of corporate responsibility and accountability for transnational corporations and other business enterprises with regard to human rights."

¹⁹ E/CN.4/RES/2005/18, paragraph 8, at http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc_id=11080; see also E/CN.4/RES/2004/19, paragraph 9, at http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc_id=11080 (emphasis added).

In this paragraph, private actors are given similar obligations as those of states. The special rapporteur had for many years emphasized the need to address corporations in the context of the right to food.

Finally, in the World Trade Organization (WTO), human rights represent important legal mechanisms to increase the scope of provisions in the agreements on trade, services and intellectual property. The industrialized states are most eager to extend the scope of provisions related to trade for reasons of protectionism. Regarding the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), it is the developing countries that have sought to introduce human rights considerations. In these efforts, both the LWF and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), have been at the forefront.

Links to poverty eradication and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Human rights are the most comprehensive legally binding system for defining what constitutes a dignified life. The non-realization of the right to food and health, both due to the lack of resources (inability) and the lack of priorities (unwillingness), is a serious human rights concern. If the suffering is partly due to the state's unwillingness to act, it most likely represents a violation. Sadly, as the international community regularly experiences this situation, it hardly causes any outrage.

The absence of human rights principles in the process of poverty reduction has been regretted by many. This absence can in part be explained by the lack of awareness among many of the decision makers. Even UN programs and agencies that have facilitated the compilation of the strategy documents have not succeeded in eradicating poverty. After a long process, the UNHCHR has finalized the "Guidelines on a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies," as well as the booklet "Human Rights and Poverty Reduction: A Conceptual Framework."

It is of great concern that the Millennium Development Declaration and the monitoring of the MDGs are done in a manner that does not build upon human rights. All eight of the MDGs could be adequately phrased in human rights language. By de-linking the MDGs from human rights, however, it has proven to be easier to have human rights skeptics such

as the US on board. The US claims to be committed to halving the number of people living in poverty by the year 2015, but not to the right of everyone to have adequate food. While they are not bound to the latter, they have been a part of intergovernmental processes leading to non-binding documents on the right to food.²⁰ Section III of the voluntary guidelines refers to the international dimensions of the right to food, including trade, debt, food aid and development aid.

Perhaps the most controversial question in the context of human rights and development is whether there exists an obligation under international human rights treaties to transfer resources from rich to poor countries. The strongest formulations are found in the ICESCR, article 2.1, where “international cooperation and assistance” is included as a “step” which state parties are to take. In the CRC, “measures” shall be taken within the framework of international cooperation, but only “when needed.” Other articles in these two treaties also refer to the role of international agencies for the realization of these rights.²¹

Human rights apply during conflicts

In principle, human rights apply during conflict and in occupied territories, provided that the control over the occupied territories is effective. This is confirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the various committees supervising the implementation of the human rights treaties. During times of emergency which threaten the life of the nation, however, a state is permitted to derogate from its obligations, in accordance with article 4 of the ICCPR.

²⁰ The adoption of the “Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security,” at www.fao.org/docrep/009/y7937e/y7937e00.htm, a non-binding document, adopted at the FAO Council in 2004, during which USA did not object. Paragraph 16 under section I defines the right to food: “These Voluntary Guidelines aim to guarantee the availability of food in quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals; physical and economic accessibility for everyone, including vulnerable groups, to adequate food, free from unsafe substances and acceptable within a given culture; or the means of its procurement.”

²¹ See article 45 of the CRC, at www.unicef.org/crc, and article 22 of the ICESCR at www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_cescr.htm.

However, the right to life, freedom from torture, slavery, unjustified imprisonment and sentencing, as well as freedom of thought, conscience and religion can never be derogated from. Similarly, no limitation can be imposed on the exercising of rights under the ICESCR, with one exception: the right defined in article 8.1 "... to form trade unions and join the trade union of his [sic] choice."²²

Despite the general agreement that human rights apply in situations of war and occupation, this does not imply that international humanitarian law treaties should be ignored. These treaties include:

- III Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1949)
- IV Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949)
- Additional Protocol I Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (1977)
- Additional Protocol II Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (1977).

These treaties include more detailed provisions. The areas they cover are not substantially different from the scope of the human rights treaties, however. As an example, there are very detailed provisions in articles 69 through 77 of the III Geneva Convention²³ regarding the correspondence to which prisoners of war are entitled. Article 17, paragraph 1 of the ICCPR, on the other hand only states that "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence [...]."²⁴ For all practical purposes, this means that prisoners of war also have the human right to be free from arbitrary or unlawful interference in their privacy.

²² At www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_cescr.htm.

²³ Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949, at www.icrc.org/IHL.nsf/FULL/375?OpenDocument.

²⁴ At www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm.

While I will by no means discourage stronger emphasis on international humanitarian law, it must be pointed out that one of the strengths of the international human rights system is its many mechanisms for overseeing compliance. As an example, Israel is bound by six of the human rights treaties, providing for examination by one of the committees at least every year. In addition, the special rapporteur on the OPT and thematic rapporteurs can provide information to the CHR/HRC and the General Assembly, which can then decide to take action. This represents a more extensive monitoring of Israel's conduct in the OPT than what is provided for under international humanitarian law.

Is there hope for the world?

This article has journeyed to some of the “battlegrounds” where human rights are being applied in order to serve humanity. I definitely believe that human rights continue to serve a most valuable purpose. The answer to the question, Is there hope for the world?, must definitively be “yes.”

At the same time, the popularity of human rights jargon implies certain risks. First, state leaders, international agencies and diplomats might use human rights terms without actually being committed to the realization of human rights. Secondly, people might make unjustified human rights demands. Both of these risks—inflating human rights concepts, as well as the whole human rights project—represent particular challenges. I am glad to observe that the LWF is regularly engaged in clarifying the scope of human rights and plays an integral part in the most relevant arenas.

Excerpts from a Missionary's Log

Anton Lutz

7 November 2004

We are beginning the wetter season and it rains almost every day. A week ago, I went to visit my brother David. After church, David, Grant and I headed down the hill to the Chapaitis' household where they were hosting year twelve students from Aiyura National High School. I sat nestled deep in a corner, warm bodies packed tightly around me. Maybe sixty of us were inside on the floor. These young men and women are the future of the nation. Inspire them and you will change the face of the country.

When they gave me the chance to speak, I rose and looked out over their faces. The others had given the admonition to trust God for receiving good results in their impending exams. I simply asked them who benefits from their education. "For yourselves, or for your God and your country? Are you here because you seek money and status, or because you seek the well-being and wholeness of creation?" With such talk, I challenged them to be advocates and servants and changers within Papua New Guinea, for the good of their people, to the glory of God. And when I walked away into the rain, I was alive.

I was gone for a week, on the road in the central highlands, passing through Ukarumpa, Kainantu, Goroka and Mt Hagen. Under the hot sun, I found myself challenged to engage in the work of development—standing by a people without increasing their dependence on me or my money. I was invigorated by the hope I saw and the people I met. I am burdened in that I now live more aware of the situation: the brokenness, the apathy, the ignorance, the treacheries. "Lord, when did we see you hungry, sick, a carrier of HIV, naked, in prison, or locked in ancient tribal conflicts?"¹

¹ A personal reference to the reign of God's glory, Mt 25:31-46.

Reflections on the Promotion of Human Rights in a US and Global Context

Dennis Frado

My professional involvement in activities supporting human rights began in the mid-1970s when I was working for the Lutheran Council in the USA's (LCUSA) Washington, DC office. One of the first instances I recall was the situation that arose when the then-Bishop of Chile, Helmut Frenz, was detained by the Pinochet regime for defending the human rights of the many Chileans in detention. His stance was courageous in that many of his fellow expatriate congregational members had been supportive of Pinochet's coup against the socialist president, Salvador Allende. Our office was called upon to contact the State Department in support of the release of this Lutheran bishop in a context in which the US government, as was later confirmed, had supported the coup against Allende. We joined with many other Lutheran churches, notably those in Germany, the bishop's home country, in seeking his release. After a period of time, he was released and deported.

My work on human rights came quite some time after the efforts of a notable list of other Lutherans. It is fairly well known that the late Reverend O. Frederick Nolde, a professor of education at LTSP, worked on the drafting of the UDHR in the mid-1940s under the auspices of the WCC. He collaborated closely with Eleanor Roosevelt in that endeavor and is recognized as having been a principal drafter of article 18 on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Lutherans have been represented at the UN headquarters in New York since the early 1960s. Initially, volunteers worked under the auspices of the LCUSA, but in 1973, the first director of the Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC), the Reverend Edward C. May, was hired by

the LCUSA and the USA National Committee of the LWF to undertake representation on a full-time and remunerated basis.¹

During his eleven-year tenure, May focused his efforts on advancing the cause of Namibia's independence, but also took up other human rights situations and the promotion of economic justice. He did this at a time when very few people were concerned with these matters and when many did not even know where Namibia was. However, his efforts as well as those of his successor, Ralston H. Deffenbaugh, Jr. (1985–90), were instrumental in raising awareness of the illegal occupation and apartheid policies of the South African government among Lutherans in the USA and beyond.

One would be remiss not to acknowledge several other areas where Lutherans have made major contributions to the advancement of human rights within the USA. Beginning in the late 1940s and early 1950s, US Lutherans cooperated with the LWF in resettling post-war refugees within the USA.² Some Lutherans, such as the Reverend Will Herzfeld, were deeply involved in the civil rights movement, starting in the late 1950s and 1960s, to end racial discrimination and the related economic oppression of African Americans.

Often, involvement in defending human rights proved quite controversial within and outside the Lutheran church. One noteworthy example was that of the Reverend Paul Boe, a Lutheran pastor, who was invited by the leaders of the American Indian Movement to join them at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1973 during their standoff with federal authorities at the Indian reservation. His solidarity with Native Americans and maintenance of clergy confidentiality in a subsequent federal judicial proceeding led to his resignation from the national staff of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) the following year.

The wars in Central America during the 1980s were also instances where Lutherans became human rights defenders. Bishop Medardo Gomez of the Lutheran Synod of El Salvador provided refuge and pastoral

¹ Cited by the late Rev. Philip A. Johnson, a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in "Lutheran Advocacy at the International Level," in *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Public Policy Advocacy: Papers from a Consultation*, 1990.

² This work evolved into the present-day Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS).

support to hundreds of persons displaced during the nation's civil war. His courageous stand resulted in death threats and the disruption of his work. That work, however, continued, supported by LWF staff persons, Mary Solberg and Phil Anderson, who persevered under difficult personal circumstances on behalf of the Salvadoran people.

The LWF subsequently became involved in bringing together the warring parties in Guatemala, the opposition Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the government, into indirect and later direct contacts that ultimately led to the signing of the peace accords of December 1996. LWF General Secretary, the Reverend Gunnar Stålsett, and the Assistant General Secretary, the Reverend Paul Wee, persisted in keeping the parties talking with one another and helped them to develop sufficient mutual trust so that negotiations were possible and peace agreements reached, ending over thirty years of civil war.³

In the late 1970s and into the next two decades, Lutheran churches and their cooperative entities, such as the US National Committee, promoted the ratification by the USA of most of the major UN human rights covenants and conventions. There was involvement with other Christian bodies, such as the National Council of Churches in Christ in the USA (NCCC), the United States Catholic Conference, pan-Jewish organizations and human rights groups, in advocacy on behalf of the USA becoming a state party to important documents such as the ICCPR. This work was affirmed with the adoption in 1995 of the ELCA social statement "For Peace in God's World," which drew attention to the importance of the promotion and protection of human rights to world peace. Over the years, Lutherans have been encouraged both to support ratification of these treaties as well as to write to their elected officials on behalf of persons held in detention by oppressive regimes. In addition, US Lutherans participated in the LWF delegation that attended the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, in Vienna.

Today, LOWC continues to collaborate with other Lutheran church offices, such as the ELCA Washington Office, in making appeals to the US Department of State on behalf of detainees and prisoners, the LWF

³ See also Jens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari and Norman A. Hjelm (eds), *From Federation to Communion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), pp. 342-343. For an overview of LWF involvement in human rights from the First to the Eighth Assemblies see *LWF Today*, 1/94 (March 1994), pp. 7-8.

Office for International Affairs and Human Rights (OIAHR) in Geneva in monitoring the compliance of state parties to international human rights conventions, and the ELCA's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program advocating for the protection of human rights in the context of major companies and corporations working worldwide. LOWC is also assisting the OIAHR in monitoring discussions in New York under the umbrella of UN reform about a possible new human rights body in lieu of the CHR.

All of these activities indicate adjustments within a shifting international context and sustained commitment to maintaining international human rights standards and norms rooted in the UDHR adopted in 1948.

The Power of Faith and Early Experiences in the Formation of Human Rights Values

Jean Martensen

I was ten years old when the UDHR was adopted in 1948. I had no idea of its importance at that time and would not study its contents until I became an adult. Nevertheless, by 1948, I already had many experiences that would form the foundation for my values, convictions and forms of human rights witness and service as an adult, three of which are the focus of this personal reflection. Each of the three main sections that follow, therefore, opens with an important personal learning from childhood, cites the ways my involvement became more public and risky, and concludes with specific articles in the declaration that have become crucial for me.

The first learning in my early years: When people are hungry, feed them

There was no talk of rights in our household then. Instead, I remember the simple, repeated act of sharing food with those who had knocked on our door and had asked for something to eat. One by one they had climbed the wooden steps that led to the back doors of our apartment building on the south side of Chicago in search of food. “No one should be hungry” was the message that came in the hot soup, ladled and served with bread and a reassuring smile to the strangers at our door. No food was wasted in our household in those years; anything “leftover” was eaten later and every glass, tin and paper container was used again. In Sunday school we offered our nickels and dimes to feed the hungry wherever they lived in the world. Jesus, we learned, shared what he had with others.

What we citizens did on a personal basis in the decade that followed the stock market crash in 1929, the president did on a federal level. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or FDR, as he is remembered, was faced with millions of hungry families and wage earners without jobs. "When people need jobs, help them!" was his response. And the jobs were created. Between 1933 and 1945, the nation was the beneficiary of government sponsored public works that have enriched subsequent generations long after the workers themselves have died. Our national parks took shape; highways were built; the farms of the US, big and small, were electrified; social security was established for those who had lost their breadwinners or who needed help in their retirement days. All helped all in the programs that resulted from these governmental initiatives that we called the "New Deal".

Another important but little noted change happened during these turbulent war years: women entered the paid labor force in record numbers. Bone tired seven days a week, rural women worked and managed family farms and helped feed the nation. Their city sisters were hired in droves to keep assembly lines humming, companies productive and governmental services efficient. Seen initially as replacements, women discovered they were good at what they did. They were proud to see their names on weekly paychecks. My mother was one of these millions of white-collar workers who stayed on the job after the war had ended and whose sense of self changed along with her sense of justice. Women, she discovered, were not simply substitutes; they were productive citizens and they had a right to work in peacetime as well as in wartime.

It is no accident that many of the achievements and expectations of ordinary people of this era found their way into the thirty articles cited in the UDHR. Eleanor Roosevelt, a key advocate for their passage, was also a First Lady who knew first hand the enormous challenges facing people worldwide. She had lived through both the Depression and World War II and believed that you could not fight for democracy abroad without strengthening it at home. Most Americans remember her as a bright-eyed speaker with a warm smile who rallied huge crowds in a compelling way; who tirelessly organized, lobbied, wrote and demonstrated the power women had to bring about social, economic and political change. Eleanor broke the mold of the First Lady and people loved (or hated) her for it; she was warm and real and passionate.

The Power of Faith and Early Experiences in the Formation of Human Rights Values

In between the political meetings and formal White House dinners with VIPs Eleanor clomped around in army boots, greeting soldiers when she was not shaking hands with tenant farmers and prodding her husband to do something about the poverty and racism she saw first hand. She flew with the Tuskegee Airmen to show her confidence in black pilots and pressed (unsuccessfully) for the release of Japanese Americans held in internment camps. Few people today know that her fluency in French and English coupled with her diplomacy, attention to detail and grasp of the work of the United Nations Commission that she chaired, was absolutely essential to the adoption of the UDHR 1948.

We need such leaders today—here and in every country of the world. The gaps between rich and poor that both Roosevelts sought to close are widening daily. The richest one percent of Americans own twice as much wealth as the poorest eighty percent. In 1960, the average head of a major US corporation made twenty times as much as the average worker; in 2001 it was 500 times as much.

Repeated tax cuts for the most wealthy, instead of generating new jobs with decent benefits as promised, appear instead to be exacerbating the inequalities. Worldwide the income distribution is also scandalous. The world's 400 billionaires have a combined wealth equal to that of the bottom half of the world's people.

David Johnston of the New York Times writes that in 2003, the top one percent of households owned 57.5 percent of corporate wealth (i.e., households with incomes that ranged from USD 237,000 to several billion dollars). The poorest one fifth of households, by contrast, owned 0.6 percent of the corporate wealth and got by on USD 16,000 or less yearly. Everyone below the top one percent saw their shares of corporate wealth decline since 1991.

Meanwhile, citizens cope with the changing nature of the American economy as skilled jobs disappear, plants close, outsourcing employs people beyond borders, family farms dissolve into agribusiness, and pensions are either reduced or eliminated. Nearly forty five million people in this affluent country have no health care insurance and many go without necessary prescription drugs in order to eat or to keep warm.

Housing prices have skyrocketed making purchase for young adults prohibitive in many parts of the country. Our home, for example, could be sold for over five times the amount we paid for it twenty five years ago,

while our wages rose only two and a half times in that same period of time. This acute shortage of low and moderate housing is creating one more wave in the sea of insecurity affecting millions of citizens.

Growing personal and national debt, at home and abroad, moreover, limits the sense of possibility for individuals and nations alike and cripples their capacity to save and improve their situation. In our nation, college students, on average, have six credit cards and nearly triple the serious delinquency rate as older adults.

In the estimation of Professor Jeffrey Sachs, esteemed economist and special advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the MDGs, the nations of Africa should refuse to pay their 201 billion USD debt in the event donor nations do not cancel it. Drastic inequalities in the global economy today require drastic solutions; noncooperation with injurious processes is one of them. Today debt is squeezing the life out of the peoples of Africa and violating their human rights.

In light of such trends, the articles in the UDHR relating to economic, social and physical well-being are nothing short of prescient, and even more essential today than they were in the postwar period fifty years ago.

In the last third of the UDHR we find articles that name and insist upon the right of “everyone, without any discrimination” to work—for equal and just pay; for “remuneration, ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection”(article 23).

Article 23, in particular, reveals the way both the underlying premises of the framers of the declaration (who were nearly all men) coexisted with the vision of a radically different and more just economic and social world for women and men alike. It implies a collective responsibility for the social welfare of individuals and concludes with the right of workers to defend their interests: “Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests” (article 23).

The rights that follow name rest, leisure, vacations and holidays (article 24) as well as health and well-being, “[...] including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood” beyond the control of the individual. Article 25 asserts that particular periods of life require particular attention: “Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.”

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These so-called “economic, social and cultural rights” have never been more important than they are today. Honoring these rights will require a reimagining and a restructuring of the global economy at all levels and in all nations.

Second learning from childhood: War requires sacrifices, causes suffering and makes people sad

Soon after the outbreak of World War II, the large vacant lot that stretched from the back of our building to the next block became a patchwork quilt of victory gardens. Where kids of all ages had once played softball on warm summer evenings with their parents, we now tended vegetables for the war effort. Thousands of buckets of water were toted to these small gardens and others like them across the nation during the early 1940s. As little as my first grade classmates and I then were at the time, we, too, made a contribution. We recycled everything possible: we drew and wrote on the back side of envelopes, trucked newspapers in our little red wagons to school, stomped on tin cans and wasted nothing.

For some, the changes were far more costly. An older youth on my block did not return from “the war.” We knew this because his mother sat sadly near the window of their living room looking out but not seeing us as we whizzed by on our roller skates or bikes. The gold star on the khaki square that hung in the window of her house signified that he had died. Nothing seemed to change her expression once that news had come—not even the ringing of church bells that proclaimed the Allies’ victory and the excitement in the days that followed.

As a seven-year-old child, I did not understand the full meaning of the sentence shouted with so much fervor: “The war is over; it’s over!” first heard in connection to the war in Europe and shortly thereafter, the war in Japan. I did know that the news of the end of these conflicts made our parents and our neighbors very glad. My Dutch cousins had survived even though Rotterdam had been bombed; the worry on my father’s face vanished. War was clearly something that troubled people and intruded on daily life. When it was over, however, just about everyone was deliriously happy. The losses would end. The sacrifices and suffering war required would stop. Peace was a good thing. Life would go back to normal.

The next war was different. I was in high school when US soldiers were sent to Korea and have only vaguely troubling memories of that time. Far from the US and not well understood or even declared to be a war, the Korean conflict was something to be waited out, it seemed, until it was finally resolved through negotiations rather than clearly won by either side. Veterans who survived melted quietly back into civilian life, the sacrifices of life and parts of the self largely unnoticed by citizens excited by the prospect of becoming consumers in a nation that was booming. Korea had never hovered over the boys in my high school, since they were too young to have been drafted in the early 1950's and were married and having children by the time we were sending advisors to Vietnam. Our generation slipped silently into work and family life largely untouched by the wars in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

By the time the Vietnam War began, however, I was teaching social studies in California and reading recent history with newly developed interest and a growing sense of disillusionment with the rationale offered for our involvement. Media coverage—extensive, risky, moving and far more independent than is the case today—daily brought disturbing accounts of the war to Americans. The suffering was inescapable; the sacrifices were considerable. Despite claims of progress, millions of Americans could see that no one was really winning. Both sides pounded the beautiful country of Vietnam, killing and maiming villagers and creating environmental havoc for years to come.

This war demanded a new level of citizen engagement since elections and letters to Congress were not making a difference. In this period of my life, I learned the power of prayer vigils, public demonstrations and huge national marches. In 1969, shortly after moving to the campus of Wittenberg University, a Lutheran liberal arts college in Ohio, my spouse and I joined the students and took an overnight bus to the huge anti-war demonstration held in Washington, DC. Our children remember it as “The night Mom and Dad took their pillows and went out into the snow.”

I joined a local group, “Springfield People for Peace,” which was led mostly by women and included a variety of citizens from the city as well as students and faculty at Wittenberg University and Hamma School of Theology, a Lutheran seminary on Wittenberg's campus. Our public advocacy and education increased my sense of being an intentional minority in the conservative state of Ohio. The term “counterculture”

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took on new meaning; it applied not only to rebellious students but to a small sliver of the church. Being near to Wright Patterson Air Force Base, we were viewed as unpatriotic by many, including the owner of an influential radio station. Some found us simply gullible.

One of the Roman Catholic leaders of the group was denounced by her priest from the pulpit, while another friend, a peace candidate for the US Congress, was asked to leave her congregation. Both women left their parishes. We who were Lutherans faced disapproval in many forms. Through tightly drawn lips and frowns, the skeptical registered their doubts while the more vocal confronted us. Where are you getting this information?, the president of the Lutheran seminary asked me in exasperation? People we didn't know shouted epithets at us when we marched in public. So harsh was the reception to our witness, one young mother among us felt sick shortly before giving talks in public school classrooms and utterly exhausted when she had finished.

Yet we all persevered. Among the leadership of Springfield People for Peace was a small ecumenical group who occasionally met for worship and prayer. My husband, Dan, a professor at the seminary at the time, celebrated communion after members provided reflections and prayers. We found this house church to be sustaining since we all acknowledged that the gospel was at the heart of our resistance.

By the time the war had ended, Dan and I had added telephone tax resistance to our list of forms of protests since the federal tax on phones was used at the time to help fund the massive costs of the war. We were visited by the Internal Revenue Service as a result. The deaths and injuries of the anti-war student protestors at Kent State University (a couple hundred miles from our home) affected us deeply. Ultimate sacrifices were being made in this country as well as by those who battled in the rice fields of Vietnam.

The price for waging peace, like war, could be very steep. In spite of all that I learned from resisting the Vietnam War, I did not see myself so much as an advocate for nonviolence as I did as a protestor to a particular war. It took low intensity wars in Central America, the Gulf War and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to move me to a different place in my self-understanding and to a new way of viewing the UDHR. I now regard peace as a human right that is systematically and repeatedly violated by states as well as by armed "freedom fighters" and individuals acting alone, e.g., "suicide bombers" and other forms of terrorists.

War recruits innocent and law abiding people and turns them into human rights dodgers. War requires us to suspend temporarily our willingness to respect and enforce the universal dimension and applicability of article 3, paradoxically, in the name of protecting the lives, liberty and security of one's own people and allies. War separates the world into good and evil. Enemies no longer merit the universal human right to live, to be free and safe. Civilian deaths are rationalized as tragic necessities of having to defend national values. Freedom, democracy, and the will of God are just some of the justifications offered for the suffering. War continues to make people sad.

Article 3 of the UDHR is quite clear: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”

War is the biggest threat devised by states and groups to article 3 since war is a planned, funded, highly organized public endeavor requiring training, conditioning and a constant barrage of enemy images and appeals to honor and love of country (or commitment to cause, or obedience to God) to ensure the support of whole populations. Ultimate sacrifices require fear, reasons and meaning if individuals and nations are to consent, bear and inflict the suffering war brings.

Once initiated, war generates its own momentum and rationales, oblivious to the human rights that spell out the ways life must be protected. For millions of us in the US today, the violation by our government of the fifth article in the declaration is particularly shameful and tragic: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.

Few people know that a long line of US presidents from George Washington, general, commander in chief and first president, right through Lincoln and down through the twentieth century, believed that captured enemy combatants should be spared inhuman treatment and torture. Even when there was no law requiring such protection, Washington's directives to the Continental Army were clear. We would be distinguished from armies who mistreated or killed their captives and would manifest to the world, as a result, values and norms that not only the enemy but people everywhere would respect.

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Today this respect is in jeopardy. In its World Report 2006, Human Rights Watch (HRW) states that there is “new evidence in 2005 that torture and mistreatment have been a deliberate part” of the current US administration’s counterterrorism strategy. Acknowledging that “Fighting terrorism is central to the human rights cause,” Kenneth Roth, executive director of HRW, also said, “But using illegal tactics against alleged terrorists is both wrong and counterproductive.” Such tactics, in his estimation, are fueling terrorist recruitment and undermining the defense of human rights worldwide.

Third learning, one that has required persistent rethinking: People who appear to be different from us warrant attention... maybe even caution or action

This was a lesson I would revisit, reexamine and finally “unlearn” when I was older. The first memory I have of this learning came from my father. On a bright summer day, I heard him mutter with strong feelings, What’s he doing here? as he peered long and hard out our dining room window. Curious, I went to the window and stood beside my father, prepared for the sight of someone doing something bothersome, if not really bad. We looked in silence a long time at the young man as he walked down the street. But as far as I, (then about ten years old), could see, walking was all that he was doing. With his back towards us he was simply walking down the street. Dressed in a white T-shirt and jeans under a noon day sun, he looked like most everyone else his age. Except for one thing: he was black. It was not anything that he was doing that caused my father to be alarmed. It was where he was doing it and who he was.

Later, in high school, at the urging of a teacher who wanted us to get involved in civic life, I attended local town meetings where I learned how some people wanted our neighborhood to remain just the way it was—(fine schools, strong institutions, high property values, and stability, or, in other words—“white,” although that word was not said aloud), while others strongly disagreed. Had my father, (who had died when I was eleven), been alive, I remember thinking, we would have had some serious conversations. My “unlearning” had begun in earnest. Wrestling with racism as evidenced in my family, my neighbors, my school, my

colleagues, my church, my government, myself and the whole world, would be a lifetime enterprise.

Later, as a young adult living in California, I continued to follow the civil rights struggle, waged first in the south before heading north to Chicago. In 1962, I heard and saw Dr Martin Luther King Jr address a huge crowd in Los Angeles. People of all races, ages and nationalities poured into that sunlit coliseum and listened with incredible attentiveness as he spoke. For me, it was my first encounter with a prophet. Here was a man who gave meaning to the term “powers and principalities.” His ringing condemnation of racism, although strong and clear, was only part of his message. Since he was not there primarily to accuse whites or rail about powerlessness, he focused much of what he had to say on what the US could be. He clearly had a vision rooted in a biblical understanding of God’s intention for the world, and he wanted all of us to understand it, to embrace it and to live it with all its risks. We each had a part to play in the transformation of our country. Together we would infuse substance into the pledge of allegiance, chanted by school children daily across the country, “to our flag and to the country for which it stands... one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

I write these words as our nation pays tribute to the ways Coretta Scott King, talented musician and tireless witness for justice, never wavered from the vision that she shared with her husband. Her passing on 31 January 2006, like Dr King’s death nearly forty years ago, leaves a space in our national leadership for civil rights and liberties.

Throughout the sixties, I continued to make significant connections between the civil rights struggle, the peace movement and the gutsy, vibrant “sisterhood is powerful” witness of women. I sought out the writers who enabled us to see the “other America” and the poverty that the nation so desperately wanted to deny. In Southern California, my friends and I visited a Hispanic community of migrant workers on the edge of a small city thirty miles from the college town where we lived. It was not long before the women and youth of our church were collecting items for their brand new Headstart program for preschool children and spending our mornings as volunteers in church classrooms surrounded by fields of vegetables.

A few years later, as a young parent in Ohio, I took our two young children to local peace vigils and stopped buying grapes in order to support

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the farm workers' call for a national boycott. Only by not tasting those cool, juicy, luscious green and purple grapes just inches from their eyes in the supermarket, could our little girls begin to experience any sense of connectedness to the families who picked this produce for nearly nothing under a blazing sun. By longing for a mouthful of forbidden fruit and celebrating the day they tasted grapes again, our daughters learned an important lesson about the demands and rewards of justice.

Through these early childhood years, I negotiated time with my spouse relative to housework, childcare, professional demands and passionate callings. Paid nothing, I was nevertheless fully and wholeheartedly employed in the struggles to bring about civil rights, peace, liberation and personal transformation along with millions of others who pursued the same vocations.

The ways we humans differ from one another were not "cause for caution" (or fear or hostility) as had once been communicated to me as a child. "Attention" to race, sex, age and national origin however was not only "warranted," but mandatory, if one wanted to act according to article 2 of the UDHR: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, property, birth or other status."

These "distinctions" or categories and many more ways of defining and confining "The Other" were essential to understand if one wished to be part of the worldwide struggles for justice and transformation. And I did.

All of these experiences provided basic training for being ready to challenge unjust laws and to engage in civil disobedience

I have been prepared to do so several times in my life, only to learn that the officials who could have made the arrests were not always prepared for us or willing to enforce the laws that we had deliberately broken as a means of protesting an unjust situation. Only once, when as part of a group who had stepped onto the property of the South African Embassy in clear violation of a trespassing law, was I escorted to a police van, taken to the police station in Washington, DC, and arrested. During the worldwide movement to end apartheid, it was the Lutherans' turn, on that particular day, to stand on space prohibited to us by the South African Embassy. Other denominations, religious groups, labor unions, civic groups and all kinds of organizations took their turn as well to assure a continuous presence for months.

Some years later, I was part of a caravan of pickups, cars and even one school bus that knowingly included items (e.g., computers) that our government forbade citizens from sending to Cuba, along with books, toys and medical supplies. Long phone calls with the US Department of the Treasury preceded this motley caravan so that all parties affected would be forewarned of our intention to enter Canada, the departure point for the “illegal” goods bound for Cuba. We did so without any incident; the border patrol just waved us through. The US pastor and leader of this caravan was well known to the US Treasury officials. As he always told the truth and was clear that these periodic caravans were, for those of us involved, a nonviolent means of challenging the US embargo, he had developed credibility with the authorities.

The last time I prepared to engage in civil disobedience occurred when I went to the US Army training school for Latin American soldiers at Fort Benning in Columbia, Georgia. On a beautiful fall day in November, we began the annual gathering of petitioners with speeches, songs and a moving liturgy of remembrance (a tradition shaped largely by the Roman Catholic leaders who initiated and still sustain this yearly nonviolent gathering). Slowly and quietly, I joined the ranks of those moving, rough wooden crosses painted white in our hands, toward the gate of the base. Hundreds of us walked arm in arm in groups of two and four as we “crossed the line” onto the base to protest the teaching of torture methods in the School of the Americas (SOA). The organizers of the action had anticipated that a much smaller number would engage in civil disobedience than actually did while a large crowd would demonstrate outside the gates as had become the custom.

Because our numbers were surprisingly so much greater than anticipated, arresting us all exceeded the capacity of the authorities. So after standing for several hours near a strip of woods bordering the road that ran through the base, we were rounded up and put on local buses that took us to the center of the city where we were released with the warning to go home and not return. More recently, a Roman Catholic friend in Virginia who had been so warned, returned the following year, knowing she would be detained as a consequence. She was arrested and sentenced to three months in a women’s prison where she joined other “prisoners of conscience.”

Since that time, the SOA was closed, only to reopen under a new name: the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation or

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SOA/WHINSEC. The witness, therefore, has not ended. On Monday, January 30, 2006, thirty-two people ranging in age from nineteen to eighty-one, began federal trials in which they face up to six months in prison and a USD 5,000 fine for this act of nonviolent civil disobedience. These persons were among the 19,000 individuals of all ages (many of them college students and church people) who had gathered November 18-20, 2005, outside the gates of Fort Benning to demand a dramatic shift in US foreign policy and the closure of the school.

This past demonstration was described as “the largest yet in a sixteen-year history of opposition.” According to *Truthout*, more than 183 people have served a total of eighty-one years in prison for engaging in nonviolent resistance since protests against the school began.

The grassroots movement for human rights continues to grow. A bill (House Resolution 1217) introduced to suspend operations at WHINSEC and to investigate the development and use of the “torture manuals” currently has 123 bipartisan cosponsors in Congress.

On other fronts, people are challenging other threats to civil liberties, e.g., the “Patriot Act” and the use of illegal wire taps. They are trying to keep the Internet free from domination by our government or any group of governments and especially, from military appropriation and control in the name of national security. Environmental, peace and civil rights groups, often seen as unpatriotic by their governments here as elsewhere in the world, have been especially vigilant in this regard.

Our political task today in the US is to study the thirty articles cited in the UDHR either for the first time or with renewed and profound appreciation, and to promote them as the foundation for our collective work for peace and human rights. Together with others, we can address the implicit challenges that they raise and that we share with all citizens on this planet.

Once we in the US begin to see, cite, implement, use and protect the UDHR embraced with so much hope by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, we will have taken a vital step in making human rights local and real. We will have inched closer to a world in which the following article is normative and respected by political leaders and citizens alike: “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized” (article 28).

Our spiritual task is as it has always been: to see and treat all human beings as brothers and sisters made in the image of God.

Human Rights as a Public Theology

David Pfrimmer

Introduction

Four months after Nelson Mandela was released from a South African prison, he visited Canada. As a symbol of the resistance to twenty-seven years of apartheid, Mandela's release was celebrated worldwide. The prime minister at that time, Brian Mulroney, described Mandela's release as, "one of the most extraordinary things I've ever seen in my life. [...] It's the beginning of the end."¹

In June 1990, the Canadian government hosted a state dinner for Mandela in Toronto to which some Canadian church leaders were invited. I was seated at a table among senior civil servants and Conservative Party guests. During the dinner they asked me, "what do you do?" curious as to why my wife and I had been invited. When I told them that I was representing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), one of them responded somewhat patronizingly, "Isn't that nice that the churches take an interest in these things."

An interest?! Had it not been the churches that had brought this issue to the government's attention in the first place? Had it not been the churches that provided documentation of the ongoing violence against the majority of South Africans? Had it not been the churches that first declared the apartheid regime illegitimate? Had it not been the churches that called into question the illegal occupation of Namibia? Had it not been the churches with their divestment and disinvestment campaigns and pressure for economic sanctions that made it possible for the Canadian government to break from the US policy of "constructive engagement?" Had it not been the churches that had mobilized thousands of Canadians and others around

¹ From the Canadian Broadcasting Corporations Archives, http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-71-703-4125/conflict_war/apartheid/clip9.

the world and so had made this moment politically possible? I attempted to enlighten them on how the churches not only took an interest but also acted as leaders in the effort to end the apartheid regime.

The uninformed comments by the civil servants demonstrates the ambiguity and invisibility of the churches' work on human rights. Many people do not realize how extensive and effective the churches' work has been and continues to be. There are others, even within the churches themselves, who regard the work of human rights as "an interest" apart from the "real" mission of the church. Nevertheless, the churches' work for human rights and greater justice is integral to the church's mission and to the credibility of the proclamation of the gospel by Christians.

History is helpful in reflecting on ambiguities. Through this article, I explore the theological consensus that has emerged in the churches concerning the basis for human rights, the various approaches to human rights since World War II, and a few guiding axioms for the future.

A theological consensus

The relatively recent emphasis on human rights in international law stems from the Reformation and the Enlightenment. The religious conflicts and post-Reformation wars emphasized a demand for religious tolerance and ultimately, greater civil liberties. As a result of the Enlightenment, churches were reluctant to accept the notion of human rights, preferring instead to speak about human responsibility.

Religion has, more recently, been accused as being a source of conflict. This perception leads to the false assertion that there is no theological consensus among faith communities when defending human rights through various international instruments. By the 1940s, many churches began to articulate their theological perspective on human rights as these rights were being codified and they continued to develop their positions as human rights were repeatedly violated. These theological foundations assisted churches in addressing the governments' responsibility toward their citizens.

A somewhat fragile ecumenical theological consensus for human rights advocacy has been emerging. Numerous social statements, most notably the human rights resolution at the Fifth Assembly of the LWF in Evian, 1970, illustrates some of these converging themes. There are

at least three important theological convictions upon which churches base this work: that people are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), a recognition of the prevalence of sin, and the mutually responsible vocation of the churches, governments and civil society in the public sphere. Let me offer a few brief observations.

The first conviction: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Bearing the “image of God” implies that people have an inherent and inviolable dignity. Such a belief also affirms that human beings, as the “created,” are the focus of God’s particular concern and care. An international ecumenical consultation on human rights convened in 1980 by the WARC concluded that, “All theological statements on human rights derive from the Christian anthropology of the human person made in the image of God.”²

Foster McCurley, a Lutheran biblical scholar, has pointed out that the God of Israel inverted the social order of ancient societies in liberating the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt. Rulers were believed to bear the image of a god and therefore were served by the common people. In God’s new order it is the common people who bear the image of God, while the rulers and governing authorities have a responsibility to assure their well-being. Human rights, as articulated in various international declarations and conventions, exist as one threshold under which the image of the divine is violated and disrespected.³

The second conviction of this ecumenical theological consensus is the recognition of the fallen nature of all people and their communities. “The fact that we are all in bondage to sin means that some can exercise their human rights at the expense of others. What is meant for good can be perverted for evil.”⁴ While human sin is a paradoxical cause for

² “The Theological Basis for Human Rights, Report of a Limited Research Project 1981,” in WARC, *Semper Reformanda*, at www.warc.ch/dt/er12/01b.html#txt2. This report was discussed at an ecumenical consultation that was convened by the WARC, in Le Cénacle, Geneva, April 30–May 3, 1980. The project involved Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed theologians.

³ Dr Foster McCurley presented an unpublished paper on human rights based on Genesis 1–10 to the Lutheran Church in America’s Conference of Bishops in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1984.

⁴ “Theological Notes on Human Rights,” from a theological working paper on human rights by the Church of Norway’s Council on Foreign Relations, 1975, in Jørgen Lissner and Arne Sovik (eds), *A Lutheran Reader in Human Rights, LWF Report 1/2* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1978) p. 14.

the abuse of human rights, it nevertheless cannot serve as a reason for indecision or inaction. While discerning and addressing human rights violations can often be difficult and lead to disagreement or controversy, prescriptions for remedy are never unqualified or ultimate.

The third conviction of this theological consensus is the mutual responsibility that churches have in providing a public witness on issues of human rights. This mutual responsibility with governments, civil society and NGOs arises from their involvement in public life. Churches are not just concerned about “religious freedom,” nor have they tried to Christianize human rights to justify their involvement. Rather, churches have tried to lift up human rights for all people, pushing the political frontier to understand those rights as both individual and communal.

It is from this foundation that various theological approaches have diverged. For example, in 1977, Wolfgang Huber and Heinz Eduard Tödt laid out five different approaches for understanding the theological basis for human rights.⁵ Other scholars argue approaches that are based on a natural law theology, the humanity of Christ, the basis of covenant or the freedom that comes from justification by faith. More recently, the emergence of liberation, feminist and eco-theology have provided a contextual basis from the perspective of the marginalized.

Different traditions have adopted various theological approaches. Focusing on a diversity of contextual situations and a concern for different rights, churches have generally accepted redressing human rights as a part of their mission.

⁵ See Wolfgang Huber and Heinz Eduard Tödt, “Basic Theological Models for the Interpretation of Human Rights,” in *ibid.*, p. 91. The five approaches Huber and Tödt identify are (1) deductive approach based on theological axioms; (2) human rights have a twofold basis for legitimacy based on human reason and Christian understanding of *imago Dei* and Christian responsibility; (3) there is no theological justification, but logic and reason justify them; (4) there is no theoretical theological or philosophical justification, but in the practice and application they find legitimacy and ; (5) the basis is found in the existence of an analogy between the justice established by God and the legal status which human beings possess or accord to each other in their mutual relationships, (p. 95). It is this fifth approach that is reflected in the position taken by the LWF in the Evian approach.

An evolving understanding of human rights

The twentieth century has been the bloodiest century in human history. According to some estimates, wars alone have killed 170 million people. From the Great Depression through the mid-twentieth century, the world has witnessed horrendous abuses of the fundamental dignity of people, often caused by the actions of unjust governments from around the world.

The understanding of the churches' role in defending human rights has not been a static exercise, but has evolved in response to historical realities and political impulses. Looking back, there are at least three eras in this evolution that can be instructive for the future work of the churches: the postwar response to building a new social order, the postcolonial response to opposing oppression and documenting violations, and the response to economic globalization with strategies to hold national governments, international institutions and international businesses accountable.

Following two world wars, the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, churches undertook a project to build peace and avoid the recurrence of war. Church leaders believed in building a new social order, renewing Christendom. They were not prepared to leave this project of building a just and durable peace to governments alone, but understood themselves as collaborators in the creation of this new world.⁶ Much of the trajectory of the current ecumenical movement was established by this postwar vision.

Central to this effort was articulating standards for the promotion and defense of human rights. One of the important ecumenical figures for articulating these standards was Dr Otto Frederick Nolde, dean and professor of Christian education at LTSP. Nolde was a driving force in the Federal Council of Churches and for twenty-two years director of the CCIA at the UN headquarters in New York.

[Nolde's] personal vision of the task and his particular talents were necessary for the successful inclusion of a mandatory Commission on Human Rights in Article 68 on the UN Charter in 1945, the foundation of the Churches' Commission on International Affairs (CCIA) in 1946, and to the drafting

⁶ See John S Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

and defense of, in particular, Article 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.⁷

Ralston Deffenbaugh, a former director of the LOWC at the UN headquarters in New York, described the significance of this achievement and the Universal Declaration.

Before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, no commonly accepted definition of human rights existed. Before World War II international law was solely a matter of relations among countries. The individual had no place in international law.⁸

The emphasis by churches on securing the recognition and defense of human rights was a significant development in the process of building peace, securing justice and avoiding war. With a mandate for defending human rights, the churches helped to give the UN its “soul.” While some may point to the UN’s disappointments and shortcomings, this mandate and its instruments have in fact mitigated against the unrestrained resort to military force in many situations and have reduced the ability of governments to abuse the human rights of their own citizens.

The second era of the churches’ work responded to the postcolonial and Cold War realities. The “Golden Age of Growth,” from the end of the war to the 1970s, was the largest economic boom in human history. Western economies grew by five percent each year, doubling every five years. In the Global South, seventy-five percent of people living in former colonies were being given their independence. There was great hope as poor countries embarked on the road toward development. However, by the 1980s nations were already beginning to revert back to some of their old ways. The great fears and anxieties generated by the Cold War, the narrow economic interests of transnational corporations and historic rivalries led to national and regional conflicts in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

As a result of these conflicts and the historic partnerships that were established across national borders, churches became painfully aware

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁸ Ralston Deffenbaugh, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” in *Praxis* (The Institute for Christian Ethics, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, 1990), p. 8.

of the gross and systematic violations of human rights that are often perpetrated by governments allied with Northern democratic countries. The optimism of the postwar period was gone. So too the churches' privileged voice in public affairs had ended as Western societies began experiencing greater secularization.

During this period, churches and NGOs assumed the role of an international conscience within the global human family. Through the churches' historic ties with their mission partners and their resettlement work with refugees, they heard and publicly shared the horrendous testimony of victims and their communities in other countries.

By the twentieth anniversary of the UDHR, the impact of world events was already changing. Following the UN Conference on Human Rights in Teheran in 1968, the WCC Central Committee called for a review of the ecumenical policy on human rights. This review, which resulted in a significant consultation on "Human Rights and Christian Responsibility," made an important contribution in shaping the direction of human rights work for the fifteen years that followed.⁹ It further influenced the discussions at the WCC Assembly in Nairobi in 1975.¹⁰

For Canadian churches, one of the significant turning points in this change of direction occurred on 11 September 1973 when the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile was ousted in a coup.¹¹ Four days later, Canadian church leaders issued a statement condemning the coup and calling on the Canadian government to withhold legitimacy from the Chilean regime. They further asked the government to assist those refugees who wanted to flee to Canada. In a meeting with the Canadian external affairs minister, Mitchell Sharp and his officials in October 1973, church leaders were "met with questions, skepticism and even attack." The government dismissed this as merely another Latin American coup, noting that the situation was returning

⁹ The consultation "Human Rights and Christian Responsibility" was held in St Pölten, Austria, in 1974.

¹⁰ Dennis Frado of the LOWC has noted the church's important impact on human rights work. This is supported by Clement John, Executive Secretary for Human Rights in Unit 3 (Justice, Peace and Creation) of the WCC. See Clement John, "Human Rights and the Churches," in *Semper Reformanda*, Volume 48, No. 2 June 1998, at www.warc.ch/dcw/rw982/03.html.

¹¹ Bill Fairbairn, "The Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America," in Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc (eds), *Coalitions for Justice* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1994) p. 169.

to “normal.” Nonetheless, “seventeen years of tyranny began under the brutal dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet.”¹²

Churches welcomed Chilean refugees and went on to document human rights abuses throughout Latin America and elsewhere. They presented documentation to the Canadian government and the UN CHR. They adopted a host of strategies, delegations, accompaniment programs and citizen commissions of inquiry to raise up the voices of victims. Eventually the Canadian government came to accept, if only begrudgingly, the importance of the churches’ detailed documentation of abuses and the publicity it gave to situations of systematic violations of human rights.

There are numerous other examples of the role played by churches. The debate within the LWF leading to the Dar es Salaam resolution in 1977 that declared apartheid a *status confessionis*, was also an important turning point, although it involved confessional issues as well.¹³ Churches accepted the role of being a conscience for the nations in political affairs. This has forced governments to listen, but sadly not always to act.

Since the emergence of globalization, churches have emphasized another dimension of their concern for human rights. In the early 1980s, the combination of technology and large amounts of capital stock enabled the rapid and intensive integration of the global economy. Further, the standardization of a global economic policy around the Washington Consensus¹⁴ led to what has been defined as “globalization.” While churches had previously been concerned about issues of hunger, poverty and economic justice, globalization brought to the forefront a renewed

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹³ See Jens Holger Schørring, Prasanna Kumari, Norman A. Hjelm (eds), *From Federation to Communion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) pp. 332-333.

¹⁴ The Washington Consensus was first presented in 1990 by John Williamson, an economist from the Institute for International Economics, an international economic think tank based in Washington, DC. It is so called because it attempts to summarize the commonly shared themes among policy advice by Washington-based institutions at the time, such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and US Treasury Department, which were believed to be necessary for the recovery of Latin America from the financial crises of the 1980s.

It is a set of policies promulgated by many neo-liberal economists as a formula for promoting economic growth in many parts of Latin America and other parts of the world. The Washington Consensus policies propose to introduce various free market oriented economic reforms which are theoretically designed to make the target economy more like that of First World countries such as the United States, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington_consensus.

interest in the economic, social, and cultural rights which had been part of the churches' ongoing struggle for human rights in general.

During the 1970s, churches were engaged in the development debate about a new international economic order. Churches argued that a new global economy had to be just, participatory and sustainable, setting forth numerous international initiatives. For example, in 1972, Canadian churches sent representatives to monitor the third UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).¹⁵ This was the beginning of an ecumenical coalescing of Canadian churches to address economic policy through such organizations as GATT-Fly,¹⁶ the Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice (ECEJ) and more recently, Kairos-CEJI.¹⁷ These organizations have addressed such issues as the international debt, bondage, structural adjustment, trade policy, the militarization of economies, CSR, gender equality and economic migration. One of the results of this work was the Jubilee Campaign in 1999-2000 which received signatures on a debt cancellation petition from 17 million people globally, thus effectively placing the issue of debt cancellation on the agenda of the G-8 nations.

These economic policies of globalization have profound and often deadly implications for many communities. Churches have provided a public space for testimony to these consequences at various intergovernmental and UN fora as well as at their own meetings. These testimonies were especially evident at the LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg in 2003 under the theme

¹⁵ Brian Ruttan, "Gatt-Fly and the Churches; Changing Public Policy," in Terry Brown and Christopher Lind, *Justice as Mission, An Agenda for the Church* (Burlington, Ontario: Trinity Press, 1985), pp. 171ff.

¹⁶ GATT-Fly was one of the first organizations to concentrate solely on the issue of fair trade. It was created by a coalition of Canadian churches in 1973. Its name was an irreverent way of stressing its mandate to "bug" the Canadian Government about its role in international trade organizations such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). GATT-Fly set about persuading governments to pay more for the world's exports, www.newint.org/issue204/raw.htm

¹⁷ KAIROS CEJI was formed on 1 July 2001 from a number of ecumenical coalitions with national or international concerns. Its mission is respect for the earth and justice for its peoples. It is dedicated to promoting human rights, justice, peace and viable development for and solidarity with the world's peoples. Also, see www.Kairoscanada.org for information on work with urgent actions, international human rights, global economic justice, ecological justice, Canadian social development, Aboriginal rights, global partnerships, animation communication and education. <http://archives.lists.indymedia.org/imc-maritimes-news/Week-of-Mon-20031117/000072.htm>

“For the Healing of the World.” During this period, churches have tried to offer an alternate vision for an economics of hope through their development programs by providing a public space in which to listen to the voices of those most affected. Through their advocacy efforts, economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights are more successfully upheld.

A renewed role for churches. What have we learned?

Today, we stand at a delicate crossroads. On the one hand, human rights are being overshadowed by other issues. Efforts to develop extensive trade agreements and the quick resort to the use of military forces have become the predominant instruments of international policy by powerful nations.

On the other hand, there are some new opportunities. In the wake of the genocidal conflicts of Kosovo, Rwanda, the Congo, Darfur and elsewhere, nations have begun to recognize that there are limits to state sovereignty. In 2000, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in his opening address to the General Assembly, called for a debate on the question of humanitarian intervention. On 28 April 2006, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1674 which affirms the “responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”¹⁸ While nations have focused on issues of protection, churches have advocated the greater need for prevention.

Another possible opportunity is the new UN Human Rights Council which was created in March 2006 to replace the former CHR. The new council requires that the human rights records of member countries serve as a criteria for their election to the council. The new council will meet six times a year, with the power to convene special sessions, and the mandate will include the review of all member countries. This new

¹⁸ UN Security Council, S/Res/1674 (2006), 28 April 2006, item 4. Much of this discussion has focused on the idea that nations have a “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) their citizens and the international community has a responsibility to intervene in those situations where nations fail or are unable to fulfill this responsibility. Project Ploughshares’ senior policy advisor, Ernie Regehr, states: “It is important to emphasize that the primary focus of the R2P doctrine [...] is not the issue of military intervention but the rights of vulnerable people to protection.” See *R2P and the Global Summit*, in Project Ploughshares Briefing Paper #05/6 September 2005, p. 2, at www.ploughshares.ca.

human rights body has the potential more effectively to monitor and identify violations of human rights.¹⁹

With these challenges and opportunities, what have we learned that might guide our future work on human rights? The following are a few axioms that might help this discussion.

- **The churches need to understand that human rights work is an expression of the churches' public theology.** Human rights cannot merely be an interest for churches, but must be an expression of a public theology. Although it is diverse in its expressions, it is a public theology that concretely affirms how God in Christ is present in a hope filled way in the world.²⁰ Churches have expertise and contribute to ensuring that human rights are respected.
- **The churches' human rights work needs to broaden governments' understanding of human rights as necessary to local, regional and global community building.** Governments have often defined human rights more narrowly, i.e., as strictly civil and political rights. As churches broaden the human rights movement toward greater justice, the needs of people, cultures and God's whole creation will be built into a truly life affirming earth community.²¹
- **The churches' human rights work needs to include a dialogue of cultures and faiths.** In contrast to Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations," Gregory Baum and others have called for a "dialogue of cultures." Faith is central to culture. Understanding the role of reli-

¹⁹ See LOWC, Update Number 6, May 2006.

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann offers one description of public theology. "Its subject alone makes Christian theology a *theologia publica*, a public theology. It gets involved in the public affairs of society. It thinks about what is of general concern in light of the hope in Christ for the kingdom of God. It becomes political in the name of the poor and marginalized in a given society. Remembrance of the crucified Christ makes it critical towards political religions and idolatries. It thinks critically about the religious and moral values of societies in which it exists, and presents its reflections as a reasoned position." Jürgen Moltmann, *God for A Secular Society* (London: SCM Press, 1999), p. 1, as referred to in, *Public Theology for the 21st Century* (London: T&T Clark, London, 2004), p. 1.

²¹ See Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

gious belief, therefore, is vital to any effort to understand public affairs. Churches can help to address the continuing critique that “religion is the problem” by engaging representatives of other faiths in a public dialogue that illumines each tradition and develops concrete strategies that foster greater respect for human rights. Understanding the role of religion is essential to understanding public affairs. Certainly, in Canada, we have learned that when churches work together, it creates a message that is stronger than the mere sum of individual church actions.

- **The churches’ human rights work requires partnerships with other civil society actors.** The earliest International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) was the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society founded in 1839. Today, there are over 37,000 INGOs. Since 1990, the number of INGOs has increased exponentially.²² Churches no longer act in isolation or unilaterally in order to be effective. Additionally, churches have the strategic ability to bring together non-governmental actors in their concern for all people. Churches no longer limit themselves to a narrow set of self-interests such as religious freedoms. Rather, through their global partnerships, churches help to expand the awareness and analysis of particular situations where human rights are at risk.
- **The churches’ human rights needs to recognize non-state actors and institutions.** Non-state actors including INGOs, NGOs, individuals, communities or transnational corporations also have an important impact on human rights. Whereas governments were once the primary focus, today churches need to continue to develop effective ways to address the increasingly complicated role of these other players.²³

²² Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, and Mary Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society 2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 4.

²³ Churches have addressed this effectively in the past. The rise of the CSR movement which now plays a significant role in the investment community, had its origins in the work done by churches to address the role of corporations and banks in South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle. So too churches have addressed the role of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) concerning the debt crisis particularly during the Jubilee Campaign and as trade agreements were being negotiated.

- **Churches need to be open to critique of their human rights work.** Certainly, churches have been subject to critique for their work on human rights. Criticisms have ranged from the choice of focus to arguments that the churches remain silent and uninvolved in some situations. In response to these criticisms, churches need publicly to uphold the importance of their dialogues and partnerships with the local churches as being determinative in developing their responses. However, legitimate criticisms must likewise be understood as helpful toward improving the work of the churches in respecting human rights. The contributions of Christians will be unappreciated if the churches fail to recognize their own contradictions of internal governance. Neither should they deny the fact that church leaders have themselves sometimes participated in human rights violations.

Conclusion

In this article, I have suggested that there exists a theological consensus that supports the witness of the churches' defense of human rights. By reviewing ecumenical history, I have pointed out some of the contributions that the churches have made, and have tried to highlight some of the guiding axioms that might inform the churches' work in the future.

In closing, I think it is important to remember why the churches have a responsibility to participate in defending human rights. Fundamentally, our goal is informed by the hope for creation that comes with Jesus' announcement of the reign of God. Governments, churches and other social institutions are never perfect. Sin, in all its manifestations, causes division. The churches' work to promote and defend human rights must be seen in the larger context of a ministry of reconciliation where social justice is promoted when our collective relationships falter or fail, as they inevitably will.

Churches can, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, interrupt the cycle of retaliation and retribution that can so often come to govern the conduct of nations and their institutions. The churches' work on human rights is a crucial instrument in that effort and is required now more urgently than ever. It is easy to forget how important this is to our life together in the global family. In a recent lecture, Douglas John Hall

indicated that in our current situation, Christians need to “tell the story within the church and live the story in the world.” Promoting and defending human rights is an important part of how the Christian community lives the gospel story, expressing a public theology for the world.

A Missionary's Log Continued

7 December 2004

What would it take for this huge number of young women and men to become a positive influence on their community and province? I suggested one day a week where my house is open to any and all. We'll eat and drink coffee and play music and get to know each other and start talking about our home, Mambisanda. What are our problems? What is our vision? Why are there no economic opportunities? Given who we are, what can we do? At this point, I must admit, I do not know how else to start. Throwing money at grand, unsustainable projects does nothing for the overall picture in Papua New Guinea. Grassroots communities must be motivated to think on behalf of others instead of their own personal interests. And maybe "must" is too weak a word. It is absolutely essential.

One Bread, One Humanity

Jenny Zetterqvist

Human rights in the Church of Sweden

At the Church of Sweden's Central Office, I hold a position as the policy advisor for Human Rights, Democracy and Gender in the Policy Unit of the International Department. The task of the department is to implement and develop our international mission and diakonia. This includes activities in development cooperation, peace building, humanitarian assistance and advocacy.

For several decades, human rights issues have been high on the Church of Sweden's agenda. The commitment to human rights was given an extra impetus through the experiences shared by those who suffered under South Africa's apartheid regime and Latin American dictatorships. During the early 1990s, human rights and democracy became priority areas and many programs were developed. The church's activities aim at ending human rights violations as well as empowering and enabling people to defend their rights and to overcome abuse. It addresses individuals and groups who have a right to protection, (e.g., via awareness training, legal and social counseling) and emphasizes the importance of advocacy.

In the work for human rights the Church of Sweden defines women, children, refugees, IDPs, migrant workers and Indigenous People as people of concern. Today, the church's activities are related not only to civil and political rights but also to economic, social and cultural rights and the rights of women and children. Over the last few years, main concerns of the Church of Sweden have included: the right to food and sustainable development; the right to live in peace in the Middle East and Sudan; the right of women to be protected against violence; the right of women to be included in decision making; and the right of women to equal access to resources.

My job responsibilities include training and capacity building activities for staff and personnel who are seconded by partners in the areas of humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and ecumenical

cooperation. Human rights and gender issues are treated in preparatory courses and seminars arranged to discuss the reports of seconded personnel. Describing the living conditions of a society often provides a good foundation for discussion. Various perspectives—of men and women, children and youth, refugees and the disabled in the society of concern—are then connected to relevant sections of the international core conventions on human rights.

In the Swedish context, seminars on capacity building and human rights are arranged for parishes and dioceses. Violence, the integration of refugees and non-citizens, the concerns of a multicultural society, the special needs of children and the elderly, the situation in schools, and competition over resources are currently the main issues being debated by Swedish society. Understandably, they are of immediate concern to the parishes.

Furthermore, I am actively engaged in a variety of networks both nationally within the country's civil society, and internationally within the ecumenical movement. This involves arranging public seminars and common advocacy activities aimed at influencing decision-making bodies such as the Swedish government, the European Union (EU), the UN and the WTO. The main focus has been advocacy that demonstrates commitment to the implementation of international human rights law, international humanitarian law and the overall application of a human rights perspective, as well as the consequences of infringing on human rights.

During 2005, the Church of Sweden followed the discussions on UN reform in relation to the universal structures emplaced to protect and monitor human rights. The Church of Sweden has also been active in the advocacy activities of the Swedish human rights network focusing on the Swedish government, and has sent statements to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.¹

Another aspect of the debate on UN reform involves obtaining an understanding of the concept of security and its connection to sustainable peace, peace building and human rights. Within the context of APRODEV,² the church's advocacy work regularly targets the EU's interest in the policy debate on development and humanitarian assistance. In June

¹ The Church of Sweden is included in the Human Rights Forum, an important network of civil society organizations.

² APRODEV is the Association of WCC related Development Organizations in Europe.

2005, APRODEV published the report, *Whose security? Integration and integrity in EU policies for security and development*. As a member of APRODEV's gender reference group, I participated in discussions on the many aspects of gender and human security. As a follow-up, the gender group arranged a public seminar in Brussels, in October 2005,³ in order to elaborate further on the need to broaden the concept of security into one that differentiates between the quality and magnitude of insecurities that affect women and men, young and old, rich and poor.

Additional activities related to the security debate included a November 2005 seminar in Uppsala, Sweden to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in, run by the Policy Unit together with the Nordic Institute of African Studies. The seminar touched on the themes of violent conflict in West Africa, violence and abuses against women during war, and the negative impact of violence on building a sustainable, peaceful society. Two of the key issues raised by the panel were impunity and the fear of violence predominating life whether at home or in public, in times of peace or war.

Reflections on a workshop in Moshi, Tanzania

In November 2005, the LWF Department for World Service (DWS) arranged a workshop in Moshi, Tanzania on facing the challenges of integrating international human rights standards as essential tools into the work for human dignity and sustainable development. The workshop included participants from the LWF/DWS field offices in Tanzania, Rwanda and Kenya/Sudan. Participants combined different levels of professionalism, knowledge and experience with a commitment to protecting human dignity.

I had the opportunity to participate in this workshop and I am grateful to be part of such a broad network. The workshop confirmed that the LWF context provides additional opportunity to improve church efforts, not only for sustainable development, but also for peace building in societies affected by violent conflicts, war and genocide.

³ The title of the seminar was "Whose Security? Human Security seen from a Gender and Southern Perspective."

My first contact with an LWF/DWS field office was in 1987 when I was an international law student visiting Botswana for a field study on the rights of refugees. I was keenly interested in linking the policy level of international political negotiations, debates and agreements with local realities and with people's daily experiences. One of my key questions during that study was how and to what extent the rights of refugees were implemented? I did not stop at comparing international standards with national legislation, but extended my study to include the practice of the local population. The role of customary law and practice, in addition to the need to relate my legal studies to political, social, cultural, economic and religious contexts, were vital lessons, which I carried back to Sweden. There were two very obvious elements to consider when discussing this context: the drought and the regional security situation created by apartheid. LWF/DWS, an implementing party for the UNHCR at the Dukwe Refugee Camp in Botswana, has been a primary contributor to these perspectives.⁴

What I found particularly interesting in the reports of the LWF/DWS field offices at the workshop in Moshi was that both the cause and effect of the lack of human rights were similar to the problems I had encountered in 1987. Competition over resources, difficulties in integrating refugees into the local society, a lack of freedom of movement, the need to protect rights and personal security, customary law and its impact on implementation of universal human rights, and the role of local authorities remain critical issues for people working in the field of human rights.

Further discussions on the sustainable integration of displaced populations and reintegration after repatriation were held as well. This is not only a matter of material assistance and equal access to resources, but also one of adapting the integration process to be cross-cultural and sensitive to both local and international communities as universal human rights are pursued in refugee camps. The healing of traumas and reconciliation are also essential to achieving justice.

⁴ The results of the field study were published by the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, J. Zetterqvist, "Refugees in Botswana in the Light of International Law," in *Research Reports 1990*, no. 87.

What encourages me to promote human rights?

Three mutually intertwined aspects are of special importance in the protection of human rights. The first of these relates to international law as a system for the protection and monitoring of rights. Church communities and ecumenical bodies must be active in using the mechanisms already in place. This includes submitting alternative reports to the UN human rights treaty bodies on the abuses that exist in a given country.

The second aspect relates to a human rights perspective as a tool for analyzing people's contexts (e.g. the economic, social and cultural situation of children, women, migrants, and Indigenous People). Such a perspective is encountered in the workshops centered on a rights-based approach, arranged by LWF/DWS.

The third aspect relates to the foundations of universal human rights, specifically the interpretation of, and approach to, the non-legal concept of human dignity. This aspect was formulated after a training session on human rights held for lay people committed to the work of the Church of Sweden's Office for International Mission and Diaconia. One of the participants, the former principal of a theological institute in India, shared with me his concerns, remarking: "In the context from which I come, we cannot and are not ready to discuss human rights until we have agreed upon who is a human being." Coming from a Dalit context, he experiences frequent exclusion from the community. His remarks prove that the fundamental basis for the development of human rights in international law as well as their implementation is laid down in the words and very essence of the first article of the UDHR: "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."⁵ This must be at the very core of all human rights work.

As a student I was a member of a parish where we celebrated Holy Communion every Sunday. Since that time, I have carried in my mind one of the liturgical prayers that is commonly prayed following communion. The prayer reflects what it means to be a member of society. I personally believe that it relates to our journey through life. I often

⁵ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, at www.un.org/Overview/rights.html.

return to the last two verses as a point of reference for my work in the field of human rights:

Lord, we thank you for your inexpressible gift.
You became the answer to our prayer,
the bread for our hunger.
Help us now to answer the need
of those who lack the things we have in abundance.

Help us to hear the cry you have heard,
to understand as you have understood,
to serve as you have served.
Reveal to us the secret of your table:
one bread and one humanity.⁶

The protection and implementation of human rights and their connection to truth, justice and peace must be of utmost concern for us today. One of the challenges we experience as a church community is to enable those in positions of power to realize in full the threats to human dignity that overshadow so much of our world. There are, however, tools to detect early warning signs and to enable us to speak up then when nobody else does. Each day, we strive to find ways to use these tools in accordance with our mission and the conviction that all human beings are born free and equal. The church is obliged to ensure every person's right to live in dignity. This obligation must be transformed into action through compassion. "If the churches do not speak up for those who do not have any rights or voice, then we have forfeited our mission."⁷

⁶ Prayer, Service of Holy Communion, The Church of Sweden, English edition.

⁷ Words spoken by a participant at an ecumenical workshop which related the situation of migrant workers in the Gulf to advocacy and the role of churches.

Developing a Human Rights Theology

Jan-Olav Henriksen

In the late 1970s, when I was still a teenager, I joined a study circle preparing a booklet to be published by the Church of Norway Council on Foreign Relations (CNCFR). The title, *Justice Cannot Wait*, signaled that our church had taken seriously the call from churches in the South. The churches called for a new and more just economic order in which social and economic security, and political participation were secured, and the negative influence of transnational corporations, as well as political injustice, poverty, and violence, would be abolished. I still think back to the meetings of that study circle and ask myself if the world has really changed in the way that we had wished. In some ways it has changed; in other ways, it has not. The one thing I know for sure is that I have changed since I first joined that study circle. It was the beginning of my work on issues of justice and human rights, and I have continued to work on these issues ever since.

Years later, I worked for the same church office that first produced the booklet. My work there might have had something to do with my earlier engagement in the study circle. Thus, during the 1980s, I became professionally engaged with the struggles against apartheid and for a new economic order, and questions of social and economic justice have continued to number among my personal interests. I have thus published several books on these topics since becoming an academic theologian, especially on poverty and economic justice. My human rights work has also been formed by my academic work on Christianity's place within what we call "modernity."

The human rights debate in the Church of Norway

During the 1980s, the CNCFR was heavily engaged in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. At the time, it also made statements

that were perceived as being “political.” Some people in the Church of Norway, including prominent politicians, responded critically to these statements. They accused the church leadership, who had been advocating on this issue, of turning the church into a political party and of pursuing a political agenda related to specific (for them, “radical”) political parties. This led to some debate and it became necessary to show that our engagement on such issues was not based on a specific political stand, but on our commitment to human rights. As a result, our church had to clarify how human rights are positively and closely related to the Christian faith. By making this clear, we could respond to the accusation of pursuing a specific political agenda, and demonstrate through our commitment that human rights issues should be a part of every Christian’s life, regardless of his or her political stance.

In order to do this, I was asked to write a small book in which questions regarding the theological basis for the Church of Norway’s engagement in human rights issues were explored. This debate ended soon after its publication in 1988, but not necessarily as a result of it. Looking back, I believe this signaled an increasing acceptance of the church’s involvement in such matters and a growing awareness of the horrors and injustices of apartheid in South Africa and Namibia. It had become impossible to say that the church should not have a voice in such matters.

In my book, I attempt to show that while it would be historically incorrect to say that the human rights tradition is derived from Christian ethics, this tradition can be interpreted in the light of Christian ethics. Old and New Testament teachings are in accordance with modern human rights policy. Therefore, support for human rights is to be expected from everyone who is shaped by the teachings of Christian ethics.

Human rights and the Christian faith

Although not directly derived from Christian moral teaching, human rights can be seen as being in accordance with it. Nonetheless, one should be careful not to regard human rights as the true expression of Christian moral teaching. Although human rights express Christian concerns, these concerns are common to all humanity and can be seen

as belonging to a sphere into which we all may have insight, regardless of our faith (*cf.* Rom 2:14-16).¹

While human rights can thus be seen as expressing God's law, they need to be critically examined like any other law formulated by human beings. My own approach is a pragmatic one: human rights are there to identify, address and change conditions under which God's will for humans is violated. For this purpose, they work quite well and are worthy of our support. The human rights regime is a powerful instrument since it is not based on one specific religious or secular teaching/community and is thus supported by people of all faiths and confessions. Nonetheless, I shall try to show in this essay that engagement in human rights can be substantially supported by Christian convictions—but not in a manner that excludes people of other faiths from supporting human rights from the basis of their faith.

From a Lutheran perspective, it is easy to relate human rights to the doctrine of the two kingdoms: God governs through princes, kings, law, and reason. Human rights are principles on which the authorities have agreed in order to create a more just world order, and to secure respect for the dignity of the individual. Thus, calling governments to responsible action in order to promote these rights is in accordance with Lutheran theology, and safeguards human rights from being too closely linked to the gospel of grace, according to which we are justified by faith, not works. While promoting human rights might be regarded as a consequence of this justification, we do not need to see justification as a precondition for promoting human rights. Such work might also arise from motivations other than those specifically linked to Christianity.

Human rights and teaching theology

I teach theology at a postgraduate school, and my approach to human rights follows two patterns. First, I have come to see more and more how Jesus' practice is one of inclusion and non-discrimination. Jesus includes everyone

¹ "When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all" (Rom 2:14-16).

in the community irrespective of age, gender, social, economic and national status, etc. Jesus demonstrates that this is not just a practice to ensure that people are given all they need to live, but that the conditions are established for a better community in which members act responsibly.

In a certain sense, Jesus calls on humanity to realize that “the other” is also created in God’s image and to act accordingly. In light of a more secular or modern interpretation, the image of God comprehends the concept of a human being’s inalienable dignity. To recognize this dignity is to respect the other person and to acknowledge his or her rights. Jesus’ teachings have elements of universality as they challenge those who do not recognize the other as an equal. Conversely, those who are excluded from the universal community are those who fail to recognize themselves as being created in God’s image and likewise not part of a larger community. Therefore, those excluded have excluded themselves.

Jesus’ treatment of the vulnerable and needy directs us toward those at the margins. Similarly, human rights direct us toward ensuring that those at the fringes of society, less able to determine their own well-being, become less vulnerable. These striking parallels make it apparent that promoting human rights is to work—albeit with different instruments—on the same project as that to which Jesus’ practices bear witness. Through his practices, Jesus recognizes the other as being important and valuable in the eyes of God.

My second approach to teaching human rights is quite different and draws on historical insights. Human rights, in the modern sense, partly grew out of experiences during the religious wars in Europe, and can be regarded as instruments that help us self-critically to scrutinize church practices. Additionally, these instruments may be used to eliminate injustices arising from determining social or political issues from the perspective of a particular religion or worldview. Human rights might therefore be seen as trying to overcome the challenges facing religious communities in a more pluralistic world, while ensuring that everyone is heard and recognized as an equal partner.

The above relates mostly to situations calling for tolerance and the recognition of the concept of equality. While, in one sense, these are issues challenging the churches as well as society, questions of justice might also be addressed in this context. I remember how some of my fellow students in Germany during the early 1980s understood the biblical and theological “neighbor” as a physical neighbor, arguing that they had no responsibility

for the living conditions of those living at a great geographical distance. I recall how shocked I was when presented with this view. Human rights apply to all. To withdraw from this responsibility is not only a provocation, but also contrary to Jesus' teaching: an unconditional call to help the other whenever one can and whenever they are in need. In other words, human rights help us and challenge us when our sense of the church's mission becomes too limited or too restricted. Human rights enable us to overcome the narrowness and shortsightedness to which religious commitments and convictions might sometimes contribute.

In one sense, students of theology are required to be confronted with seeing themselves "from the outside," through the eyes of the other. They have to develop self-criticism. Here human rights are helpful because they can contribute substantially to insights developed through such self-criticism. Furthermore, they can help to motivate change, should certain practices within church or society be contrary to promoting justice. Thus, human rights can help Christians to see that they are part of a global community in which everyone is created in the image of God, although not everyone may believe in the same God whom they worship.

When I talk about human rights, students generally respond in two ways. One reaction is positive and affirmative, recognizing human rights as a valid part of the church's agenda, and acknowledging that, from a Christian perspective, it would be quite wrong to deny that churches should take part in that struggle. The other response is more reluctant and based on the conviction that this issue is not as important as proclaiming the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. To the latter, I reply that this perspective separates Jesus' teachings and practices from what he offers us in salvation, and reduces Christianity to a sphere in which people do not act as people who can bear an incarnated witness to God's will for God's creation. Thus, the struggle for human rights is also to be seen as a struggle for a complete Christianity, in which we bear witness that God is the Creator, Savior, and Renewer of the world.

Conclusion: a community in which justice is not taken for granted

Information about the realities of unjust and unbearable conditions is readily at hand and easily accessible. Many of us have the ability to do

something about the global situation. Sometimes we can do a lot, at other times we can only do a little, but we can always do something. Reflecting on the last thirty years, I have occasionally wondered why the churches do not do more. Why is it so hard to stop and assist your neighbor who is in need? Do we take for granted that this is the way it should be, or expect that someone else will act instead?

As Christians, human rights call us to work toward a world community in which justice and the respect for human dignity can be taken for granted. To be a part of the Christian community is to be a part of a fellowship that recognizes each individual as having been created in the image of God, and as being endowed with the same right to participate in the sharing of God's gifts. Human rights call us to see the other in this way, and thus to experience the glory of God through one another. In this sense, human rights work is closely related to the heart of the Christian faith.

A Missionary's Log Continued

19 December 2004

On Wednesday, we spoke at Yalis and another location further on. On Thursday, we spoke at Tsak Laiagam and one village beyond there. It took us more than an hour and a half to traverse the thirteen kilometers. But, again, everyone was attentive and listened. They asked me to give the concluding speech. I asked them to let me try to address questions from the crowd instead. The following are questions posed and statements made at the various locations we visited:

- Why should we care for AIDS victims? It is their own fault anyway.
- The government should ban condoms.
- Condoms promote AIDS. Why are you advocating them?
- The government should make blood tests mandatory.
- We should build a jail or compound right at the hospital and whoever tests positive should just be locked up there.
- Who gives you university students the right to come to talk to us? You are all a promiscuous lot anyway and so are our politicians.
- The newspaper should publish the names of HIV carriers so we all know who they are.
- AIDS work is the work of doctors and nurses. It's not the church's work at all. Why would you be wasting your time with that?
- People who have AIDS deserve to die.

This says a lot about how much needs to be done here. None of the questions listed above are explicitly medical ones. Each one must be addressed by any church that sees itself as being Christ in the world. One of my main points was delivered as a question. “What,” I asked, “is God’s response to sin? Does God curse sinners? Is God furious with them? No. Of course not. We have seen what God’s response to sin is. He sent his son—who died—for you.” To the crowd it seemed like a message from another planet. Even though this is the season of awaiting the Christ Child, the world not in stillness lies but in darkness.¹ It truly is the Light of the World that we continue to await. Even so, Lord Jesus Christ, quickly come—and in the meantime, give your servants in every place strength, boldness and humility.

¹ A cynical allusion to a phrase in the Christmas church hymn, “It came upon a Midnight Clear.” The line reads, “Peace on the earth, goodwill to all, from heaven’s all gracious king. The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.”

Faith, Feminism and Human Rights

Musimbi Kanyoro

A question of credibility

My many years of working with women globally cannot substitute for their original voices. My mind's eye focuses on women in many different situations: Indigenous women speak to me about years of triple oppression as Indigenous, poor and female; women living with HIV and AIDS tell me of their daily stigmatization and discrimination; I hear echoes of Afghani women speaking about their lives of subordination, invisibility and the denial of basic rights under the Taliban. The stories about the pain women suffer are endless and many include instances of violence inflicted upon them in their homes, in the streets and by the culture, laws and religious teachings that surround them. And, as if this were not bad enough, many women live in fear and insecurity, day in day out, whether in times of peace or war. Women of all ages are never safe from violence and abuse.

These voices never speak out of pity or defeat; they are the voices of female human rights defenders committed to working for change. Society sometimes considers women who speak out for women's rights as feminists. If feminism is the awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at the work place, within the family, religion and culture, then I do not merely subscribe to it, but am obliged to use this framework in order to be an agent of change.

When women share their experiences of oppression, their ability to empathize with one another is visible. Language, race, geography and other differences often play a lesser role than the similarities of their experiences. On such occasions, women join in amazement and marvel at the Early Church, as the spirit of God descended upon the believers and gave them words of faith.

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and

your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy [...] (Acts 2:17–18).

What an experience! Like a mighty wind, God's spirit rushing through a multitude of people, blowing away barriers that divide. Hovering over heads like tongues of fire to burn through differences that separate the children of God. It is no wonder that the people who gathered that day responded with bewilderment, amazement and astonishment. Suddenly those who could not understand one another heard a single language; those who could not speak to one another, shared a common world.

This compelling New Testament image inspires me every day to name and claim the universality of human rights. The word of God speaks of prophetic voices that are not silenced by gender, age or nationality. Under the Holy Spirit's continuous guidance and prompting, the gospel constantly calls us to judge our institutions and ourselves. This leads to repentance, to a changing of our minds and altering of structures toward becoming an inclusive communion of saints in the church of Jesus Christ. This is the very crux of defending human rights. It is about ensuring human dignity for all, providing space for the voices of difference and for those who because of certain vulnerabilities are lost and forgotten.

Women's resistance has set an agenda leading to change. That which we experience in our personal lives, our communities and countries, motivates us to act. When we share our experiences with others, we discover commonalities and are strengthened to act together. Women have developed global solidarity through their participation in UN conferences and commissions and have chosen a human rights framework for global advocacy. The language of human rights cuts to the core of female inequality. Denying human rights means denying the fundamental components of being human. It is the dehumanization of women that fosters and supports discrimination and violence against women including rape, sexual violence and economic exploitation. A human rights perspective helps to illustrate the complicated relationship between gender and other aspects of identity such as race, class, religion, age or economic status. Discrimination and violence against women is usually shaped by how gender interacts with other such factors.

Human rights are founded on the protection and promotion of human dignity. Women's rights are about reclaiming the dignity of women as

human beings. Human rights are universal and non-negotiable, thus they apply to women. Human rights are indivisible; women's rights should therefore be addressed as an indivisible body including political, social, economic and cultural rights. These principles undergird the work of the World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA) and guide my work with and for women.

Theological framework

I write this essay primarily as a theologian, a women's rights activist and as one among many women in the church for whom women's theological perspectives have been a gift that has come at a great price. I am anchored in the Christian faith and nurtured by the church and communities of men and women throughout many parts of the world. I have a loving family who support me and I feel the presence of God accompanying me in my work. I consider my job and my life as a journey of justice that involves interpreting the pain of the world through the lenses of women, seeking to respond with the guidance of the gospel and human right instruments.

My awareness of the plight of women was developed in the church and nurtured through the global work of the women's movement, the ecumenical movement and the LWF. However, it has been the study of theology, particularly feminist theology, that has given me a roadmap leading me through this faith journey of justice.

Feminist theology and women's rights

Feminist theologies are rooted in women's experiences in church and society. Their purpose is not to inject political correctness into the church and society, but rather to invite men and women radically to examine their understanding of God and their relationships. Christian feminist theologies base their meditation on God's gracious gifts of creation and baptism. Men and women are made in the image of God; each one of us is baptized into Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. We have been named and claimed as God's offspring. God calls women and men alike into a right relationship with one another and with all creation. Living in

a right relationship means to respect one another, to share our humanity and to care for all that God has put into our hands.

Feminist theologians have challenged the church to reflect on how gender history in our societies has shaped our sexuality, spirituality, worship, interpretation of the Scriptures and use of power and privilege.¹ Feminist perspectives in Christian theology invite the church to explore new possibilities of being church as men and women of faith, bound together by the good news of Jesus Christ. If the church accepts that human rights are an important part of its mission and ministry, then feminist theology can serve as a framework to help the church redress these issues. Feminist theology is a gift for the church. It is an opportunity, not a problem; a possibility, not a difficulty.

Women's wounded lives have formed the basis on which questions are raised by feminist and womanist theologians.² One of the greatest advantages of feminist scholarship has been to listen to women's stories and to recognize that their subordination as a gender is a worldwide phenomenon that defies the confines of race, class, creed or nationality. This reality is voiced loudly and clearly at world conferences, in courts of law and church halls. The UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, in 1995, stated that there is no state in the world where women are safe from violence or treated as equals to men.³ Thus, despite diverse social, economic and political backgrounds, women, by virtue of their gender, constitute an oppressed social group. The social construction of gender roles and status relegate women to an inferior position. Gender subordination is articulated through various institutions, both public and private, and gives rise to the feminization of poverty, disease and uncontrolled violence inflicted on women. Feminist theology testifies to how, because of their gender, women have historically experienced suffering within social and economic struc-

¹ See for example, Richard Holloway (ed.), *Who Needs Feminism: Men Respond to Sexism in the Church* (London: SPCK, 1991).

² For additional reading on the distinction of womanist and feminist, see Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989). This book argues that feminist Christology has not reflected the experiences of non-white women. She proposes womanist theology to account for non-Western, non-white experiences.

³ See the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, at www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instreet/e5dplw.htm.

tures. It analyzes the crisis of women within the church, their search for wholeness and the historical transformation of church and society.

Feminist theologies analyze the history of humankind as written in biblical texts, as well as through the church's teachings and practices throughout the centuries and the present day. Women have discovered history to be deeply rooted in patriarchy, a part of cultural heritage. Both Judaism and Christianity were shaped by patriarchy and feminist theologies have demonstrated how patriarchy has affected women's experience and the naming of God.⁴ Furthermore, patriarchy has shaped structures of work, decision making and worship. Feminist theologies therefore name the gender injustice in these areas. Yet, gender alone cannot account for the injustices that women experience globally. Women's theologies appeal to solidarity in combating the subordination of women and are capacious enough to include the concerns of women arising from social injustices resulting from racism, poverty and culture. These theologies consider different concerns: those of single and married women; of those who are mothers as well as those who are not; of the poor and the wealthy; of women of various ethnic backgrounds and religious persuasions; of secular women. The list is endless. Feminist theologies embrace diversity as a gift and accept difference as a reality. This understanding prevents difference from becoming a source of fear, bias or ignorance that might lead to promoting unjust practices. Differences must not be taken for granted; they must be acknowledged and well managed. Their difficulties and joys must be regarded as gifts and challenges to be received by all. By affirming difference, women's theologies strive to model the possibility of celebrating difference for the rest of the world.

Fearing feminism

The pioneers of the women's movement heralded the breaking of silence over the unjust treatment of women. They demanded equal treatment and the recognition of women's human dignity. These demands sometimes shocked people out of their silent slumber and resulted in negative

⁴ See for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

attitudes toward feminism. Challenging the *status quo* is never easy. Historically, the women's movement has been even less accepted in church circles where even today feminism sometimes raises suspicion, mistrust, resentment and aggression. Feminism involves seeking human rights and justice for women. It can be dangerous and risky to be a human rights defender with such a tag.⁵

The Scriptures command us to seek justice. In seeking the God-given dignity of women, women also seek justice for all those who are treated unjustly. The Old Testament prophets constantly call for justice: "...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8).

One of the major contributions of feminist theologies is that they invite the church to consider new images of God and in so doing to discover new possibilities for men and women to live together and with the God who created them. The church's witness will be credible only then when it considers the traumatic situation of millions of women and the perilous conditions of the outcasts in our societies. What is faith without the church fighting against the forces of oppression that assault human dignity? Asking this question frightens some people since the church holds long-standing traditions and practices that have often neglected women's pain. Questions threaten the institutional comfort of churches, vested privileges and the security of our judgement over what is right and what is wrong. An experience of faith that separates itself from people seeking to escape marginalization poses a serious threat to the future of the church.

The World YWCA and human rights

On a daily basis, the YWCA promotes value-based leadership of women and girls to achieve human rights, justice, peace, health, freedom and

⁵ On 6 December 1989, Marc Lepine killed fourteen women at the l'École Polytechnique de Montréal. The reason he gave for committing the crime was that they were feminists. Similarly, in December 1994, a group of women in an African church were suspended from membership for writing a letter to the synod in which they presented the problems of women. In 1995, students attacked a female theologian teaching at a higher institute of learning in Africa. Her family was harassed and her property destroyed because she was conducting research on sexual harassment on the university campus.

care for the environment. The YWCA has a moral obligation to stand for values and actions that promote the dignity and humanity of all people. Therefore, its work on human rights includes both advocacy and support for all those affected.

The YWCA advocates for just systems through educational campaigns and international solidarity, and engages in activities that promote the social, spiritual and physical well-being of women and girls. It offers services to those in need and education for sustainable development. Most importantly, it strengthens the capacity of women so that they might adequately respond to the needs of their communities. By developing more women and girls as agents of change at local, national and international levels, the YWCA is able to sustain its vision - a vision in which its human rights work is inspired and grounded in faith and in the first-hand knowledge of being female.

Over the past 150 years, YWCA programs have transformed lives and made women's rights a reality; still, the future asks for more. When I reflect on the 150 years of the YWCA movement, I begin to think about the next 150 years. The 25 million lives that the YWCA has reached may very well double over the next fifty years. The opportunity to touch so many lives in the future and to help women make the world a better place is very exciting. Embracing the future is about standing up for change that will accompany women and girls in the years to come. That includes women's rights as human rights.

A Missionary's Log Continued ...

6 February 2005

Not so long ago two men came to our door. One of them was named Jeff. His wife used to be a patient at the hospital. Because there was nothing that could be done anymore, they sent her to her home, far away in Kopiago. “She is dying,” he said. “We have a ticket to get her on the plane, but we have no rides to the airport which is an hour and a half away. The buses won’t take her because she smells so badly and she needs to be there first thing in the morning. Can you help us?”

It seems so simple, doesn’t it, that the answer needs to be “Yes.” Yes, of course I will help you. Yes, I know a bit of what it is to watch the ones I love die. Yes, I will do this for you. Yes—but it is not that simple.

It was not a very fine thing that God did when he gifted the human with compassion. Human beings find it in themselves to agonize over the best use of that gift. And once you have been compassionate, how much worse do you feel, knowing that you could have done more, sooner, better. What kept you, you wonder, from giving a second hour of your time to that crying child? What obscene priority did you have that made you hold on that much tighter to your dollar bill as you walked past that disabled beggar? Why can’t you get up at four in the morning to drive a woman you don’t even know to the airport? Exactly why can’t you show compassion to everyone who needs it?

I picked her up at 4.10 a.m. It was foggy and my headlights did not stab far into the gloom. By ones and twos people came to stand in the lamplight of the turnaround and they watched with me as she came to the truck. They brought her mattress, laid it in the back of the truck, and her husband lifted her onto it with a gentle embrace. Then, he sat next to her and held her in his lap. The rest of the car filled quickly, five on the rear bench, three more in the back, one in the passenger seat—then four more. Enough was enough! I made a few of them leave the car. I don’t know who they were, but the more I think about it, I am sure they

were her children. Exactly why can't you take as many people as will fit into the car? Why can't you overload the truck, just this once, so that her children can spend an extra hour with her?

I had to drive considerably more slowly with the added weight, the deepening fog and the woman who cried out every time I hit a pothole. We were at the airport by 7.15 a.m. and the pilots did their best to make her comfortable. We shook hands with the woman and her family, wished them a profound peace and drove off.

Later that day, I was under the sun in a bank line. I'd been there for an hour and a half and wasn't even halfway through it. The guards and their dogs, straining at the leashes, kept the crowds at bay and we who were destined for the bank tried to stay away from the dogs, pinning ourselves against the wall. I was trying to read my magazine—to take my mind off the morning. I was here in line to help some more people. It's school fee season and my family has had a dozen requests for assistance.

The unfortunate thing about giving is that the more you give, the more you feel like you should have given more. Also, the more you give, the more you dread the next time someone comes by to ask a favor because you've said yes to ten people already, why not eleven? It seems so simple. The answer has to be "Yes." Except its not that simple.

Women and Dalits

Sagarika Chetty

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth, so as not to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain? For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still. (Isa 10:1–4).

In the context of today's globalized world, human rights concerns can be related to the micro and macro levels. My faith journey has led me from one revelation to another. The challenge is to be aware of those who encroach upon, capitalize on, and strangulate the life and space of their fellow human beings. Working on human rights involves being part of a greater community where human rights are respected.

My engagement in human rights

During my most recent engagement in working for human rights I was confronted with the following situation:

I was in Nepal's Kathmandu valley. The people of Nepal crave good governance, peace, and democracy, and have long aspired to become a better nation. Almost everyone there speaks of these issues in terms of their own experience, rather than using sophisticated jargon. I spoke with a wide range of people, including civil society leaders, religious leaders, various professionals, college students, hotel owners, taxi drivers, roadside vendors, homemakers, and many others. There were villagers who felt passionately about land reform while people of other faiths, including Hindus, expressed their hope for greater secularization. Nearly everyone to whom I spoke expressed the hope that a constituent assembly, or another appropriate body, be formed, in which all the diverse members and groups of society might be represented.

One woman had been severely traumatized when her husband was killed and her young daughter raped and murdered by soldiers of the Royal Nepalese Army. Someone else urged me to “tell India! Tell the USA! No more dictatorship. No further manipulation. We the people of Nepal will shape our own country.” Another person demanded that I “tell the world that we need development, not arms! We want peace, not destruction. We want the best of life for the whole nation and not only for a select few.” They openly shared their displeasure and disappointment with the nexus between the monarchy and major world powers in undermining democracy, human rights, and peace in their country.

The Nepalese people’s complaints have evolved into a demand for change. They are no longer willing to tolerate the abuse of their rights suffered over the past two centuries. Among other injustices, the Nepalese people have seen their material welfare decline, their rights weakened, and their natural resources unfairly traded away. They suffer under massive illiteracy, severe poverty, economic exploitation, and religious intolerance.

Having come from India, a country which has time and again played a vital role in shaping the history of Nepal since 1950, my visit was also a time for personal introspection. I began to ask questions such as:

- Are our national character and morale in any way jeopardizing our neighbor’s human rights and peace?
- Does our public opinion reflect this tendency?
- Have we given a free hand to Nepal’s political élite?
- Should the citizens of India be more aware of how our government’s policies have affected the lives of the Nepalese?
- Is democracy in India a means of unconditional submission to the decisions of the government, or does it call for more participation in decision making?
- Should personal agendas be put aside in a collective decision-making process, or can individual preference be part of the collective

planning when it involves complex and contradictory questions of geopolitics, international relations, and national interest?

- Must human rights be a part of a larger goal?

Efforts to protect human rights begin with these basic questions. Assessing the vulnerability of individuals and groups is also fundamental to the protection of human rights.

Challenges for India

In India, the church's mission is challenged by the following questions:

- Why do 300 million Indians live below the poverty line?
- Why do so many people suffer from malnutrition even though famine has been eradicated?
- Why do illiteracy and gender inequalities persist?
- What are the dynamics between political leadership and administrative bureaucracy in regard to good governance?
- Why is there often a delay between the independent judiciary and the delivery of justice?

One of the primary challenges in working for human rights is to become associated with a process in which one becomes the subject as well as the catalyst for constructive change oneself. I have been privileged to be part of various endeavors that have led me to meet and interact with people from various walks of life including Dalits, Adivasis,¹ subalterns, women, youth, children, victims of communal conflicts, environmentally affected communities, and a host of others.

¹ "Adivasis" refers literally to the "original inhabitants" or tribal peoples of India.

Our faith foundation has been challenged by various factors including the aftermath of the tsunami in 2004, environmental abuses, the increased marginalization of “have-nots”, a weakening consensus on the women’s reservation bill and women’s active participation in church and society, the basic denial of rights for Dalit and Adivasi women. The more closely you look at the unjust systems in India, the more you discover the complex labyrinth of social, economic, religious, and caste-class-gender challenges. Encountering these challenges and situations has been far from easy, but we are regularly strengthened by the perseverance of like-minded people, both within and outside the church, people with a reforming spirit and a drive for action. Together, the church and wider society have tried to develop alternative models for our local context, and through ecumenical engagement, we discover a beautiful diversity in one another. One valuable lesson I have learned through my work in human rights is that while the fight against injustice has a great many facets, the evolution of alternative paradigms must come from within the community in order to provide a firm vision and sustained engagement.

Stories are meant to be shared

The struggle for human rights often includes real life stories. Some of them are known, but most of them are subjected to a “dictated silence.” These stories need to be told and retold, as firstly, they can be symbolic of our solidarity with the suffering people and, secondly, can remind us of the Christian response to the commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39).

In this context, stories not only serve a narrative purpose, but also disseminate information. They provide a context in which a community or group of individuals can reflect on the underlying events with particular concern for present and future an generations. These stories do not follow a specific pattern, but convey important message. Engaging in human rights, therefore, first requires a sharing of stories. Advocacy, lobbying, campaigning and awareness building are all rooted in this basic sharing of experiences. This pathos deepens further when the protagonist actively enters into the struggle. Questions such as “What if you yourself were the receiver of these abuses?” often appeal directly to the human conscience.

Faith as motivator

For me, the diaconal challenge stems primarily from two sources. First, the Nazareth Manifesto,² a vision for inclusive liberation and, secondly, my immediate social milieu, rich in diversity. For several years, I have had the opportunity to serve the wider community through projects funded by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the University of Edinburgh. Similarly, I have also been influenced by the Christian vision of an egalitarian society. At times, I have been regarded as a thorn in the side by the governmental authorities, because I have been advocating for good governance and better social services for Dalits and Adivasis, who are often uneducated and neglected. Advocacy is crucial in order to stop the stigma, discrimination, neglect, and alienation that people have lived with for decades, even centuries.

Mythical liberation and the Dalits' wounded psyche

The vision of a new heaven and a new earth is quintessential among Lutheran teachings in India. In fact, the very mission of the Lutheran churches in India is based on this vision. This is especially significant in India because the church is comprised largely of Dalits. The term "dalit" literally means the oppressed, crushed and broken people. Dalits find themselves on the lowest rung of the caste system that is traditional and central to the social structure in India.³

Ritually, the people of India are often divided into the categories of pure and impure. Given this history of caste discrimination, Bahujan leaders across India often refer to it as "India's silent apartheid."⁴ Outright racism has maimed, dehumanized and destroyed hundreds of millions of

² In some regions and denominations, Lk 4:18-19 is commonly known as the Nazareth Manifesto.

³ Four varnas or estates form the caste system in India. The highest is that of the Brahmins or priests. The second includes the Kshatriyas or warriors. Next are the Vaishyas or the merchants. The Shudras or servants, also known as the "have-nots," are the fourth category. The Dalits are actually a fifth category that is left entirely outside of this stratification and are regarded as the "untouchables."

⁴ www.dalitvoice.org/Templates/april_a2006/editorial.htm

people throughout the ages. Religious sanctions, vested interests, force, and violence have sustained the status quo. Meanwhile, Dalits encounter systemic violence largely from the Shudras, or servants, including forced labor, denial of access to water and other public amenities, sexual abuse of Dalit women, mass killings, deliberate social discrimination, and alienation. For Dalits, a crushed people, each day is a struggle for dignity, acceptance, human rights assertions, and the fullness of life.

According to the Indian constitution, every person belongs to a social order based on principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity. However, the reality is quite the opposite. Being a Dalit Christian woman, I have personally, time and again, been offered false promises and a merely mythical liberation. At one point in history, Dalits took refuge in the church because of the good news of the gospel to the poor and marginalized. Being a Christian, therefore, symbolically meant to be one who was redeemed, accepted by a God who treats everyone compassionately and equally. The church became a space where the wounded psyche could seek healing, a space where one could experience life in all its fullness.

Sadly, caste divisions are now once again taking root in congregational life. Social exclusion and alienation continue to be a reality, making the promise of the “body of Christ” seem more like a myth. Thankfully, the church is also blessed with a handful of people who sympathize with the Dalits in their plight. Periodic interactions with these like-minded people have enabled me to understand the needs of Dalits from the perspectives of justice, peace, and human rights. I hope that in cooperation with like-minded people, our nation will soon reach a stage when Dalits will be recognized as a unique and special people, and not only as a disempowered people.

Gender: a lifelong challenge

I grew up in a socially depressed environment facing many human rights concerns and disappointments, especially since my family does not have a son to carry forward the family name. My mother and I could not tolerate the discrimination we experienced. Many relatives regularly advised my parents to try for another child in the hope that this one would be a boy. My relatives often asked what would become of

the family property, and when I would marry so that my parents would not have to waste their time and money on my education. Some of my relatives also commented that everything would have been wonderful, if only I had been a boy.

Millions of girls and women are subjected to such questioning and similar “social values.” It is suffocating, dehumanizing and alienating, and indeed an abuse of human rights.

Some people would consider me very fortunate because my parents did not kill me. Not every female child or fetus in India has this privilege. Sex-selective abortion is rampant. Often, parents, especially mothers, will find ways of killing their daughters including starvation, crushing their daughter to death, poisoning or choking her with the husk of a paddy⁵ that gets lodged in the pharynx. As a result of this mentality, the sex ratio is declining at an alarming rate. In some northern states, the ratio is less than 775 women to 1,000 men.

People who are not familiar with India’s social structure might ask how parents can be so inhuman. Many factors play a role in sex-selective abortion, including poverty and social morals that dictate that a girl is more of a burden than a gift of life. This is sometimes a way for mothers to prevent their daughters from leading a dehumanized life where social conditioning and the endurance of violence are common.

Dowry is another factor in India’s unhealthy social system that greatly affects the lives of female children. Dowry is a practice where substantial gifts of gold, clothes, consumer durables and large amounts of money are given to the bridegroom by the bride’s parents. Exorbitant dowries have become the *sine qua non* for marrying off daughters, and they may often leave the bride’s parents in a situation of penury. Moreover, the inability to marry off a daughter is a matter of social disgrace for the whole family. Many parents and daughters have committed suicide as a result of not being able to arrange for a proper dowry. Furthermore, a good dowry does not necessarily guarantee women a safe and dignified life. The Indian media frequently report “dowry deaths,” whereby women are tortured and killed by a greedy husband and his family.

Everyone in India recognizes the dowry system as a social evil, but very few people have the capacity to challenge it. The excessive eco-

⁵ Threshed unmilled rice.

conomic burden, the inherent uncertainties and the individual family's own limitations with respect to encountering such socially acceptable, yet extremely unhealthy practices, have led many mothers to believe that it is better to kill their daughter while she is still young, than to let her grow up and be subjected to a life of suffering.

Women's tales of woe are a litany of lifelong human rights violations. As an Indian woman, I too am part of this unjust society. I am continuously being challenged by existing customs, morals, and practices that are gender insensitive and a violation of human rights.

Previously, when I served as the Executive Secretary for Women and Gender Justice of the Children and Life Formation Program of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), I had the opportunity to learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of women in India. Through the Fellowship of the Least Coin Movement⁶ and the World Day of Prayer Movement⁷ the NCCI was able to create a network in which the women's fellowships of the member churches could come together to learn from each other's experiences. NCCI has preserved this movement despite many challenges. It has strengthened the spirit of Indian women in the church, and has led to the formation of the All India Council of Christian Women (AICCW)⁸ of which I am proud to be a part.

Rights and resources: advocacy for a just distribution

Within communities, assessing human rights violations often reveals the accumulation of resources by a few individuals at the cost of depriving the majority. The accumulation of resources is often used as a tool of power over

⁶ Begun in 1956 by Shanti Solomon of India who considered that women anywhere could have a sense of being part of a worldwide family of faith, as they prayed for peace and reconciliation, and set aside the least coin of their country as a symbol of that prayer. www.pcusa.org/pw/mission/community.htm.

⁷ World Day of Prayer is a worldwide movement of Christian women of many traditions who come together to observe a common day of prayer each year and who, in many countries, have a continuing relationship in prayer and service. www.worlddayofprayer.net/

⁸ The AICCW is a unit of the NCCI. It plays an advocacy role for women in building up the women's movement in the church and helping church women relate to secular women's movements.

those who are poor. Many transnational economic giants demand greater profits at the expense of others. These giants do not concern themselves with weak communities, the suffering of humankind, the vulnerability of the environment, or the unjust distribution of resources.

A number of ecumenical endeavors have tried to raise awareness of the effects that these giants have on our globalized world. I have been privileged to be part of the Ecumenical Diakonia Process for Healing and Reconciliation,⁹ an initiative of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). With the CCA's assistance, I have been engaged in a project that provides ministry to IDPs in India, with special concern for the victims of religious conflict, internal war, and development interventions. Through these initiatives, we hope to motivate and empower both national and local leaders to care for uprooted and indigenous peoples.

Lutherans in India have been proactive in a number of endeavors that have had an international impact. A movement in Kashipur, Orissa, brought together a wide range of people including social activists, church workers, and victims of abuse. Kashipur is one of the poorest regions in India despite the fact that it holds seventy percent of India's bauxite reserves. The government of India has already signed over many of the reserves to mining companies, leaving the local people, of whom 61.5 percent are Adivasis, without a claim. While the literacy rate among men in the region is only 6.5 percent, the literacy rate among women is under one percent. The lack of health care facilities and access thereto compound the situation even further.

For over ten years, the Adivasis have opposed the Utkal Alumina bauxite mining project. Serious efforts were undertaken by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI) and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) who incessantly lobbied in favor of the rights of the people of Kashipur. Throughout, the people of Kashipur have experienced unfair bargaining, trading, threats, abuse and, in some cases, have lost their lives.

⁹ For more information on the Ecumenical Diakonia Process, see www.cca.org.hk/clusters/jid/programs/41002Taiwan-Report.doc.

Accompanied by Chandran Paul Martin,¹⁰ Priscilla Singh,¹¹ and William Stanley¹² in 1997 and 1998, we toured parts of Norway and India to increase awareness of the effects of the Kashipur project. We explained the cost-benefit analysis from the point of view of the Adivasis, those most affected in the Kashipur region. We spoke of our concerns for the environment and of other related social justice concerns.

We also held a meeting with Norway's largest company, Norsk Hydro, part of the consortium investing in Kashipur. The NCA helped arrange this meeting so that we could join them in advocating for social justice. When we met with some of the most senior authorities at Norsk Hydro, it became clear to us that the company was not going to stop their work in Kashipur. The giant was already fat with profit and was not interested in the local people of Kashipur.

While it seemed as though we would go home empty-handed, without having accomplished anything, we later received the news that the company had withdrawn from the Kashipur project. For us, this was a sign of victory, a testimony of the church's powerful prophetic engagement. Most importantly, it was a victory for the people of Kashipur, both dead and alive, who were involved in the struggle. Many unresolved issues remain for the people of Kashipur even today, yet this movement is an important chapter in history. The success resulting from the church's engagement in human rights continues to give us hope for the future.

Human rights from a biblical perspective

When human rights are taken into consideration, the “personal” becomes “universal” and conversely, the “universal” becomes “personal.” Several biblical accounts testify to this, but perhaps one of the best examples is the story of Esther. Esther always lived her life with a communal identity, pleading and advocating for her own people who were not free. Through

¹⁰ Dr Chandran Paul Martin has formerly served as Executive Secretary of the UELCI. He has recently been appointed Deputy General Secretary of the LWF.

¹¹ Priscilla Singh is Executive Secretary for Women in Church and Society of the LWF.

¹² Dr William Stanley is a member of the UELCI and has worked for many years on the project for Integrated Rural Development of Weaker Sections in India (WIDA).

this way of living, her personal self remained open to the universal needs of her people; caring for the universal needs of others, she sympathized with the people and related to them in a very personal way.

Human rights concerns, like biblical and Christian teachings, are always about establishing a healthy personal relationship with one's neighbor, a personal relationship with those who are different, and with those with whom we do not always agree. It is about living in communion with one another. The fullness of life is attained through sharing and not through the accumulation of wealth. When a person shares what they have with their neighbor, they open up a place for the other. It is not about charity, although it may appear so, but it is about sharing what you have because someone was kind enough to share it with you. How easy it is for us to forget what we have received and how we have received it. How easy it is for us to forget to be thankful. The invisible pattern of interdependence creates enough space for the "personal" and the "universal." This interdependence carries the secret to sustainability and quality of life for us and for our fellow neighbor.

The days to come

Looking back, I understand my human rights engagement as having been motivated by a blend of religious and cultural factors. I simply wish to see certain essential values sustained—values that are intrinsically human in nature, values that need to be alive and upheld for all of humanity. We must never become complacent and think that we have done everything there is to be done. Rather, we must persistently pursue the greater good for all humanity.

Although I have focused here on human rights concerns in relation to the experiences of women and Dalits, my missionary endeavors are not limited to these two issues. I hope to have provided the dimensions of caste and gender, particularly in the Indian context, two aspects of the multifaceted struggle for human rights. Sharing these experiences will hopefully strengthen our collective engagement for justice and human rights. The vision considers both the personal and the universal in establishing the communion of life, the communion with our neighbor.

A Missionary's Log Continued ...

12 March 2005

The days continue. I forget that in some parts of the world it is not normal for men and women to sit on opposite sides of a dusty aisle in church—and that in some parts of the world, mourning isn't a socially acceptable self-imposed, long-term, depression. All in all, I do a good job of remembering to prove that I'm a pretty plain human. And the people around me do a good job of reminding me that they are just plain humans too. And it's good to know we're all in this together.

Let's Build the Beautiful Harmony of Life

Benny Sinaga

In a poem, written for the LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, Canada, 2003, I attempted to express the cries of the suffering creation. Imagine the subject of this poem as a human being, an animal, land, water, plant, or as any other living thing.

My Crying

Do I belong to this world?
Why do I often feel bad?
I can't breathe
I can't enjoy the refreshing breeze
Can't move freely in my narrow and dirty room
I am suffering, dirty and useless
I am hungry, thirsty and
I have nothing
But I am a human being.
You and I need food
You need to eat
I also need to eat
You need to wear clothes
I also need to wear clothes
You and I need fresh air
You and I need to stand together in this land
But to whom do I belong in this world?
Nobody wants to answer me...
They do not know me as a Being of God
Because I am dirty, I stink, a pale and homeless drifter.
I walked with my hurting heart
Hungry and thirsty for justice, peace and love
I continue my small steps

Looking for a hope
A hope of life
A hope for tomorrow
Lying in this narrow, dirty place
With a tattered blanket
And the sky for my roof
To wait for someone's help
Yes... to wait for *your help*...

I wrote this poem after having had the following experience. One day, I was on the bus heading from my seminary located in Pematang Siantar to my hometown, Parapat. I sat beside a woman and her seven-year-old son. At first, I felt miserable sitting beside them because they were dirty and smelled badly. Their odor made me nauseous, but no other seat was available. Suddenly, a woman selling food came to the side of the bus. "Nasi... nasi lemak. Nasi sayur. Harganya 2,500 rupiah, saja!" ("Rice... rice with meat fat. Vegetarian rice. The price is only 2,500 Rp.") At the time, 10,000 Rp. was equivalent to 1 USD. The food was cheap and probably had no nutritional value. I watched intently as the woman sitting beside me declined the food the woman was selling. However, the small boy, his face full of hope, said, "Mum, why do you reject her. I feel hungry." The mother responded, "I said no. We have no money and we do not yet know where we will sleep tonight." The son insisted, "Please Mum, I am hungry. I promise, I will not ask for food again tonight." The mother opened her small purse and ordered one small wrapping of food. The boy had beautiful manners and finished his food down to the last bite. He smiled at his mother and the mother smiled back. As the bus continued on its way to Parapat, the boy fell asleep. While he slept, I struck up a conversation with the mother. I learned that they were homeless and living on the streets. She did not know her husband's whereabouts and they moved from place to place in order to survive. They were too poor for the boy to attend school.

I arrived home heartbroken and asked for God's forgiveness because at first I had hated sitting beside them. I tried to place myself in their position and felt moved to write. Their situation moved me to such an extent that I began to hate the situation of my country. While Indonesia is rich in natural resources, most people are poor and marginalized. I was not sure of what I should do and thought, "I am just a human being and certainly not rich

enough to help everyone.” Walking down the street I see people struggling to fulfill their daily needs. Children beg for money around the clock. They cannot go to school because they have no money. My friends regard this problem as an Indonesian phenomenon. We are encouraged to pray because it is believed that a miracle from God will change the situation.

In 2001, I represented the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant Church (HKBP), at the LWF International Youth Program—Transformation Through Participation (IYP–TTP) held in Geneva.¹ We discussed how globalization changes our lives and affects the whole world. Together, we engaged in dialogue and dreamed about a New World, free of struggles.

The theme² emphasized the urgent need to participate in seeking transformation. Active participation is essential, regardless of how great or small. We cannot expect transformation and healing if we do not speak out when people are being treated unfairly. Discussing issues of globalization is never repetitive since the world is constantly undergoing transformation.

With the help of some friends and students of the Batak University in Pematang Siantar, I sought to carry out the action plan established at the IYP–TTP. We created a group called *Dei Caritas* (love of God) and primarily focused our efforts on street children. We were very fortunate to be able to use an empty room in the seminary where I was studying as a base from which to coordinate our activities and meet for fellowship. We took in street children, adopting them as brothers and sisters, regardless of whether or not they were Christian. We shared with them the love of God and instructed them in a variety of subjects. Many members of *Dei Caritas* shared their pocket money with the children, buying books to read to them and paying their school fees. Other members shared their love and attention with those children who were in need of care.

I imagined a time when the children we had adopted would in turn adopt other street children, expressing similar care for their well-being. Perhaps then, everyone might have equal access to education and the problem of illiteracy would be solved. This would certainly enhance the quality of life

¹ At that time, I described the realities of globalization as a monster which has eaten the world, now leaving us to dwell in its stomach. A friend from Texas, whom I met at the IYP–TTP, was so interested in this description of globalization that he created a website to serve as a forum on the impact of globalization. See www.tamethemonster.org

² “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

also in other areas. Educated people are much better equipped to take care of their own needs. Often, a good education leads to a better life.

In our struggle for human rights, we may sometimes feel discouraged since there is so much that we could do. The members of *Dei Caritas* have all graduated and gone on to work in other cities and villages. While it was sad to see the program end, it is important that we were actively trying to bring about change. Each one of the members, regardless of where they live, has made a commitment to provide aid to the marginalized. Additionally, there is hope that the street children whom we once adopted have a better chance of enjoying life to the fullest.

Contextual education

I served as an intern at a church called Pakkat, situated in a rural village. I saw many beautiful things there. Children played in the grass beside buffaloes, laughing and running around without slippers or shoes. Despite these children's happy lifestyles, I recognized that they lacked a decent education. I gathered them in an empty place beside the church to teach them English, mathematics, history and the Bible. The children were very excited to learn and I encouraged them to pursue further studies if they had enough money to cover the costs. Unfortunately, I had to move away and say goodbye to each of them, but the congregation committed itself to encouraging the children to continue studying.

In Kota Baru, the second part of my internship, I was involved with Sunday school and youth and women's groups. The small town of Kota Baru is often a place of transition. Most of the children already attended school but I encouraged them to seek a better education. I taught them to be conscious of those around them who are less fortunate and marginalized and about the impact that globalization can have on their lives.

In the local junior and senior high schools, I offered capacity building courses in the area of spirituality, often working with several hundred students per week. In view of the serious human rights abuses many women suffer at the hands of their husbands, a seminar on the harmony of life was hosted in cooperation with the pastors. The emphasis of the seminar was on marital relationships, in the hope of enhancing the notion of the Christian family.

Another concern of mine was that the young people are rarely listened to in the church and, as a result, do not feel welcome in the church. I attempted to speak on their behalf on several occasions and constantly encouraged them to give their best whenever participating in the church. Eventually, the eyes and minds of the adults were opened and they began to be more accepting and welcoming of the youth. Youth and children are the church's treasure; they are its future. Some became involved in leading the worship music by playing a variety of instruments, while others tended to the church grounds and planted trees and flowers. They were learning to be good ministers and deepened their faith through their devotion, Bible studies, ecumenical revival services and the creation of a youth magazine. Sometimes the work was difficult and so I would call upon the members of *Dei Caritas* to assist us. The youth remained energetic and excited throughout, and one by one, more and more adults joined in supporting the youth through the donations of sports equipment and musical instruments. The voice of the youth was being heard.

Following these internships, I went to the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong where I took up a deeper interest in feminist theology. When I first arrived at the seminary, I met many women from Indonesia who worked as domestic servants. I interviewed several of them only to hear many sad stories.

A constant struggle for survival

The harvests fail and people are very poor. The profits from their farm products are not enough to fulfill all their needs. Because of unfair trade practices, many farmers actually lose money. As a result, many farmers have traveled to towns, other provinces or even other countries, in search of work. The big factories promise their employees a better life, but this requires separation from their families for extended periods of time. Many women in Indonesia have left their children and husband to work as maids for whatever money they can earn.

While globalization integrates many aspects of this world, it also fragments human life and communities. Individuals and communities experience fragmentation when they are treated as producers or consumers rather than decision-making citizens. Families experience

fragmentation when labor markets force migrant workers to leave their families. Young women and men leave villages and head toward the urban centers in search of employment. They find themselves in a strange and fragmented environment, and life is a constant struggle for survival. Fragmentation often leads to brokenness and alienation. The church is called to dress the psychological wounds of those who have suffered brokenness and alienation, and to serve as a prophetic voice.

Issues affecting working women in Indonesia

Time off: When people get a job, they have less time for relaxation and recreation. Many female laborers in Hong Kong cannot even enjoy Sunday as a day of rest. Some people work eighteen hours a day, including Sundays, in the hope of making more money to send home to their parents, brothers and sisters.

Salary: In Indonesia, female workers do not receive a salary during the first two months of their employment. They have to pay the employment agency and the government. Subsequently, they only receive half of their salary because they are obliged to pay for the mandatory insurance.

Dilemma: Women who wish to return home are required to pay the employment agent six- or sevenfold the amount for passport, visa, tickets, etc. Upon realizing that they cannot pay these costs, many give up and continue to work in the large cities even though they are unhappy.

Violence: Some female workers are treated violently by their master or mistress. They only have very limited legal recourse.

My friends and I envision a better future. Some of us believe that we need free markets while others imagine a world that is one community without limits or territories. Unfortunately, one of the negative results of globalization is that it affects the poor in the developing world, especially where air, water and land become polluted and nothing can thrive or grow. Here we find the greatest number of victims.

I was given the opportunity to attend a conference on the WTO held in December 2005, in Wan Chai, Hong Kong.³ Women gathered to

³ The theme of the conference was, "International ecumenical women's forum on life promoting trade."

discuss an action plan as a response to the impact of globalization. We discussed problems such as the right and access to water and land, the situation of female workers in Hong Kong, increasing access to education and awareness of human rights for all women and children. We prayed together that God might hear the cries of the people.

Sharing a common vision, we entered the convention hall shouting, "Junk WTO; Say no to WTO; Kong Yi Sai Mau; We need justice and peace." We shouted on behalf of the entire world. We shouted on behalf of those who do not have equal access to human rights and those who are treated as lesser beings. We seek justice, peace and integrity for all creation. We seek the fullness of life that God has given us. While I felt small among the international community, I felt that I was standing in solidarity with the crying and suffering people of the world. I shouted on behalf of the mother and son whom I had met so long ago on that bus, that they might have food, land, shelter, education and most important, could enjoy life fully. I shouted for the female workers in Hong Kong and for all those who have been negatively affected by globalization

Many people continue to struggle. The world needs relief from its suffering. It needs hands like yours and mine. God has invested in each one of us the responsibility to care for creation. Globalization affects all areas of life, including our religious beliefs and how we interact with one another. Therefore, the negative affects of globalization are not only a problem for politicians and economists; they are our problem. The entire church must be involved. The church is needed for the healing of the world.

In the beginning, God created a world, and it was beautiful and good. All of creation was enfolded in a perfect harmony with God at the center. But, we are a fallen race and over time have destroyed nature and the created order. Human beings no longer keep the just authority that was given to them by God in Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and

have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Humanity no longer rules according to the will of God, but rather to its own sinful will. When we do not nurture and care for the whole creation, we do not reflect a charitable, merciful God; we do not reflect God’s love.

While globalization gives us hope that some day everyone will have access to the basic necessities of life, it remains vital that we continue to educate one another on the effects of globalization. As educated persons, we are better equipped to recognize the negative impacts that globalization has had on the world.

Sometimes I feel small, helpless and impotent, but I continue fighting. I continue to have hope which is sometimes the only thing that remains. I pray that some day God’s creation and the beautiful harmony of life will once again be restored.

A Missionary's Log Continued ...

7 April 2005

I turned twenty-four the other day and found that while I may perhaps be growing up, I am also growing a callus, a shell. My seemingly blind optimism is far more guarded than usual. I don't even bat an eye when my bishop decides it is appropriate and biblical to encourage capital punishment for criminals. I was reminded today of an incident not three months ago where an inebriated police officer struck and killed a girl with his car. Stopping to see if she was okay (she wasn't) he was hacked to death by the outraged villagers. His brothers in uniform, rumor had it, took their vengeance in turn by killing four locals and burning numerous houses. It didn't even make the national news. Optimistic? Who can afford to be blind? Son of David, have mercy on us!¹

¹ An allusion to the appeal of the two blind men in Mt 9.

Defending Indigenous Rights in the Brazilian Amazon Region: Testimony and Faith

Jandira Keppi

Background

In 1850, the first contacts were established with Brazil's Indigenous peoples living in the Amazon region. The region was almost entirely inhabited by Indigenous peoples each with a unique culture, dignity and way of life. The nineteenth century saw the beginning of a period of bloodshed and genocide, as rubber barons organized brutal armed expeditions, *correrias* (planned massacres), ethnically to “cleanse” the lands that were home to Indigenous peoples. They made way for their northeastern rubber tappers and, as a result, thousands of Indigenous people were massacred and scores of native populations wiped out. Those who managed to survive were taken captive by the *patrões* (estate owners) and forced to work in the rubber camps. Under a system of slavery that did not value human life, the Indigenous were generically referred to as *caboclo* (a person of mixed Brazilian Indian and European or African ancestry). In addition to systematic physical abuse and economic deprivation, cultural destruction meant that Indigenous people could no longer live and die as they chose, and were prohibited from observing their embalming and burial rituals. In addition to slavery, many people died from non-Indigenous diseases such as influenza and measles.

In the early 1970s, supported by churches and NGOs, Indigenous peoples began to demand their right to have their ethnicities, languages, cultures as well as their ancestral lands acknowledged. This struggle for rights was coupled with the reassertion of ethnic self-determination. Indigenous peoples no longer accepted the generic name *caboclo*, but called themselves by their proper names such as Kaxinawa, Madija, Jaminawa, Arara and Gavião.

In the states of Acre and Amazonas, as well as in other regions with access to Indigenous lands and rivers, the end of the rubber boom allowed for the reorganization of some Indigenous populations. Many non-Indigenous people who had worked in the rubber latex industry in the upper Amazon basin moved to the outskirts of the cities. However, in the state of Rondônia the collapse of the rubber industry was followed by the brutal exploitation of timber, iron ore and minerals and the construction of roads and factories. This led to the extinction of several Indigenous populations, and the dramatic decrease in numbers of others. In this climate of violence, where Indigenous lands and lives were being stolen, the Indigenous peoples were undergoing a period of reorganization, reclaiming their lands and self-determination. Their extraordinary organizational ability is evident in the progressive changes made in the Brazilian constitution in 1988. In accordance with the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 160, the constitutional text established a new relationship between the government and Indigenous peoples, recognizing Indigenous peoples and protecting their ethnic diversity.

The government's new relationship with the Indigenous peoples is clearly part of its new relationship with society as a whole. Symbolically, the Brazilian constitution is the legal benchmark for democratic transition, and the root of the institutionalization of human rights in Brazil. Alongside protecting individual rights, the constitution defends collective rights, focuses on identifying human rights issues and addresses the Indigenous peoples' specific constitutional rights. However, almost eighteen years after the promulgation of the constitution, there is still a great discrepancy between theory and practice. To this day, vestiges remain of Brazil's sad history that includes massacre, slavery, prejudice, violence, invasions of Indigenous lands, exploitation of natural resources and the denial of Indigenous citizenship. Indigenous peoples are not entirely free to appreciate their specific rights, fundamental human rights and liberties in the same way as the rest of the Brazilian population.

Defending Indigenous peoples' land rights

The right to land is undoubtedly one of the main reasons why violence is perpetrated against Indigenous peoples. While the government takes its

Defending Indigenous Rights in the Brazilian Amazon Region: Testimony and Faith

time to mark land boundaries and prevent encroachment, many attacks have been aimed at the Indigenous peoples. According to Missionary Indigenous Council (CIMI) statistics, thirty-eight Indigenous people were murdered in 2005. The majority of these murders were related to land conflicts.¹ Twenty-eight murders were reported in Mato Grosso do Sul state alone, an area where the struggle for Indigenous land is intensifying.

Amnesty International has stated that Brazil's Indigenous populations continue to suffer violence and severe economic deprivation as a result of the government's and judiciary's inability to protect their constitutional right to land.² Many communities, evicted from their ancestral lands, are now encamped along the roadside. They suffer hardship and abuse while their land is being occupied by local farmers. Today, Indigenous leaders are murdered, children are dying from malnutrition and young people are committing suicide. The future appears hopeless.

In addition to the authorities' failure to carry out their constitutional duty of demarcating Indigenous lands, Brazil's supreme federal court has hampered and delayed the entire procedure. This has caused considerable legal insecurity among Indigenous peoples and their supporters, and has fuelled violence. Amnesty International called on the government to develop "clear policies and specific strategies for tackling the persistent human rights issues that affect Brazil's Indigenous population."³

According to Brazil's 1988 federal constitution, the demarcation of Indigenous lands was to be concluded within five years of its promulgation. However, recent CIMI statistics report that only thirty-eight percent of the 850 areas are regulated.

The government has been slow in demarcating Indigenous lands and has often failed to protect these lands. Many Indigenous lands are illegally occupied by non-Indigenous invaders for hunting, fishing, logging, mining and cultivation. In some cases, the destruction of land is so widespread that Indigenous communities are not even aware that their lands are protected. In other cases, Indigenous peoples are unable to

¹ See www.cimi.org.br.

² *Ibid.* Amnesty International's declaration was accessed on 13 January 2006.

³ *Ibid.*

stop invaders from exploiting the riches of their land. Many Indigenous leaders are being prosecuted for attempting to kill such invaders.

Brazil's policy on macroeconomic stability calls for strict export controls, particularly of soybean. However, easy access to credit has enabled soy farmers to target the Amazon region, invading Indigenous lands and protected areas.⁴ Amid economic growth and development, Indigenous peoples maintain a cultural attachment to land linked to their belief systems and knowledge, rather than vested interests. Outsiders make claims that Indigenous peoples are impeding progress and that they do not need large amounts of land for their cultural and physical activities/survival.

In the state of Rondônia, the Amazon rainforest was replaced by pasture. Today, the only intact rainforest is on Indigenous lands and in the Amazon Protected Areas (APA). These rainforests are often surrounded by farms, which has led to the further exploitation of natural resources. Although the land belongs to the state, the government does not have an effective policy to protect these areas.

Amid these land conflicts, the Indigenous Peoples Mission Council (COMIN) has worked in cooperation with various partners and Indigenous organizations to support Indigenous peoples by informing them of their rights, assessing their claims and calling on the government to take steps to guarantee their right to land.

Land conflicts and racial discrimination, which are often interlinked, are the main reasons for the perpetration of violence against Indigenous peoples. Below, I will describe some of my experiences during investigations and hearings related to crimes perpetrated against Indigenous peoples.

Crimes perpetrated against Indigenous peoples

On the evening of Sunday 14 July 1996, a military police officer killed Raimundo Silvino Shanenawa near his village in the municipality of Feijó, Acre. The public prosecution's official report states that along with two other Shanenawa people the victim had a fight with two military policemen. Allegedly, the Indigenous people and the policemen were

⁴ Jean Pierre Leroy, "Human Rights in Brazil 2005: Environmental policy of the Lula Government for the Amazon Region," at www.social.org.br, accessed on 21 January 2006.

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intoxicated. During the altercation, police officer José Rosseni Muniz de Moura sat on the victim's back, pulled back his hair and shot him in the neck. As the two other Shanenawa men tried to run away, they were both shot in the back. The Indigenous people were unarmed and Silvino died on the spot.

For almost ten years, the Shanenawa people and their supporters fought to have the policemen tried in court. The first police officer was acquitted by the court in Acre, as there was no evidence against him. Due to the tardiness of the legal system, police officer Rosseni was tried before a jury only on 4 August 2005. The Shanenawa and their supporters did not want the trial to take place in the municipality of Feijó, given that a high percentage of the local population were prejudiced against the Indigenous peoples. Despite their request, it was not possible to transfer the trial to the capital. On the evening of the trial, the jury reached their final verdict: on the grounds of legitimate self-defense, police officer José Rosseni Muniz de Moura was acquitted by six votes to one.

This is just one example. The vast majority of murders of Indigenous people are not even brought to trial, and even when a trial does take place, the accused are often acquitted for absurd reasons.

Trial proceedings are frequently very lengthy. Since it was almost ten years before the above case was tried, many witnesses had disappeared and others no longer wanted to testify. The accused police officer, still working in the village, had established good relations with the non-Indigenous population of Feijó and this worked in his favor.

Generally, impunity for those who have committed crimes against Indigenous people, particularly in the Amazon region, begins already in the early stages of the investigation. Police are notoriously slow to arrive at the scene of the crime. They often have to reach remote, inaccessible places such as the headwaters of rivers and *igarapés* (small Amazon waterways), allowing criminals to flee and incriminating evidence to disappear. Thorough investigations are practically unheard of in these remote regions and police authorities demonstrate a lack of interest and a weak structure. In many cases, there is not even an official inquiry.

Some Indigenous people feel like they are being “killed like dogs.” There is always greater public interest when Indigenous people are suspected of perpetrating a crime against non-Indigenous people; an inquiry is launched immediately and the Indigenous person is quickly

charged. Many Indigenous people have no place to go, outside their own community and thus do not tend to flee from the scene of the crime, which would make the investigation more difficult. Since very few Indigenous people understand judiciary procedure, they often confess to the crime during the first round of police questioning.

Punishment of those who commit crimes against Indigenous people depends on the public prosecution and the legal services available. The inner Amazon region, is an example where the judiciary is often significantly hampered by the absence of judges and prosecutors. Since small municipalities rarely have any judges and prosecutors at their headquarters, legal proceedings are difficult, causing dejection and frustration for those seeking justice and ultimately leading to impunity.

In late 2004, Ivanilde Shanenawa, a worker at the only hospital in Feijó, was verbally abused by a doctor. Under COMIN's guidance she went directly to the public prosecution service and demanded her rights. To this day, there has not been a public hearing and it remains unclear if there ever will be. When judges and prosecutors visit these small municipalities, they generally take on high profile cases such as homicide and drug trafficking. Crimes regarded as less serious are not their priority. Therefore, situations like these often result in impunity, prolonging injustice and making re-offense easier.

Despite the many, regularly occurring injustices, there are some positive examples of where justice is being carried out. This gives cause for hope. On 22 April 2001, a newspaper columnist, referring to her encounter with the Indigenous peoples of Rio Branco, wrote that their "terrible body odor" was something non-Indigenous visitors could hardly bear. Enraged by her offensive and prejudiced comments publicized in the media, the Union of the Indigenous Nations (UNI), CIMI and COMIN brought their case against the columnist before the public prosecutor. The case led to a penal lawsuit for racial discrimination. That same year, the court in Acre ordered the columnist to pay damages of four thousand Brazilian Reals (R\$).⁵ While this small amount was no adequate compensation for the crime, it nevertheless constituted a significant victory for the Indigenous people. The court responded swiftly and positively which has encouraged the Indigenous communities and

⁵ R\$4,000 is approximately USD1,770 (June 2006).

their supporters to continue reporting such abuse and deep insults to their dignity. The case has also served as a warning to media professionals who need to be more careful when expressing their opinions about Indigenous communities.

Indigenous populations are extremely vulnerable to physical and moral abuse. This is often due to the lack of governmental support. In addition to safeguarding justice for all people, the government needs to give special protection to this ethnic group which is constantly being exploited simply because they are Indigenous.

Indigenous women

Sadly, in Brazil it is still common to deprive those who have no material possessions as well as those who are not part of the dominant race of their rights. Indigenous, black and poor people are generally victims of discrimination. Victimization leads to the assumption that inequality between people and races is natural. This climate of economic inequality and racial vulnerability is even more pronounced among Indigenous women, who are regarded by many non-Indigenous men and governmental organizations as not having any rights, even over their own bodies.

In 2005, a young Apurinã woman went into labor. She gave birth at the only hospital in Boca do Acre, in the inner Amazon region. One of the doctors took her to the delivery room, locked the door and savagely raped her. He left town immediately after the attack. Police inquiries have been launched, but to this day the doctor remains a free man.

In October 2002, construction workers were building traditional houses in a Jaminawa village. All the Jaminawa men were in the city. Taking advantage of the fact that the women were alone, the workers plied the women with alcohol and then raped some of them, including a twelve-year-old girl. In this case, there was not even a police inquiry since it was argued that the village was difficult to reach and the Jaminawa women would probably be too ashamed to cooperate with the police.

In general, police officials who investigate crimes do not regard attacks on Indigenous women as being as serious as other crimes. Brazilian society is chauvinistic and discriminatory, and it is commonly held that Indigenous women are promiscuous and engage in sexual relations with

anyone. A Brazilian official once told COMIN that it is because of their promiscuous nature that Indigenous women become the “white man’s” prey. The rape of an Indigenous woman is often viewed with suspicion and even indifference. In this way, violence against Indigenous women is legitimized, even by the state.

Community training

One method of breaking this cycle of violence is to enable and support Indigenous people to exert their rights. Knowledge of their rights and how to implement them could better enable them to report crimes and seek justice. As Gersem Baniwa, secretary of education and environment of São Gabriel of Cachoeira once said, “people can only fight for the rights they know.” The only way for Indigenous people to regain their rights is to be aware of them in the first place. Therefore, since 1997, COMIN has focused on supporting the Indigenous community in this process.

Rights cannot be fully realized merely by knowing how to articulate and demand them. The government, particularly the secretary of state, the public prosecutor and the judiciary, need to be better prepared in order to work with different ethnic groups and their specific rights. Similarly, officials must be made aware of the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Authorities tend to discriminate against ethnic minorities and often ignore their specific rights. The belief that “in the eyes of the law everyone is equal” is not always upheld in practice. Acknowledging that Indigenous people have their own cultures, languages and ways of acquiring and passing on knowledge, including their own legal systems, could help authorities to respect and encourage respect for their human rights.

Statement of faith and commitment

In 1987, after completing a course in theology at the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil’s (IECLB) Lutheran School of Theology (EST), I began working with Indigenous peoples in the Amazon region. Accompanied by my good friend and fellow pastor, Nelson Deicke, I initially served the Kulina communities in Alto Rio Purus, Acre, with

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the aim of becoming acquainted with the culture and values of the Indigenous peoples and seeking ways in which COMIN might support them.

During my time with the Kulina communities, a five-day boat ride from the nearest town, I realized how pronounced and fundamental such Christian values as loving others and serving humanity are in Indigenous and riverside communities. These communities are often far removed from urban life and close to nature. It is almost as if nature and the environment brought these people to life. They depend on one another and work together in order to fulfill their daily needs. They are more vulnerable to the outside world, largely because they do not experience it on a day-to-day basis. While assessing and supporting land-related issues, Indigenous rights, health and education, I saw the need to help the Kulina, as well as other communities from the Amazon states of Acre and Sul.

I believe strongly that the church's mission among Indigenous peoples should focus on issues relevant to their daily lives. To speak of God is to speak of life and to speak out against all that threatens it. To speak of God is to support Indigenous people in defending their land, rights, culture and ways of life, as well as to find out more about each other. Together we rediscover the humanitarian values that often lie dormant within us.

While working in these villages, I concentrated my efforts on training to become a lawyer. This was extremely important in order to support the Indigenous communities, whose rights were being threatened time and again.

Helping to defend the rights of the Indigenous peoples in Brazil is difficult and challenging. At the same time, it is satisfying because of the experiences gained throughout the whole process of improving, attaining and protecting these rights—both in defeat and in victory.

The abuse of rights is partly the result of Brazil's colonial past and its 500-year history of slavery, discrimination and domination of Indigenous and black people whose humanity, even today, is far from fully realized. Helping them to defend their rights cannot only be a means of breaking the cycle of violence, but must also be a political and moral tool to confront other injustices.

In the Old and New Testaments, God's justice is not found in the courtroom or the church. It is neither mental nor spiritual, but found in human relationships and in daily life. It is evident in the most basic

and fundamental aspects of life where people come together to share their “daily bread”.

Christ’s path is one of grace. Following it requires sharing with one another, maintaining an open heart, ensuring that everyone has enough to eat and that their dignity is respected. It includes ensuring that Indigenous people have a voice.⁶ COMIN attempts to follow Christ’s path in this way, assisting Indigenous people and communities to determine their own affairs, to have their dignity respected, to protect their land rights and the right to live in harmony with their beliefs, customs and traditions.

⁶A statement from the training course for COMIN workers, December 2005.

A Missionary's Log Continued ...

3 May 2005

The first of two trips to Wabag was undertaken with the intention of finding out what is really going on with regard to HIV and AIDS counseling, testing, prevention and awareness in our province. I talked with doctors, surgeons, lab technicians, public health officials, disease control officers, administrators and nurses at Wabag Provincial Hospital.

I'm honing a theory of development: the human creature must be both inspired and enabled. If nothing is happening, either people are not inspired or they're not enabled or they're neither. For instance, why has there only been one visit to each of the three high schools in the area over the last year to talk about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV? No vehicles. Why? No allowances. Maybe the "leaders" haven't been enabled to think selflessly—it's not a human instinct, you know.

Dr Steve is honing his theory of development. Development will only happen, he figures, when the ones with the power decide it is in their best interest not only to let it happen, but also proactively to pursue it. When will the bureaucrats decide to allocate money for a vehicle, so that the district disease control officers can visit schools and speak about public health issues on a regular basis? When it is in their best interests to do so. Maybe when the HIV prevalence in high schools surpasses ten percent, or maybe when their son is dying of AIDS. Dr Steve calls this theory "sustainable corruption."

Thinking about sustainable corruption and enabling and inspiring in relation to my visit to the provincial hospital gives much grist for the mill, as you might well imagine. How could one convince a lab technician that counseling prior to conducting an HIV test is a good idea, morally correct and community strengthening? If medical staff are so under-supplied that they feel they must resort to covert HIV testing without patient consent in order to protect themselves, how does one begin to establish higher standards of medical and ethical practice? The disease control

officers sit at their desks waiting for the necessary travel allowances in order to operate their vehicles. The trained HIV and AIDS program facilitators wait for someone to organize a program. A one-week course for thirty people costs between three and five thousand Papua New Guinea Kina.¹ In the last five months there have been five of these sessions in the province. Enga has well over half a million people. And, outside on the street, fifty feet from where the educators sit waiting, walk hundreds of the most at-risk men and women in the world.

What is my role, being here ostensibly to promote sustainable nationalization and integral human development? But, come on! Nationalization? When health care falls below a certain standard, no one thinks it is inappropriate to have internationally funded and staffed hospitals built. What is more important, a nationally run HIV program or an effective one—or might those terms mean the same thing? Can you accept a thousand deaths because you are defending the principle of nationalization? Can a human being who knows how to save or improve a life justifiably fail to do so because his/her skin color or passport say the wrong thing? Unless one can teach by inspiration, the incompetent are forced to learn competence through blood, sweat and tears. Slowly.

¹ Equivalent to approximately USD 1,660.

The Promotion of Human Rights in Gambella

Ojod Miru Ojulu

Background

Gambella is located in the southwestern part of Ethiopia bordering on the Sudan. The regional capital, also called Gambella, is 777 km southwest of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. The area covers an estimated 25,274 square kilometers and is home to five major ethnic groups: the Anywa, Majangir, Oppo, Kumo and Nuer. According to the 1994 national census, the population is 181,862, but this figure is controversial. With the exception of the Nuer, who are pastoralists, the majority of the population live by agriculture. Fishing, picking fruit, hunting wild roots and hunting wild animals are also common practices in the region.

Unlike any other region in Ethiopia, altitudes vary from 300-2,000 meters above sea level. Temperatures average between 18-20° C, but peak at 47° C during the hottest months of the year. Openo (Baro), Gillo, Alwero and Akobo are the perennial rivers in the region and approximately 600,000 hectares of land are irrigable. Wildlife includes lion, elephant, leopard, buffalo, antelope and several different species of birds. Natural resources such as gold, silver, tungsten and oil are said to be available in abundance.

Childhood

I was born in 1980, in the remote Gambellan village of Gog, to my father Miru Ojulu and mother Jay Abala. My father had three wives, five sons and three daughters. The entire family were non-Christian since the gospel had not yet reached the area where we lived. My father worked for the government as a tractor operator in the resettlement program. In February 2000, we moved to Abobo state farm where he worked until the end of his life.

During my childhood I often felt excluded from the rest of the family for reasons I did not understand. I first experienced this feeling of exclusion between the ages of seven and eight. Although my parents were not rich, they always managed to buy new pieces of clothing for all of my brothers and sisters for the New Year celebrations. I was the only member of the family to remain naked. When my brothers, dressed in their new outfits, celebrated the New Year with the other children in the village, I would stay hidden because they would all laugh at my nakedness.

When I was sick, I was often left unattended. No one cared for me and no family member would ask me how I felt, or attempt to diagnose my sickness. At the age of nine, I was so frustrated by this feeling of alienation that I decided to commit suicide. I journeyed far from home, deep into the forest, and waited for any dangerous and wild animal to come and kill me. Later that evening, my feelings changed and I began to calm down. Suddenly, I became very afraid of staying in the dark forest and I returned home safely. I was disappointed since no one had searched for me. They did not even ask where I had been.

When I was fourteen, my father's last wife converted to Christianity. One Sunday morning, she took me with her to the local congregation. She seemed to understand my feeling of alienation and regularly tried to encourage me, urging me to feel good about myself. When I first attended Sunday school, the text that was read was about Jesus and the little children.

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mk 10:13–16).

On hearing this, I accepted Jesus Christ and became an active Sunday school student. A strong fellowship existed in the church. Whenever I was sick and could not come to church, the Sunday school teacher and all the other children would come to my house to visit me, talk to me and stay with me. This inspired me to become an assistant Sunday school

teacher and I regularly spent time with the pastor, reading the Bible and learning more about Jesus Christ. After a while, I decided to remain in the church compound as a volunteer, enjoying all the programs that the church offered, including Sunday school, prayer group, choir and others. I would return home only for lunch and dinner. In addition to participating in these different church programs, I spent time engaged in academic study.

When I moved to Gambella town for high school studies, I continued my volunteer service as a Sunday school teacher at Bethel congregation. Upon finishing my high school studies, I was sent to a theological seminary by the Mekane Yesus synod in Gambella.

Today, I am the president of the synod in Gambella. My stepmother, who first brought me to Christ, was ordained in 2002. She was the third female pastor in the whole of Ethiopia and the first female pastor to be ordained in Gambella. To this day, she continues to bring many lives to Christ through her ministry and her ability to proclaim the Word of God.

The love of Christ was first revealed to me by the young local congregation and has shaped me into who I am today. Since that time I have often challenged my own faith, wondering to what extent I am really committed to offer the love of Christ to others, especially to those who have special needs. As the synod president, whenever I visit a congregation the first thing I do, is to visit the Sunday school. I offer the children a blessing, encourage them in their faith, and listen to their stories about the love of Jesus Christ.

Theological training and its influence on my life

In 1998, I began my theological education at the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Addis Ababa. While taking the six-week entrance course, I faced a lot of pressure from friends and my parents who tried to discourage me from studying theology. Yet, I insisted that I had to learn more about God and his plans for me.

After four years of seminary studies, the basic principles of my faith can best be summarized as follows: God created a world at the center of which exists a deep love for humankind. Each person is created in the image of God. Whenever I read the Bible, I clearly see how God values humankind.

Throughout history, God has revealed God's love of humankind in many different ways. It culminates in God taking human form in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ suffered, was crucified and buried for the sake of the whole world. The books of the prophets remain a deep source of inspiration for me as they speak on behalf of the poor, the oppressed and those treated inhumanly by powerful leaders and authorities.

Just as God loved humankind, so too my theological training has led me to develop a special place for humankind in my heart. It has deepened my understanding of all people and led me to view humanity through the lens of the Creator which transcends race, color, ethnicity, language, religion and all other human traits.

An incident in Gambella town

I have personally experienced how some people are treated inhumanly because of their ethnic origin and was significantly impacted by an incident that occurred in my hometown, Gambella, on 13 December 2003. Around thirty kilometers outside Gambella town, a vehicle from the Administration for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) was ambushed by an unidentified group. Eight officials including police and the driver were killed. All the victims were highlanders.¹ Upon hearing the news of the ambush and prior to identifying the perpetrators, the military, chiefly comprised of highlanders, joined forces with other local police. They wrongly accused the Anywa tribe of having ambushed the vehicle and began killing every Anywa person in Gambella town. Unlike the light-skinned highlanders, the Anywa people are easily identifiable because their skin is a deep black. While the Anywa and Nuer peoples have similar skin color, they can easily be distinguished because the Nuer traditionally wear marks on their faces. Thus, from 13–15 December 2003, 424 Anywa civilians were singled out and killed in Gambella town.

I was at my office that Saturday morning, despite it being a day of rest. Around noon, on my way home for lunch, I heard the news of what had happened on the road. After lunch, I took my usual nap. At the time,

¹ The term "highlanders" is used to describe those Ethiopians who are living in, but are not native to, the Gambella region.

I was staying at a large boarding house. Some of the rooms were rented to highlanders from the central part of the country who were working in Gambella with the government or in businesses. Suddenly, one of my friends burst into my room. He was deeply worried and cried, "Please leave your room and come to mine. Other highlanders and the military are killing every Anywa person they find on the road. They are even searching Anywa houses." At first, I did not believe him, but he insisted that I quickly leave my room and join him. It was then that I heard many gunshots. Before an hour had passed, a group of highlanders with some soldiers broke down the door, entered my room and burned all of my belongings. My friend repeatedly told them that no other rooms were let to Anywa persons and insisted that they leave the house. Fortunately they did.

The house was situated at a crossroads in the center of town. The Anywa people were running for their lives. Together with soldiers the highlanders had already occupied the road. They were waiting for the Anywa people who had no chance of escaping the killings. With my own eyes, I saw seven people being killed: four were stabbed and beaten to death by highlanders; two were shot by the soldiers as they were fleeing for their lives shouting, "I am a Nuer,² not an Anywa. One Anywa man was running away when the soldiers caught up with him. Some of the soldiers said, "Why do you want to shoot him? We can kill him in another way instead." Then they tied his hands to his legs and laid him on the road while he was still alive. When the military truck came, the soldiers shouted, "Run over him. Run over him." Some highlander children were at the same time crying loudly, "Please do not kill him. Please do not kill him," but nobody dared to listen to the children's cries. The truck ran over the Anywa man while the soldiers and other highlanders clapped and cheered.

One of our pastors was killed in his house along with eight family members. Members of the choir were assassinated in church while preparing for Sunday worship. The massacre did not stop in Gambella town but spread to surrounding villages. Property was damaged and looted and Anywa women frequently fell victim to rape. Throughout 2004 and early 2005 many people fled to southern Sudan and Kenya.

² Nuer is another ethnic group in Gambella. They were not targeted during the December 2003 massacre.

Human rights education: The church's role

Many church leaders in Gambella believe that speaking about human rights is a matter for governments and politicians only. Church leaders and pastors believe that they are called to pray for peace, and not to question or discuss the root causes that threaten peace within the community. Article 11.3 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, states: "The state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs."³ This article is used by many church leaders and local governmental authorities to argue against the church's engagement in such discussions. When human rights issues are raised, people often think of killings, torture, rapes and detentions initiated by the military. Therefore, addressing human rights violations is regarded as speaking against the government and a direct involvement in politics. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders refers to human rights defenders as "individuals, groups and associations in contributing to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals."⁴ However, there remain a number of complex questions regarding specific cultural elements. For example, what should a pastor do, when a husband beats and tortures his wife, in a context such as mine, where wives are treated as property and husbands are culturally authorized to kill their wives? How should church elders respond to female genital mutilation in a culture where this is regularly practiced? How should a local church respond in places where a caste system exists? Or, how should Christians respond in places where armed groups are carrying out killings, torture and detentions and subjecting individuals to inhumane treatment?

In order to create awareness among local church leaders, pastors and lay members, my church synod has been organizing human rights training workshops that provide a basic introduction to human rights as outlined in the national constitution. Unfortunately the national constitution is not widely distributed. After these training workshops,

³ www.ethiopar.net/English/cnstiotn/conchp2.htm.

⁴ The annex to the UN "Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms." General Assembly resolution A/R/53/144. Adopted 8 March 1999, at [www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/A.RES.53.144.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/A.RES.53.144.En?OpenDocument).

church leaders, pastors and lay members are expected to educate the public and with the concerned authorities mutually to strive for the practical realization and respect of human rights.

In addition to these workshops, the synod has been involved in providing education related to elections in order to inform the public about their right to vote and to be elected to government offices. Nine educators were trained and, with the assistance of a coordinator, were involved in a public education campaign six months prior to the elections. They instructed the public on the candidates' political campaigns, their own civic rights and obligations before and during the election, as well as the necessary regulations and directives issued by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia.

Building bridges

In most cases, human rights violations are the result of differences in race, color, language, gender, religion and other human traits. If people could understand one another as equals, with each and every person entitled to the same human dignity, inhumane treatment would cease and tolerance would be promoted.

In Gambella, conflicts between ethnic groups are common and, as a result, hatred is deeply rooted. Since the 2003 massacre, many lives have been lost, property destroyed, people displaced and others physically disabled. Identifying others as inferior because of their ethnic origin or skin color is among the underlying factors contributing to such inhumane acts. The people of Gambella continually seek to bridge gaps of color, ethnicity, gender, religion and language between communities, and to enhance their understanding of one another beyond their differences. They wish to build a common attitude that stands on the solid ground of humanity. This cannot be achieved unless all come together to engage in dialogue, sharing their common understandings and discussing the causes of their conflicts. In order to promote tolerance and respect across ethnic barriers, my synod has organized the following programs with other Christians.

- ***Joint prayer programs:*** Joint prayer times enable people of different ethnic groups to come together to worship the Lord. This

expresses unity and love of Christ, and demonstrates to others mutual respect and the ability to work together.

- ***Joint peace choir:*** One large choir, whose members are from different ethnic groups, sings in different languages during joint prayer services and is regularly invited to sing in congregations belonging to each of the different ethnic groups.
- ***Exchange of pastors:*** An exchange of pastors from one ethnic group to another is practiced so that a message of love and respect for humanity, as it is clearly stated in the Bible, may be preached fully in every worshipping assembly.
- ***Work together:*** In addition to spiritual meetings there are other programs in places where different ethnic groups live together. In such places, people work together and dialogue with one another in order better understand themselves and the source of their struggles. Additionally for women, there are literacy programs, small vegetable farms and handicraft projects.

These programs enable the church not only to be a preacher of human rights, but also a visible model where, regardless of color, ethnicity, gender and language, humanity is respected. People are able to work together on the basis of common understanding and tolerance.

The prophetic role of all Christians

The church's prophetic role is biblical and rooted in the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament and the history of the church. Old Testament prophets denounced the evils of their day. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ identified himself with the poor, the prisoners and the oppressed. Throughout church history, pastors and elders have been murdered for openly speaking out against injustices.

Today, fulfilling the church's prophetic role depends on whether or not it is safe. However, it must be a priority for the church to speak out against injustices, to take action and to build a just society in partnership with others.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:18–19).⁵

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in preaching the good news to the poor and proclaiming freedom for prisoners and the release of the oppressed, has anointed us to the same mission. Why then is it difficult today for local churches to carry out their prophetic role? Besides misunderstandings and misinterpretations of biblical texts, there are additional reasons why local churches are often reserved and cautious. Many church leaders and pastors argue against engaging in human rights issues, on the grounds that the church should remain neutral and be protected from being associated with human rights organizations that oppose political authorities. Therefore, in order for the church to remain integrally connected to its mission, it is crucial that it plays an independent role, without being mobilized or persuaded by external bodies. Neutrality and voice grounded in human equality, and the biblical truth that God created us all as equals, should be the starting point and driving force for Christians as they stand up for human rights. Partnership with others remains important provided that it does not erode the church's identity or diminish its neutrality.

The church in Gambella has been playing its prophetic role in denouncing human rights violations in every form, and by joining hands with those who work for peace and justice both within and outside Gambella. By providing and disseminating information, it has cooperated with national and international organizations that have sought to understand the realities that exist in Gambella. Most importantly, it has asked its Christian brothers and sisters around the world constantly to be remembered in their prayers.

In need of Christ's constant voice

I have personally experienced the feeling of exclusion and witnessed people being treated inhumanely and cruelly. Human rights violations in

⁵ See also Isaiah 61:1-2a.

all forms continue to persist. Throughout the world, many people continue to suffer. Human rights are especially threatened in places where certain groups dominate minorities, especially in remote areas where there are no reliable means of communication. In these places, humanity is being degraded and certain groups are eliminated without the knowledge of the international community. In some cases, people give up speaking about human rights because they feel helpless and fear for their lives.

Despite the existence of many organizations devoted to the promotion and protection of human rights, violations continue to prevail. The church has a vital role to play in promoting and protecting human rights, tolerance and respect for human dignity. In many cases, human rights violations and intolerance are not due to a lack of legislation. Many countries have excellent constitutions that have integrated international human rights standards. Yet, we still see and hear of government sponsored genocide. Many people have had the opportunity to learn about human rights, yet violations are still being committed by individuals.

It is vital that a change takes place in people's mindsets. By witnessing to Jesus' mission, the church can play a fundamental role. Additionally, the church must become a model for respect and tolerance. In some African countries, the church has taken a lead by becoming an example of attitudinal and behavioral change toward HIV and AIDS. I am very excited about the church's leadership in this regard and remain hopeful that through its practical activities the church might continue to bridge the gaps in understanding. As an ambassador of Christ on earth, the church must constantly give voice to Christ's response whenever injustices and human rights violations occur in the community.

A Missionary's Log Continued ...

9 July 2005

The bank of the people, the Bank of South Pacific, has consolidated its operations to the north side of the street. By the time the place opens its doors at 9 a.m., the line of people is a hundred meters long. One time I stood in line for six hours. Another time, I left home at 4.30 a.m. so I could be in line at 6 a.m., three hours ahead of time. Sure enough, I was the first one in line. Consolidating operations, while promising great benefits, does not give me warm fuzzies. I should state for the record that doing the right thing is still a tenuous, frustrating and ambiguous adventure. I could certainly exercise “white privilege” and skip the bank lines if I really thought my time and frustration were worth more than the time and frustration of the three hundred Papua New Guineans in line. But then again, I certainly spend more money on a given day in town than about a hundred of them put together. So, if I were making up excuses as to why I should go to the front of the line, there could be one about my economic value being greater. I should probably also admit the psychological satisfaction I derive from standing there in the ridiculously long lines, in solidarity with “the people.” We stand and watch as other “white skins” walk past the lines and my fellow line standers comment, “Oh ... look at those “white skins” skipping lines. Are they better than us?” I listen with a sick satisfaction. I assure you, doing the right thing is still ambiguous and frustrating and in the end, likely sinful too.

But on this Monday morning there is no need to go to the bank and so I just shake my head at the line and make my way to the other establishments where they know me. Here they let me write checks without consulting the manager and nod me through the lines at the door, assured by some law of nature that “white skins” don’t shoplift. It is enough to tie your head and heart in a knot.

From Marxist Ideology to Christianity

Vincent Manoharan J.

I first recognized my Lutheran identity in the mid-1960s when I attended confirmation class in southern Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu is the most urbanized Indian state with 43.9 percent of the population living in urban areas. I was excited to learn that Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, the first protestant missionary to land on the southern coasts of Tamil Nadu in 1706, was a Lutheran.

In the early eighties, I enrolled in courses in Marxism. Karl Marx envisaged a classless society, where one day the poor and downtrodden will be freed from all forms of economic and political exploitation. Marxist principles and strategies resonate deeply with me, especially the dynamic call, “Workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains!”¹ This is the call of the poor and the marginalized. In the mid-1990s, I organized the “Working Peasants’ Movement” that sought to promote the struggles of the poor and marginalized by seeking for them a better life and a classless society, free from the feudalistic and capitalist systems that so frequently threatened their existence.

In those days I was convinced that religion was nothing more than “the opium of the people.”² Historically, the church has sided with exploiters and rulers, advising the poor to remain silent. The beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12) are just one example of the poor being left to hope for a new world that they will inherit one day.

My Marxist beliefs were challenged when I met a faction who identified themselves as “Christian Marxists.” I was perplexed by this seem-

¹ www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch04.htm.

² According to Marx, religion is an expression of material realities and economic injustice. Thus, problems in religion are ultimately problems in society. Religion is not the disease, but merely a symptom. It is used by oppressors to make people feel better about the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited. This is the origin of Marx’s comment that religion is the “opium of the masses.” <http://atheism.about.com/od/philosophyofreligion/a/marx.htm>.

ing paradox. They believed that long before Marx, Jesus spoke of the “kingdom of God,” a kingdom based not only on economic equality, but also on love, justice and peace. This paradox left me very curious and led to my pursuing studies in theology.

I was admitted as a distance education student for a bachelor of divinity (B.D.) to Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in Madurai and devoted my time to reading as many books as I could. I frequented the library and began to discover “new” and “different” theologies such as Liberation Theology, Contemporary Theology, Black Theology and Feminist Theology. There were even a few scholarly papers that spoke of a Dalit Theology, but it was quite new at the time. As I read more, I discovered that Jesus was more comprehensive and successful than Marx in terms of challenging the authorities, motivating the discriminated and raising up the marginalized.

In the late 1990s, I had to confront the serious issues of casteism and untouchability. I was well aware of the divisions resulting from the caste system, according to which certain castes are believed to be “pure” while others are regarded as “polluted.” One fifth of the population were identified as “untouchables” and segregated, humiliated and harassed because of their caste. Civil and political rights were denied to the point that eating together and intermarriage between castes were prohibited.

Today, untouchables are widely known as Dalits. They are prohibited from worshipping in the temple together with people of other castes, and their right to water resources, common burial grounds and a share in the common property are still denied by society at large. Dalits are forced to undertake menial and filthy jobs such as sweeping, manual scavenging,³ cobbling, drum beating during funerals, grave digging, cremating, garbage collecting and removing carcasses. The smallest resistance is regarded as an act of rebellion and disobedience and is punished with murder, rape, physical assault, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, arson, social boycott and death threats. 167 million Dalits remain highly vulnerable and their human dignity is constantly being jeopardized.

I, a Dalit, have had to carry my slippers in my hands, rather than wear them on my feet. I have had to walk along a route that was significantly

³ “Manual scavenging” is the manual removal of excreta from “dry toilets,” i.e., toilets without the modern flush system; especially prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manual_scavenging.

longer than the route that passed directly through the main village. When I visited the village headman to receive a certificate so that I could begin my college studies, I was first subjected to hearing my grandfather, a man who is respected for his intelligence and commitment by many in the Dalit churches, being called by abusive and derogatory names. There were many other examples of Dalits being denied their basic human rights.

I studied the works of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, one of the fathers of Dalit ideology.⁴ The testimony of his life, combined with the struggles that he faced while being humiliated by members of other castes, as well as being sidelined by leaders including Gandhi, have led me to be a follower of Dalit Liberation Theology. While Marxist ideals challenge me to consider economic equality, Ambedkar's ideology, which includes economic equality, challenges the social justice of India's caste system. It is unlikely that Marx knew anything about India's socio-economic situation at the time of framing his Communist Manifesto. Caste has only recently been identified as the root cause for many of the socio-economic, political and cultural disparities that exist in India. While Marx identifies economic disparity as the root cause for all divisions in society, Ambedkar argues that in the Indian context, the cause for division is very clearly related to caste. Therefore, Ambedkar has given a clarion call to "dismantle castes" and to establish a society that is free of the caste system.

We live in an era where human rights are very much an issue and regularly challenged. The 192 member states of the UN have advocated for the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people. The UDHR was adopted and proclaimed to denounce all forms of discrimination and to ensure a dignified life for all humanity. This is carried forth in additional UN conventions such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Unfortunately, the human rights and dignity of Dalits have not yet been fully realized.

The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)⁵ provides a platform for human rights activists and academics from which to promote

⁴ For the official web site promoting Dr Ambedkar's ideology, see www.ambedkar.org.

⁵ See www.dalits.org.

and protect the human rights of the approximately 160 million Dalits. As someone whose human dignity and status have been infringed upon by the caste system and the notion of untouchability, I have committed myself to working for the NCDHR. As general secretary, I am responsible for monitoring the atrocities and abuses that are regularly unleashed upon Dalits. With the assistance of more than 700 Dalit youth, we are able to take fact-finding reports on the most abusive situations that exist. We then facilitate meetings with elected representatives, law enforcement agencies, various human rights mechanisms and the judiciary in order to render justice to the victims. Regrettably, government officials in India are also firm believers in the caste system, which means that victims often face further intimidation and harassment in the course of pursuing justice. It is both painful and challenging to protest against human rights violations inflicted upon Dalits because it often leads to being threatened and humiliated by non-Dalits and government officials.

The Christian faith provides the motivation to continue, even when the world is seemingly against you. God in Christ came to earth to establish the kingdom of God where there would be no room for disparity, discrimination and domination, but rather love, justice and peace, not only among human beings but also in all creation. Economic equality and social justice must be present before the kingdom of God can be fully realized. Christ, although born a Jew, frequently identified himself with the Galileans and the Gentiles, raising his voice against those in authority and mingling with those who were completely segregated from the rest of society. Christ broke the ritual regulations associated with observing the Sabbath. Christ voiced the rights of women and cared for the children. Christ spoke of a life free from sin and human suffering. Rather than compromising with worldly authorities, Christ journeyed faithfully to the cross.

Christ's life motivates me to fight vigorously and passionately, seeking human rights and dignity for Dalits as well as for all those who are marginalized and vulnerable. "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'" (Mt 16:24). Christian life involves serving the marginalized by raising them up and making them feel their human dignity. Regardless of caste, it involves washing dirty feet just as Christ washed the feet of his disciples. It is a call to serve, rather than to be served.

The Dalits are very much modern day Gentiles. I believe that I am called to serve them in my ministry with the utmost care that is simple, accommodating and uncompromising. I stand with them through humiliation and harassment because I believe that in being accountable to the God who has created me, I am also accountable to my fellow human being. My daily prayers and reflection strengthen me in this commitment. Whenever I have been weak and vulnerable, I find God's presence leading and guiding me. I pray that God might sustain me in this commitment to carry forth this ministry.

A Missionary's Log Continued ...

28 August 2005

We were on our way, heading into the back half of a survey trip to Kaiam. Our days were marked by the gradual deterioration of our wimpy bodies—foot rot, infections, belly trouble, sunburn. By the time we were home and trying to recover, the five of us had lost ten kilograms among us. Here, in the cooler, cleaner, less humid haunts of “home” however we began to recover. And not just a physical recovery; the sores, fungi and lost weight were all dealt with quickly, but the daunting psychological chore of doing what is good and right in the face of inertia was substantially on the horizon. Indeed, you might find me convinced that this inertia, this complacent self-serving apathy, is a far worse sickness with far more devastating consequences than the handful of TB cases, the ubiquitous skin conditions, the malnutrition and even, dare I believe it, the raging HIV disaster.

Nurses Anna and Katharine sat in the big room at the end of the hall, waiting for their next patient, when I stopped by. We stood around and talked for a while, about this and that, and about the changing times. Anna sat there, slouched in her wooden folding chair, arms crossed. “It’s not like the old days,” she said. “Sex is everywhere. Most girls will have sex for a piece of betel nut or a cigarette. The “bigshots” are always looking for new high-school-age girls and they can have any girl they want. You know those cars with tinted windows they drive around in? They are full of girls. We all know it, it is public knowledge. The whole province knows what is going on, but we’re not doing anything. For one thing, there’s no money for awareness raising activities. Why do you think they refuse to give out the funding for HIV awareness raising campaigns?”

I started tuning out, partly out of renewed horror. Sister Katharine kept chiming in, letting me know just how young these kids were starting their bad habits, just how ubiquitous it all was—just how twisted people’s attitudes toward condoms were. She kept gesturing to the condoms on the table in front of them. “High school boys keep coming in here, asking for condoms. What are we going to say? No!?!?”

Not a single person has said to me that, in principle, helping a remote people build the airstrip they've been planning, praying, dreaming and working for during these last twenty long years is poor use of time and energy. I have to point out how ironic it is that the ones who should be the most eager to assist are the ones being standoffish and nervous. The airstrip at Kaiam is happening. They worked yesterday and they worked today. They will take tomorrow off, because it is Sunday, but they will work again on Monday. We are just trying to do what we can. After I go to Wanakipa for two weeks to lend my small mechanical expertise to their sawmill, I'll be heading down to Kaiam for five or maybe six more weeks to do things like move and rebuild the aid post, get the solar panels put on proper roofs, teach the guys how to use a winch to pull stumps. What it comes down to is this, How well do you know the men and women of Kaiam, Namata and Kupina? How badly do you want a better future for their children? How sincerely do you believe that an airstrip is an important and wholesome step toward that future? And how many months of frustration and fights on all fronts are you willing to undergo to see it happen?

Human Rights: The Relationship Between Faith and Work

Mozart Dietrich

Defending, promoting and guaranteeing human rights

I decided to participate in the struggle to promote and defend human rights in Brazil's underprivileged communities in 1985, when I began my studies at the Escola Superior Teologia (EST) of the Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil (IECLB). Three factors were crucial in making this decision. First, the study of the history of God's people in the Bible and their age-old struggle against oppression and the power of the state, both in the Old Testament and the liberating message of Jesus Christ's decision to help the poor and to resist the oppressors. Second, my involvement in a number of groups at the EST, such as the support group for the "landless" population, the student society of the Brazilian Workers' Party,¹ the study group on Black Theology, various groups debating the freedom of sexual choice, study groups on Marxism and a support group for Indigenous persons. The third was getting acquainted with the work of the IECLB's Conselho de Missão entre Índios (COMIN).

The invitation to become a COMIN advisor, combined with my voluntary work as the executive secretary of COMIN, inspired me to pursue legal training. I realized that in addition to advocacy support, these communities also needed specific legal advice, particularly in the fields of health and education. With COMIN's and the IECLB's support, I received a grant from the Diakonisches Werk² to study law. I completed my legal studies with a thesis entitled, "The Autonomy of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil."

¹ *Partido dos Trabalhadores*, a left-wing Brazilian political party, also known as the Brazilian Workers' Party.

² A Lutheran welfare and social work organization.

In 1994, I began working as a legal advisor to COMIN, advising the IECLB on Indigenous issues. I regularly advised COMIN working groups, Indigenous peoples and occupying settlers and often established COMIN working groups within Indigenous communities. Furthermore, I advised government institutions and the public prosecution service on regularizing the legal situation pertaining to Indigenous lands. COMIN represents civil society and works together with the government to establish and support state legislation protecting Indigenous people's rights. Additionally, COMIN has often served as a driving force behind public action and policy. Unlike other institutions, COMIN works in cooperation both with social movements and government institutions. The most important objective is to develop plans and measures that guarantee the defense and promotion of human rights, both for Indigenous communities and the occupying settlers whom the state allowed illegally to occupy lands that must be reallocated. Many of these people must be relocated and duly compensated.

My involvement with COMIN, and the level of success I achieved, led to an invitation from the Workers' Party to work in public administration. With the support of COMIN and the IECLB, I served as director of citizenship in the state government of Rio Grande do Sul, from 1999 to 2002. My main role was to support and advise the state council on the rights of children, youth, senior citizens, consumers, the Black community, women and the Indigenous populations. Additionally, in 2001, I supervised the founding of the Brazilian Council on Human Rights. Between 2001 and 2002, we introduced more than 3,000 human rights advisors throughout nearly all of Brazil's 497 municipalities, aware that a culture of human rights could only flourish by actively developing and nurturing those human rights.

Through my work in the government, I supervised the creation and inauguration of the National Program for Regularizing Indigenous Lands in collaboration with Brazil's National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), the Ministry of Justice, the National Campaign for the Regularization of Quilombos³ Lands, and the Palmares Cultural Foundation of the Ministry of Culture. Over this period, we regularized eight Indigenous areas

³ The Brazilian concept of Quilombos has come to mean the communities that were constituted out of the struggle of rebel slaves.

in Brazil, home to Kaingang and Guarani communities, relocating and compensating more than 1,000 families occupying these lands. We also began studies to identify and register the state's remaining six Quilombos communities and participated in the Brazilian organizing committee for the first three meetings of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre.

From 2003 until mid-2004, I returned to my advisory role for COMIN, working with the street children's program, Children and Adolescents Defense Center Bertholdo Weber in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul.

In mid-2004, COMIN was again invited to work with the Workers' Party, this time in Brasília, Acre, alongside the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MAD) whose role it is to carry out agrarian reform, regularize the lands of remaining Quilombos communities, reclaim Indigenous lands and develop family agriculture throughout the country. COMIN focused on the importance of its involvement in government bodies, applying its experience and knowledge on an even greater national scale. The invitation proved that the measures COMIN developed over time were valid and accepted, to the point where they can actually help solve some of the problems encountered by Indigenous peoples and others who are marginalized and discriminated against.

The IECLB recognized the great significance of its members having been called upon to serve on government bodies. According to a government survey conducted between 1999 and 2002, more than thirty Lutherans, some of them pastors, were involved in government leadership and management positions. With their expertise a "popular" government had been created which prioritized those who had previously been mistreated and excluded from policy making. The same is true in sectors of the federal government, where a number of Lutherans and members of the IECLB are active, and our efforts to strengthen the Lutheran position within the governmental sphere continue.

I have been working as a special advisor to MAD in Miguel Rosseto, Brasília, since 2004. The work includes the introduction of the National Indigenous Relocation Program in twenty-four Brazilian states and the National Program to Regularize the Lands of Remaining Quilombos Communities. Among Brazil's Indigenous populations, more than 20,000 families still need to be relocated; we have already registered over 2,200 across the country. The Quilombos communities are among the most unique in the world. Brazil, home to more than 200 different

Indigenous people, is the most ethnically diverse country in the world. Additionally, we now realize that there is a great ethnic diversity among Brazil's Quilombos population. Unofficial statistics suggest that there are more than 5,000 Quilombos communities in Brazil.

As a special advisor to MAD, I bring together a number of government bodies in order to secure lands for the National Agrarian Reform Program (NARP). Together, MAD and NARP are developing legal mechanisms so that people, mainly large rural landowners who are considerably indebted to the state, can hand over their land to NARP to clear their debts. This clearly difficult measure is met with great resistance in sectors that support large estate owners, such as the ruralist bloc the National Congress of Brazil, which has more than three hundred representatives. As a result of this involvement MAD, through the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), has guaranteed one of the most fundamental human rights: the right to land. In 2005, MAD and INCRA helped relocate more than 127,000 landless families in Brazil, 250,000 families over three years and 550,000 families over thirty years.

However, guaranteeing the right to land is not enough. All other human rights, such as housing, transport, health and education, should also be guaranteed. MAD focuses on rural education, including higher education, and promotes sustainable development for almost one million settlers. MAD seeks to carry out high-quality agrarian reform, unlike that of past governments which only relocated families and left them in the hands of fate. NARP figures show that this is the largest agrarian reform plan in the world. Nevertheless, as Brazil is the country with the largest concentration of land ownership in the world, it still has a great deal to achieve before the right to land and other public policies is extended to all who are trying to build up their livelihood and human dignity from nothing.

Faith and involvement in public policies

As mentioned above, my faith has compelled me to play an active role in society. As well as taking part in the reflection and social reform groups of the faculty of theology at EST, I have been a member of the Worker's Party since 1987, striving to build up the party and promoting its rise as

the largest left-wing party in the world today. There is a great affinity between Christian ideas and objectives and those of the Workers' Party.

In my capacity as executive secretary of COMIN, I have often had to choose between studying theology and working as a legal advisor. In the end, I gave up my theological studies in order to dedicate myself entirely to working with Indigenous peoples, other social movements, the government and NGOs. My theological studies, however, were not in vain. Through the study of theology, I realized that only the active involvement of Christians and the church in social, economic, legal and political matters can be the appropriate response to the biblical and Christian call. The church's mission for the Indigenous peoples and other underprivileged social groups should not only specifically focus on theology, but on the active engagement in matters related to establishing human rights for all people. The IECLB has always stood out as a church whose pastors and lay members, including lawyers, agricultural experts, social workers and teachers, have, in addition to carrying out their Christian responsibilities, carried out functions that have not necessarily always been very popular.

My work in the executive authorities of the state and federal governments has forced me to confront a serious and persistent Christian and moral dilemma. Clearly, government structures, not only in Brazil, but in most countries, were not built to benefit poor communities desperately in need of active state intervention. Quite the opposite. The state is still in favor of those in power, often suppressing public pressures and weakening consciences and social struggles. Generally speaking, the state is an archaic, paternalistic, run-down, corrupt and inefficient system, whose departments are largely passive and inefficient. Under such conditions, ever increasing cases of corruption and misspending of public funds should hardly come as a surprise.

Integrating into the state system forces us to confront our moral and Christian conscience and values on a daily basis, so as not to be corrupted by authority and the false sense of power, nor to take for granted the mind-numbing displays of public conscience that frequently emerge in speeches and which are accompanied by the notion that "things have always been this way, so there's no point fighting them."

There is a constant lack of courage when it comes to dealing with the huge and problematic situations and realities in a country with

such an immense concentration of wealth, land and favoritism. Those who make a firm commitment to achieve and guarantee equal human rights, above all for the underprivileged, also possess personal moral and ethical structures based on the Christian faith. It is this faith that drives us in our ongoing struggle for justice and human dignity that the kingdom of God wants to introduce here and now. God's will neither subsides nor surrenders when faced with problems, nor does it conform to the structures in place. Each day, we must consider the objectives and principles that our faith supports: dignity and citizenship for all. That is God's will and we are the instruments.

A Missionary's Log Continued ...

2 November 2005

I was reminded a little while back of how I came here, of where and whom I left, and of the fact that it's been a year. A year should feel like a long time. Maybe that is only true when you are young. I took a poll of my so-called "activities"; eleven weeks at Wanakipa, three weeks at Kaiam, seven speaking engagements on theological issues, a dozen or more public awareness talks on HIV, two groups of young men educated and motivated to do their own HIV education, two large sex and HIV surveys, visits to high schools, to other cities, to the provincial capital, a hundred written projects begun and left on the computer because "more important" things came along. Not a lot, really, and mostly just stabs in the dark.

I feel stretched, although not in the good sense of the term. There are always many more things and many more people waiting for me than there are hours in the day. I just do what I can and put the rest off until tomorrow. If God really wants it to get done, a way will be found. Does anyone really want health care to be accessible to the Penale people? Does anyone really care if high school students are being meaningfully educated about HIV and AIDS? I hardly think so anymore. In some ways, a year has been a long time.

I feel pulled too, and it is a fulfilling sort of pull, the sort that lets you dream and hope even in the face of what others shout to be impossibilities. Isn't there a gift of the Spirit like that—being one who hopes and does, when everyone else doubts and quits? It may not be of the Spirit but it's still something to which I aspire. Realizing all the while that it will probably hasten my death—socially, organizationally and/or physically. It is gratifying to be on something of a line, taking a stand, side by side, shoulder to shoulder against the ones who seek to overrun it all. It helps put the questions of meaning into order—what am I doing in the world anyway, what is worth fighting for, what's true, what's right—what is finally worthy of hope?

Yes. It is good to be here. I am glad I am here. I am thankful for my chances to speak, to pray, to write, to preach, to encourage and to teach. I rejoice in the mountains, the highland rain and the long ferns gracing the yard. I can hardly believe that out of six billion men, women and children in this world, I'm the one who gets to do what I do around these valleys of the central highlands. Where would I rather be? Nowhere.

Establishing a Human Rights Culture

John Pfitzner

Developing a human rights culture in the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA)

On 10 December 1948, with the horrors of World War II (especially the Holocaust) still fresh in people's minds, the General Assembly of the recently established UN adopted the UDHR. This was followed, in 1966, by the adoption of the two legal treaties that, together with the UDHR, make up the International Bill of Human Rights: the ICCPR and the ICESCR. These events were significant steps in a long process that has resulted, over the last sixty years, in the development of a considerable body of international human rights instruments and a virtually universal commitment to the principle of human rights.

Some Christian individuals (including the Lutheran O. Frederick Nolde) and Christian organizations (especially the CCIA of the WCC) were involved in the formulation of foundational documents. Some writers have also argued that the concept of human rights has its origins in the values of Western Christendom.¹ Nevertheless, Christian churches were not always quick to appreciate or respond to the new human rights thinking, and some opposed it.

Lutheran recognition of the importance of human rights emerged most strongly in 1970 at the Fifth Assembly of the LWF in Evian. In the Assembly's "Resolution on Human Rights," member churches were urged to take up particular issues of injustice in their own countries and to study the UDHR and its application to their situations. The resolution also asked churches to report to the General Secretary about action

¹ See, for example, Max Stackhouse, "Why Human Rights Need God: A Christian Perspective," in Elizabeth M. Bucar and Barbara Barnett (eds), *Does Human Rights Need God?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 33.

planned and taken in relation to human rights, but unfortunately fewer than twenty member churches responded, and only one at any length.

The LCA has not always been energetic in addressing the issue of human rights, although it can point to an honorable record in providing humanitarian aid, especially to Indigenous Australians, migrants after World War II and impoverished peoples throughout the world through the work of Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS). The LCA's Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions (CSBQ) adopted a statement on human rights in 1985. In its May 1990 edition the "Lutheran Theological Journal" carried two articles on human rights. In 1994, the church's Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) adopted its statement entitled "Human Rights," which gave a positive assessment and endorsement of human rights.² More recently, in 2004, the president of the church established the President's Advisory Committee on Human Rights Issues. In spite of these developments, it remains a challenge to make human rights more prominent in the church's thinking and discourse. Among church members there is little understanding and appreciation of human rights, and in many quarters there is actually an attitude of suspicion and opposition towards the concept.

Possible reasons for the church's caution and slowness in taking up the issue of human rights might include:

- A lack of knowledge and awareness in the church of human rights.
- Stress on evangelism and individual salvation (seen mainly in after-life terms), rather than service to others through social action.
- An emphasis on providing aid, rather than trying to address the systemic problems that cause poverty and oppression.
- A tendency to focus narrowly on religious issues and not engage with wider political, social and global issues.
- Members having no experience of human rights violations in their own lives.

² The CSBQ and CTICR statements can be accessed on the LCA website, www.lca.org.au.

- Being a church that practices and defends discrimination against certain groups of people, placing the church at odds with human rights principles.

This article argues that it is important for the LCA to develop a human rights culture if it is to be effective and credible in its Christian witness to today's world. Five requirements for the development of a human rights culture are suggested.

A church with a human rights culture will develop an understanding of human rights

The cautious attitude of members of the LCA and their distrust towards human rights are partly the result of ignorance about what human rights are and what they involve. The LCA should encourage its members to become better informed about human rights and should provide resources and educational opportunities for this to happen.

The UDHR, in its thirty short articles, is a good summary of human rights.³ The rights listed are ones to which any sensible person will readily agree, and those of us who live in a free and democratic society largely take them for granted.

The basis for human rights is human dignity and worth. The preamble to the UDHR speaks of “the inherent dignity” of all members of the human family and the “dignity and worth of the human person.” Human rights are a set of minimal standards that are required for people to live with dignity and to have a life that can be called human. In places where these standards are not met and when people are deprived of their humanity, they cannot live fully as humans.

The need for human rights arises out of people's inhumanity towards one another. There would be no need for human rights—one might even say they would not exist—if human beings treated each other rightly. It is against the background of human sinfulness and the existence of evil (to use Christian terminology) that the development of human rights has taken place.

³ The UDHR may be accessed at www.unhchr.ch/udhr.

Specific human rights have been formulated in response to specific abuses. The right that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”⁴ has been formulated and is necessary because governments around the world continue to torture people. The right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and ones family⁵ has been articulated because millions of people around the world are prevented from having such a standard of living.

This means that there is no completeness or finality about the development of human rights. Current human rights treaties outline what is needed at the present time because of the injustices and abuses that people suffer. As new situations arise, it may become necessary to modify these rights or to formulate new ones. Human rights are, therefore, always a work in progress.⁶

The remarkable achievement of those who have developed our present-day system of human rights is that the rights they have formulated are virtually universally recognized and accepted, even when they are not adhered to. Human rights give rise to a common understanding of what it means to be human. They have a moral force that is difficult to challenge seriously.

A church with a human rights culture will engage in ongoing theological reflection and study about the relationship between human rights and Christian faith

To engage in a committed way with human rights and human rights issues, the LCA will need to develop further its theological understanding of how human rights relate to what we believe and teach as Christians. Human rights will not become part of the church’s culture unless it first becomes an integral part of our theological thinking and discourse. A theological foundation for human rights has already been spelt out in the CTICR statement on human rights, but the statement is brief.

The church would benefit from deeper and more extensive study and discussion. The aim of such would not be to find a Christian validation

⁴ UDHR, article 5 at www.unhchr.ch/udhr .

⁵ *Ibid.*, article 25.

⁶ For a discussion of this aspect of human rights, see Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human: Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 23-25.

for human rights, as if human rights were somehow illegitimate until they receive our Christian—and Lutheran—theological imprimatur. Modern human rights concepts are of secular origin and, therefore, universal. They are not the preserve of any particular group of people or particular religion. It is not necessary or appropriate for us as Christians to try to claim human rights as if they belonged to us. The aim of our reflection would be to give us a sharper vision of how human rights relate to our faith and to lead us to more focused and effective action for human rights.

Theologians who have written on this topic have usually acknowledged that human rights are not a biblical concept. However, it has not been difficult for writers to find strong points of correspondence. Lutheran theologian Heinz Eduard Tödt refers to “fundamental analogies”⁷ between human rights thinking and Christian belief. Having been created “in the image of God” (*cf.* Gen 1:26-27) is often the foundation for Christian thinking about human rights. Also of great importance are the Old and New Testament accounts of God’s action in liberating people from tyranny and oppression, such as the exodus and Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection. God reaffirms and reestablishes the true humanity for which people were created. Jürgen Moltmann is another theologian who sees a strong link between these biblical themes and the foundational human rights concept of the inherent dignity of the human person.⁸

While theological reflection is important, it must not become a substitute for taking action against specific abuses. Helmut Frenz, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELC), who was expelled from the country in 1975 after the military coup against President Allende, notes the tendency of churches to refrain from action on human rights until everything has been examined theologically.

There are situations in life that allow no delay for reflection; they cry out for spontaneous and devoted action. I find this always to be the case when there is a direct menace to persons, to their life and dignity [...].

⁷ Heinz Eduard Tödt, “Theological Reflections on the Foundation of Human Rights: Questions and Theses,” in J. Lissner and A. Sovik (eds), *A Lutheran Reader on Human Rights. LWF Report 1/2* (Geneva: LWF, 1978), p. 162.

⁸ See particularly the first two chapters of Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (London: SCM Press Ltd.).

That Christians hesitate here and ask for theological justification shows how much the human element within us has wasted away.⁹

In order for a church to be effective, relevant and credible in its witness, it must recognize the importance of engaging with human rights

The church's ministry takes place within a particular historical, social, political and cultural context. As a church, we sometimes seem to be more concerned that our message is not contaminated by the world. As a church, we sometimes fail to connect and engage with the significant developments and movements that affect people's lives today.

Human rights thinking provides the framework for international discourse on governments' moral responsibilities and issues relating to poverty, peace and social justice, the very issues that relate so closely to what the church teaches and represents. For a church not to engage with these issues and not participate in this discourse indicates a narrowness of vision and raises questions about the church's relevance and credibility. Human rights are not a peripheral issue. Rather, they are connected with some of the most important issues facing our world today.

Today, "Christian living" is no longer merely a matter of personal morality. We now know that the suffering of millions of people throughout the world is, in most cases, not the result of individual acts of human beings toward one another but the result of systemic abuses, institutionalized inequalities and injustices. In these situations, individual acts of kindness are important, but we can show our love and concern for the people involved much more effectively by challenging the systems responsible for their suffering and by trying to influence the authorities that allow or support these systems.

Churches need to develop a human rights culture in order to be alert to situations of suffering and abuse, to be ready to do the hard work of studying the complex situations of injustice, and to be prepared to join with others of goodwill, whether Christian or not, in taking effective action to defend and promote human rights. This is needed if the church's

⁹ Helmut Frenz, "Human Rights: A Christian Viewpoint," in *A Lutheran Reader...*, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 146.

witness in today's world is to be taken seriously and is to be seen as having integrity and authenticity. Moltmann believes that "through its relationship to human rights the church becomes the church for the world."¹⁰

Unfortunately, the history of the twentieth century is full of examples where churches have failed in this regard. In Argentina, for example, the RCC hierarchy was solidly on the side of military repression during the 1970s and 1980s. Military chaplains actually blessed the murder of "subversives" as a necessity for preserving "Christian civilization." Belatedly, in 1995, senior bishops issued a statement expressing remorse for not having done more to prevent violence and the government's abuses of human rights. Walter Wink observes that "this lame facsimile of repentance did nothing to heal the loss of relatives of the disappeared." He also notes that the bishops "actively supported a policy of state murder and human rights violations."¹¹ The example shows how easy it is for a church that does not have a culture of human rights to fail to respond appropriately to human rights abuses, even in situations where the abuses are evident. Wink notes that at the same time in Chile, by contrast, the church took the lead in defending human rights.

In many cases, the only appeal human rights have had to the churches has been in terms of defending its own freedoms or sometimes also the freedoms of other Christians. This has reflected badly upon the church. Through these narrow and limited actions, the world perceives that the church is concerned only with its own welfare and is not serious in its claim to serve others. If the church is to be sincerely committed to human rights, it must take seriously their universality and indivisibility. The church must be prepared, for example, to defend everyone's right to practice freely their religion, not only Christians.

A church with a human rights culture will be aware that the state, while being established by God for the good ordering of society, can also become demonic

In the LCA, we tend to stress that the government is ordained by God and carries out a God-given responsibility to ensure the preservation

¹⁰ *On Human Dignity...*, *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 7.

¹¹ Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of the Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 46.

and good order of society. However, we do not recognize to the same extent that governments or aspects of government policy can become demonic, having harmful and destructive effects on people. In developing a human rights culture, the LCA may need to reexamine its theology in relation to the state.

Human rights are everyone's responsibility, but they are the particular responsibility of those with power and influence, especially governments and government agencies. It is the government's duty to ensure, for example, that people are not tortured, that their freedoms are preserved, that they have access to health care and education, and that they can participate in the political and cultural life of their community. Conversely, it is governments and their agencies that are mainly responsible for human rights abuses. This means that human rights work has a dual focus: speaking out in defense of those who suffer abuses and speaking out against those who are responsible for the abuses. Those responsible for the abuses will in most cases be governments that are either failing to protect people's rights or pursuing policies that deprive people of their rights.

Human rights abuses often occur in situations where the government claims that the country is under threat or that certain groups of people are a danger to society. In this situation, people who question government policy can be portrayed as being disloyal to their country and unpatriotic, which creates strong pressure upon them to remain silent. People often take pride in their nation and trust that their leaders are acting in their country's best interests. Human rights work involves questioning and challenging governmental policies and practices. This can result in human rights ambassadors coming under attack themselves. There is nothing comfortable about human rights work. It often requires great courage.

A church with a human rights culture will have a particular concern for people who are marginalized and vulnerable

Those most at risk of suffering human rights abuses include minorities, the marginalized, those who lack power and those who are vulnerable such as women, children, prisoners, homosexuals, refugees, asylum seekers, Indigenous persons and people of a certain ethnic, racial, cultural or

religious background. Developing a culture of human rights will involve the LCA in examining to what extent it is committed toward helping people in these kinds of situations to defend their rights.

Governments are often able to act in discriminatory ways towards particular minority groups because these people are already disliked, distrusted and despised by the majority. Churches claim to have a special concern for those who are weak, poor and in need, but, in many cases, Christians share society's prejudices and discriminatory attitudes. In some cases, Christians are seen as being even less accepting of certain people and more intolerant than others.

Human rights work involves actively defending and promoting the human rights of people whom we may not like or of whose beliefs and lifestyles we may disapprove. In this regard, it may be helpful for us, as a church, to reflect more deeply on what it means for us that Jesus associated and ate with the outcasts of his day. Human rights apply to everybody. They are not a reward for good behavior. They are not something that people earn. Being human is the only condition for being entitled to human rights. This means that even criminals have rights and that we should be as concerned about their rights as we are about the rights of people we like. This is an aspect of human rights work that is challenging and difficult. Being a church with a human rights culture may also involve us in a painful reassessment of some of our own attitudes and practices within the church.

My work in human rights

In 1984, I became the pastor of a city congregation after working for fifteen years with Aboriginal people in a remote part of Central Australia. After a year or so, I realized that much of my work was church-related, and I felt a desire to get involved in an activity within the local community. I could have joined many organizations but decided to focus on the work of one organization, namely, Amnesty International. I have been an active member of a local Amnesty group, now, for more than twenty years.

One might ask what attracted me to working in this field. I was unaware of anyone in the church who was a member of Amnesty International, but I had heard about the work of this organization and was drawn to its

sensitivity toward other people and strong sense of justice. I remember thinking at the time that if I had to spend the best years of my life in jail simply because of my beliefs, I would hope that there would be someone in the world who knew about me and cared enough to try to help me.

At that time, I had no strong sense of connection between my Christian faith and my work in human rights. The teachings of the faith in which I was raised had focused strongly on matters of personal salvation and had not encouraged engagement in social justice. Aid work of various kinds was supported by the church, but the emphasis was on “saving souls.” Social engagement was seen by many as a dangerous distraction from this primary task. At this stage, I did not have the theological framework to integrate the human rights work, in which I was involved, with the Christian faith that I held.

In 1993, the LCA’s commission on theology was asked to prepare a statement on the theme of human rights. I was invited to be a member of the committee that was established for this purpose. I am not sure from where the impetus for this study came, but I saw the church’s engagement in this issue as a positive development. The statement was adopted by the commission on 20 April 1994. I assisted in drafting the earlier part of the document, “Historical Development,” and in strengthening the document’s positive assessment and endorsement of human rights. The statement’s support for the principle of human rights has been useful in addressing more recent issues confronting the church, such as the treatment of Aboriginal people.

From 1994 to 1996, I was a member of the LCA Committee on Aboriginal Issues and Ministry which had three primary tasks. First, we were to listen to the concerns and aspirations of the LCA’s Aboriginal members. Second, we were to recommend actions that would promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Third, we were to encourage greater inclusion of Aboriginal members in the church’s activities. The subsequent report prepared by our committee, “We’re All People,” contained recommendations on nine issues including reconciliation, racism, land rights and involvement of Aboriginal people in the church. The report was widely distributed in the church and its recommendations were accepted and acted upon.

In the late 1990s, I represented the church on the national Faith Communities for Aboriginal Reconciliation group. This group, which had a

connection with the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, established by the Australian government, promoted the issue of reconciliation among religious communities in Australia. Several years later, at a national convention of the church, a rite of reconciliation took place.

In 2000, I was chosen to represent the LCA at the Asia Regional Human Rights Training Workshop in Bangkok conducted by the LWF. I subsequently prepared a report on the workshop for the leadership of the church. An attempt was made within the church to set up an informal grouping of people interested in human rights issues, but unfortunately there was little enthusiasm and nothing came of it.

In 2004, at a conference of LCA pastors, I asked the president about what action the church was taking in relation to the several human rights issues affecting Australia at that time, particularly Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and their involvement in the Iraq War. The president said he would take up the issues I had raised and subsequently appointed me to convene the President's Advisory Committee on Human Rights Issues.

The functioning of the committee has not been easy. The voluntary membership comes from all over Australia and we do not have any access to funds for our work. Nevertheless, the committee has served a good purpose, especially at a time when an increasing number of human rights concerns have emerged in Australia. We have prepared briefings for the president in relation to the issues of the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, including children, for long periods of time, services and treatment provided for mentally ill people, the warehousing of refugees in many countries, the apparent condoning of torture by Australia and its allies, and a proposed bill of rights for Australia. In recent years, I have been invited from time to time to give talks on human rights to groups both within and outside the church. On one occasion, I was invited to address the faculty and students at a theological college on this topic.

Conclusion

A renewed interest in Jesus' life and teachings has led me to a clearer understanding of a God of compassion, who has a passion for justice. These qualities are central for us in our life as God's people and follow-

ers of Jesus. Jesus' behavior which, at the time, was seen as shocking and outrageous, challenges us as a church and as individuals to consider how seriously we take our commitment to those who suffer. As Christians, we must ask ourselves, How far are we prepared to follow Jesus? Human rights work often involves standing alongside of—and standing up for—those who are marginalized and victimized. They may be people we do not like, people of whose lifestyles and values we may disapprove. The church claims to be an organization that exists to love and serve others, especially those who are victimized and oppressed. Jesus' acceptance of outcasts challenges us to think about whether our actions always match our words.

A statement by Pastor Martin Niemöller, which has sometimes been reproduced in Amnesty International material, continues to encourage and motivate me in my human rights work.

They came first for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up because I was a **Protestant**.
Then they came for me,
and by that time no one was left to speak up.¹²

A church with a strong human rights culture or ethos will be a church that follows Jesus on the way to the cross. This uncomfortable and dangerous road involves engaging more fully with the pressing issues of our world today, understanding and responding to complex situations that involve suffering for millions of people, taking a stand on the side

¹² "First they came..." is a poem attributed to Pastor Martin Niemöller (1892-1984) about the quiescence of German intellectuals following the Nazi rise to power and the purging of their chosen targets, group after group. This version inscribed at the New England Holocaust Memorial in **Boston, Massachusetts** at, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_they_came...

of those who suffer oppression, injustice and abuse, and challenging the “domination systems”¹³ that are responsible for the abuses.

Regarding the human rights situation in Chile during the 1970s, Helmut Frenz once said:

It became very clear to us in Chile that defending human rights and commitment to human dignity were an unabandonable part of the preaching of the gospel. Many of us came to this knowledge very late. We should have been on the side of the poor and suffering before September 11, 1973.¹⁴

Developing a culture of human rights will enable the church to be more alert and to respond more quickly and appropriately to situations of abuse, thus giving greater integrity to its message. It is never too late for Christians around the world to raise the awareness of human rights. It is never too late for Christians to defend the human dignity of all people. And, it is most certainly never too late to preach the gospel of a God who eats with the outcasts.

¹³ The phrase is Walter Wink's. See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis. Fortress Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Frenz, ... *op. cit.* (note 9).

A Missionary's Log Continued ...

9 November 2005

I returned from a week away. When I walked into the house, well after dark, Dr Steve was in surgery. Julie was on the radio with Wanakipa. Listening in, I heard: “threats of revenge killings [...] Johnny’s body [...] Kopiagos angry at Wanakipa [...] in mourning [...] sorry that you are scared for your life [...] don’t know [...] can’t say [...] praying for you too.” At the end of the long Monday, I lay there with my head tilted back. Over me are my covers, burying me in darkness. In my eyes are tears and glimpses of lightning. Then, voices in my head, thunder in my ears. And I drift to dreamless sleep.

It can still get worse. In Mambisanda we are in mourning. Johnny was stabbed to death on Saturday. He still lies cold and alone in the morgue, waiting for someone to take him home. Coworkers, friends, hospital staff and patients whom he touched walk by slowly and look to the sky.

Look up, keep your lower lip still. Its going to be better tomorrow, I know. The district administrator looked at me: “Twenty people have already died in my village so I asked the pastors what in the world they were doing about HIV outreach.” He made a move to get up and go to his meeting. A meeting of paper pushers to develop more sub-committees and teach them to self-propagate and on and on and the moon turns to blood and the horizons reek of death. “My son, Onga and his wife are trying to do their part and I am encouraging them.” His fork nudges a piece of broccoli from one side of the plate to the other.

I am reminded of missionaries who invested a lifetime in a handful of people. All dead when the tribal fights twitch their terrible lips. Was anything even accomplished?

[...]

Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build ‘em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it at one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
[...].¹

Truth be told, failure is the real name of the game—and who will have the courage to fail? Who can faith-fully, hope-fully fail? “Winning” was a nice dream, an optimistic fantasy. Nations will not win, neither will religions, nor worldviews, nor political systems, nor even human beings. Not ever. The requiem must be, I finally admit, the lament of our (humanity’s) dream, our hope and destiny. There cannot be peace on earth, justice for the oppressed, liberty for the bound. Not while this planet obeys earthly rules. But still I find men and women and children who dress wounds, pray, administer drugs and plan on doing it tomorrow. They find, somewhere, somehow, the courage to face failure and keep fighting it, knowing already that failure is going to be the final word. And it is incredible to see.

Is there a real difference between expectation and hope? Or do we say, “if you hope it, you have to expect it too.” We expect more HIV deaths in our community. Rhonda’s on Friday only foreshadows things to come. I expect we will all, together, keep up appearances, teach ourselves and our children to deny death, to ignore the prophetic words echoing hollowly, sporadically, in our markets. Failure begins to teach me what I already ought to know—that I am—we are—mortal. That all my words are dust and so are yours.

The boy walks along the beach, tossing starfish back into the shallows. “What’s the point?” you ask. “Ask that one,” the boy replies, and he heaves one more into the surf. It’s a parable which can be used for all sorts of end/telos justifications. Why is it worth it? The answer, they say, is because it matters for this one. This gift of economic independence, this sense of self worth or even this salvation of the soul—matters for this one.

¹ Rudyard Kipling, *If*, at www.everypoet.com/archive/poetry/Rudyard_Kipling/kipling_if.htm.

Turn back two thousand years and you have a Jewish carpenter who suffered and died, some say, because the end would justify the means. God's death would somehow balance in the scales against human brokenness and misery—even, maybe, outweighing it. Fast-forward and they claim that Christian obedience is the joyful means to a heavenly goal. Or maybe a purposeful life is the price and earthly blessings are the end. Faithfulness is the price and heaven the reward.

The problem with justifying our actions based on our goals is that we end up walking away from the inhabitants of the world, the real world, the one where we are all broken, all sick and, under our veneer of middle-class optimism, in wretched denial of death. That is, we carefully, fastidiously, force ourselves to operate in a world where humans are thought to be still good enough, still able to win, still perfected, still justified under the law, if only we get it right. But that just isn't this world.

Around here, people think that if only they do enough of the right things, believe enough of the best thoughts and show up for enough of the religious events, God will like them and their future will be good. Some even think that if they get all those things right, then their earthly existence will see healthy kids, peace in the village, and maybe they will not be affected by HIV. Some organizations think this too—if we get the right programs, right slogans, flash posters and T-shirts and hats, and are sufficiently choosy in our fund distribution, then our objectives will be met and we will be patted on the back. The same mindset permeates both religious and secular sectors.

Take up your cross and follow, I tell you. Take it up and serve with justice oriented organizations. Take it up and be a pastor, a deaconess, a teacher, a missionary, a health extension officer at Immanuel Lutheran Hospital. Jesus' footsteps do not take you to the echelons of the religious establishment. They do not take you to the halls of ecclesial or political power except to be judged and found ridiculous. Those footsteps do not lead you to a sense of religious satisfaction, to complacency, to feelings of self-adequacy. Is there a great goal at the end of the following? Some think so. Others called it Golgotha.

Christian following, when it is a following of Christ and not a parade toward self-satisfied success, takes us for the sake of that Jesus; for the sake, simply, of following and being. Christian following because

that is who I am, and have been made to be, not because of what is in it for me. A minister because I am God's child, a preacher because Jesus preached the Good News, a healer because my gifts are for the sick. The reason for throwing that starfish back in is not to save that starfish. It is because that is who you, the thrower, are. You do unto the "least of these"² because you are a child of God—never because it might be Jesus in disguise. The reason Jesus endures the cross and its shame is not in order to save the world. It's because that is who our God is. God endures with us—Immanuel—even into death.

This world we inhabit, as opposed to the one we make-believe, is a world faced towards death. Jesus was a "man-toward-death," as am I, as are you. We expect, await and run from death. It's Eden to think that we can know right from wrong, can work in the ways of God and redeem this creation. It's Easter to live toward the world, live on the paths toward all the Golgothas of this screwed-up place and live on them without despair. Live toward one another without ulterior motives; that is, live, I tell you, for someone else. Not in order to do anything with or to them. Not to save them, not to reach them, not to give them justice or freedom—you live and do because of who you are. You're a follower. It's enough to follow. "Come, follow me, the Savior spoke,"³ away from the reward-seeking self and into a disciple's death—I will teach you to die so that you may learn to live.

The inevitable uphill is underway ... to Golgotha, where we die as failures. All the things we wanted to get done will be undone. All the things we gave our lives to will be broken. Our dreams will be undone, our loves and desires pulled apart. But, you protest, I am a Christian—Christians die with hope and a smile on their lips. Christians die with hope, I tell you, because they have known the one who promises to hold them even into their death and through whatever may come. The world around you sings, "You are because you do." The inevitable uphill cries out, "You do because you are!" Let the prophets among you attune your ears.

Myself, it's about being instead of doing. Maybe, because of me, someone will come to trust God's promises instead of their own religio-

² In serving one another and caring for the humanity of the "least of these," you are serving God. This is a reference to Matthew 25:31-46.

³ A reference to Jesus' calling of his disciples.

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ity—it's worth a shot. I have no one better to be with in this life. Fight and die fighting because that is identity—hardwired to seek justice, it's Christian to be merciful and vocation itself to walk humbly (as humility is imposed on us) where God wills. God looks at Jesus and not at my pitiful accumulations—and that is why, despite all my failings, I wear the name of Christ.

When we got back tonight and walked into the house, Julie was on the radio with Wanakipa. Listening in, I heard: “threats of revenge killings [...] Johnny's body [...] Kopiagos angry at Wanakipa [...] in mourning [...] sorry that you are scared for your life [...] don't know [...] can't say [...] praying for you too.”

It's either one step forward and two steps back or the other way around, depending on the week. But it is good to be here.

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Conclusion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

[T]here are three possible ways in which the church can act toward the state: the first place, as has been said, it can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and accordance with its character as state; i.e., it can throw the state back on its responsibility. Second, it can aid the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to Christian community—"Do good to all people." In both these courses of action, the church serves the free state in its free way, and at times when laws are changed the church may in no way withdraw itself from these two tasks. The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to jam a spoke in the wheel itself.

Relations with the State are almost always a difficult issue in the context of any consideration of the role of the church in the promotion and protection of human rights. This has long been the subject of discussion and study, including by Lutheran church leaders and theologians. The LWF has played its part in this process, and it continues to promote reflection within the Lutheran communion and ecumenically on church-state relations and the role of government.

The contributors to this present publication have different experiences and challenges with regard to relations with state concerning the promotion and protection of human rights. But for the church as a whole, Dietrich's three options continue to represent the unavoidable choice in all contexts in which the Christian faith is lived out.

This publication has a modest objective. It does not pretend to provide a current overview of critical human rights situations, nor a significant contribution to the burgeoning literature on human rights law and policy. Neither does it purport to advance the growing discourse on biblical and theological bases for human rights. Instead, it is a means of broadcasting the thoughts and experiences of just a few individuals from within the global communion of the Lutheran World Federation who have been drawn by their fundamental faith principles to working for human rights and justice.

In reading these articles, we may reflect once again on the question—Who is Jesus Christ for us today? We may learn how some of our brothers and sisters have reflected on, and responded to that question. We may find in their diverse experiences inspiration and examples for action. And we may discover in human rights, not a secular ideology aloof from Christian ethics, but tools at hand for defending God-given human dignity and for serving the neighbor in need.

Human rights—and the related instruments and mechanisms—are tools for the promotion of justice and the protection of the dignity of all human beings, each of whom bears the image of God. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) therefore sees human rights work as an important part of an holistic Christian ministry. Many individual members of Lutheran churches around the world are active participants in the struggle for human rights.

This volume is a collection of essays and articles by some of these members of the Lutheran family, illustrating their experiences and concerns, the ways in which they are working for human rights in their different contexts, and how they relate this work to their faith principles. Their writings offer inspiration and examples to others who may feel called to a human rights ministry.

The LWF is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF now has 140 member churches in 78 countries all over the world, representing 66.2 million Christians.

