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The human rights Church school: A particular school for the common good?

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### Abstract

The idea of a human rights Church school raises challenges from (at least) two opposing quarters. The ardent secularist will doubt a Church school can be a human rights school, as Church denotes a theological moral framework that does not accord with (secular) human rights. A Christian who opposes the language of human rights being drawn into the Christian ethos will oppose the Human rights Church School as not being Christian enough. Ergo the Human rights Church School cannot have a satisfactorily human rights ethos (for the secularist) or satisfactorily Church ethos (for the Christian). This paper challenges both of these arguments as failing to truly represent the interconnectedness of Christian and human rights thought and action, and further it suggests the human rights Church school is an example of a particular school for the common good, also disrupting some assumptions about common schooling and schools of a religious character.

### Introduction

The assumption is that religion subverts human rights education as religion stands against human rights because it is for patriarchy, bias, illiberalism and hierarchical control, or at least some aren't secularists will claim. The notion of a Human rights Church School masks this reality. However, an opposer from the opposite corner will make a similar case that a Church school cannot be a human rights school. This is also due to the ethos of a Church school contradicting the ethos of a human rights school. A Christian who opposes the language of human rights being drawn into the Christian ethos will oppose the Human rights Church School. For Christians to be involved in human rights education is a failure to understand the moral law does not reside in human norms, but in divine revelation. Human rights are human made and come not from scripture but flawed human thinking.

Yet within Christian thought we find a number of ideas that can nourish human rights. First in terms of a basic attitude towards humanity: The imago dei doctrine, that human beings were made in the image and likeness of God, the doctrine of the incarnation and theosis, that God could become man so that human beings could partake in Christ's divinity. Second in terms of Christian morality: the golden rule, agape love, the idea of compassion and responsibility for the other and the idea of human autonomy and liberation. Is a Christian approach to human rights education possible or meaningful? What might it look like? What does it look like? This paper sets out some thinking around these questions and a case for an alternative to either of these accounts. It critically considers whether there are Christian reasons for human rights education and considers what Christian approaches to HRE add to core ideas in HRE. These principles offer a Christian understanding of human rights and are suggestive of an approach to human rights education that integrates a concept of a kind of school and an approach to moral education.

Part 1. What do we mean by a human rights school?

The virtue of human rights themselves are seen variously as an attempt to assert a moral shared vision, or at least language, that can help protect the weak and innocent from oppression, a framework for an international system of justice for resolving differences between governments peacefully and holding brutal dictators to account, or an attempt to assert a universal moral culture. These arguments are common enough but what of a human rights school? The idea of a human rights school is one where the ethos and character of the school is sympathetic to the human rights. At its heart is the expression in the 1948 Preamble and Article 26 of the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), which make HRE a right in itself and define the Declaration as an act of HRE (Morsink 1999, 326). The preamble of the UDHR stresses the 'common understanding' of human rights and fundamental freedoms as values or 'common standards' of achievement. These should be promoted through teaching and education by every individual and organisation. HRE is an individual and collective duty (Baxi 1997).

The notion of a human rights school is linked to the United Nations concept of human rights education (HRE) which in turn is based on the international declarations and conventions of human rights. HRE is burgeoning pedagogical formation based on human rights universals which has undergone a worldwide dramatic expansion since the 1970s (Andreopoulos & Claude 1997; Campbell & Covell 2001; Claude 1996; Keet 2007; Suarez 2006; Suarez & Ramirez 2007; Tibbitts 2002). Suarez and Ramirez (2007) pronounce the 'strength and the success of human rights education at the global level' (Ibid. pp.22-3) with an increasing number of developing countries including HRE in their education systems (UNESCO 2005).

During the 1990s, the international documents on HRE were elaborated and progressively became part of a worldwide educational discourse (Lenhart & Savolainen 2002). In 1995, HRE had gained enough momentum that the United Nations proclaimed a United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) (UNHCR 1994) and after that a World Programme for Human Rights Education, the second phase of which is currently underway (UNHCR 2005). By the end of the 1990s, numerous teaching orientated resources were produced which sought to translate educational ideas into strategies, pedagogies and professional practice (Lenhart & Savolainen 2002; OHCHR 2003; Reardon 1995; UNESCO 1998). There was a drive to make HRE an integral part of mainstream education, integrated into all subjects and, in the UK, especially in citizenship education (Gearon 2003a, 2007; Smith 2003). HRE includes imparting skills, sharing of knowledge and molding attitudes:

Human rights education can be defined as education, training and information aiming at building a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of knowledge, imparting of skills and molding of attitudes directed to: (a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; (b) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity; (c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; (d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law; (e) The building and maintenance of peace; (f) The promotion of people-centred sustainable development and social justice. (UNHCR 2005)

HRE is conceived as a force for societal transformation (UNESCO 1993) through the establishment of a universal culture of human rights (UNHCR 2005)

The transformative dimension of HRE applies to outward global change, conceived through inner personal change. HRE has been bolstered by its inclusion in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly 1989) (CRC), which signatories have a legal obligation to implement. HRE constitutes an international influence on national moral education and a unique contribution to education. Because human rights in the twenty-first century are international, with international agreements and conventions that are widely known,

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HRE provides a footing in the curriculum that is supranational. Just as it can offer a position of consensus within diverse societies, it can provide an influence from a perspective of international or global consensus. This provides a sense of the ethos or culture of a school proclaiming itself to being a human rights school. We would expect to see these kinds of moral messages reflected in the structures of the school its relationships with stakeholders and the moral vision it extends.

In Britain the most significant example of the human rights schools are those that have sought out Rights Respecting School status, a designation that is set, and awarded by UNICEF UK. This substantial HRE initiative promotes using human rights to permeate the ethos and life of a school (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009). There were already signs that HRE in schools had positive impacts (Covell & Howe 1999, 2000, 2001, 2005). Studies in Canada and the UK examined the impact of teaching children's rights as a means of promoting rights-respecting attitudes, encouraging children to learn that they are worthy of respect, have rights and live in a society which is committed to their present and future wellbeing (Covell et al. 2002). If children are not taught about their rights they are more likely to equate their rights with their wishes, and fail to understand the rights of all.

Hampshire County Council ran a pilot of the scheme called Rights, Respect and Responsibility (<http://www.unicef.org.uk/Education/Rights-Respecting-Schools-Award/>) involving 380 primary schools and 48 secondary schools in the county (Covell & Howe 2005). Some schools have reported significant reductions in bullying and other behavior improvements (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009, p.60). UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools scheme (UNICEF 2008) seeks to raise pupil achievement and improve the quality of their life. There are four evidence based strands to the project: to share Rights-respecting values underpin leadership and management, to ensure the whole-school community learns about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ensure the school has a rights-respecting ethos and to seek to empower children to become active citizens and learners. They study the CRC as a guide for living. In 2009 the inquiry reported that over 500 schools across the UK registered with the project and that the University of Sussex evaluated the scheme in 2008 and found improved behavior and self-esteem and some improvements in learning (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009, p.59). These projects are about the whole school ethos as well as the kind of curriculum being taught in lessons or subjects and it is not clear whether the changes are down to human rights education per se, or other ethos nurturing activities. As of June 2014 there are 3283 schools taking part. 2627 primary schools, 379 secondary, 152 Special schools, 16 Pupil referral units and 109 early years' settings. Brighton University in 2010 concluded

“The RRSA has had a profound effect on the majority of the schools involved in the programme. For some school communities, there is strong evidence that it has been a life-changing experience. In the documentation from one infant school, the head said, “After 16 years as head teacher at [...] school, I cannot think of anything else we have introduced that has had such an impact.”” (UNICEF 2010) (Available at [http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Education-Documents/RRSA\\_Evaluation\\_Report.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Education-Documents/RRSA_Evaluation_Report.pdf) Accessed 10.7.2014)

Changes observed included a major shift in attitudes and values with a focus on responsibilities and rights, with improvements on behavior and an increase in active involvement in campaigns to uphold rights. Attitudes towards diversity were uniformly positive and there was a significant shift in the involvement of pupils in decision making with pupils involved in aspects of schools governance (2010:7-9).

One of the features of the Rights Respecting Schools initiative is the involvement of different kinds of schools, from different categories, including community schools, academies and Church schools. Much is made of the distinctive ethos of the Church school, so how can you have a Church school that puts human rights at the heart of its ethos? Human rights are an international, universal culture or statement, and yet a Church school must surely be defined a distinctively Christian foundation, rather than human rights? Indeed, more than this. There are some grounds for suspicion that Church schools are not champions of human rights.

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Part 2: Church schools are tainted by Christianity's incompatibility with human rights values.

Secular suspicions about Christian education and religious involvement in human rights

There are two parts to this challenge. The first is a general secular suspicion about the role of religion in education, and the second is a criticism of the idea that religion is in a good place to sponsor institutions to teach about human rights.

The first part is familiar to those who are knowledgeable about opponents to publicly funded faith schooling. These can be summarised as follows. Religion has had a dubious impact on education. Religions have been involved in scandalous abuse of children and cannot be trusted with the wellbeing and basic rights of children. Whatever goods it gained historically, in recent decades a multitude of abuse cases went unrevealed and unpunished, because religion held an unchallengeable semi-theocratic position in society. Religious authorities have proved unreliable and untrustworthy when it came to child protection and abusive law breaking because of mixed allegiances. Criminals were moved around, victims silenced. Religion is, therefore, untrustworthy with education. Schools are safer when the power of the Church is weak, because the rights of victims need safeguarding.

Another concern can be noted here. Religions are not a suitable organisation to be running public education because a religion is particular and leans towards one particular narrative whilst the public are plural and diverse in their belief systems. We might question whether religion lacks a basic rationality that undermines its position to be in a position to direct education. Religions are systems framed by belief or superstition, not rational evidence and education should be led by rational evidence, not belief. We might question whether religion is biased to unquestionable doctrines that limit its critical functionality. To protect individual autonomy requires a secular school leadership. A religion is therefore not well placed to serve the interests of the diverse public. Religions are not democratic organisations but are led by privileged groups, often privileging men over women. Religions commonly uphold conservative moral frameworks that oppose freedoms for women, gays, and so on. Religious rights often get twisted to become the right to protect religious institutions.

Against these claims we might amass a range of arguments. Religion is often involved in sponsoring schools that educate children from a wide range of backgrounds that parents are happy with. Religion is a dimension of community, and schools should be conceived as community organisations rather than statist centrist public bodies. A religious school could arguably be more locally accountable than a Government school, run by a distant corporate body or central government department. Religious schools offer different visions of life and provide alternatives to parents and children other than a singular conception of a state ethos school adding to choice. Children's identities should be nurtured by their schools and holistic visions of education should have a spiritual dimension which religions offer. Religious schools therefore provide support for children's identity.

There remains considerable and unresolved disagreement about the strength of the merits of each point of view. Presently UK legislation allows for and promotes schools of a religious character that are state funded.

A second argument challenges religion as a suitable authority to promote human rights. Even if there is a case for religious schooling, there is no case for religion as a pedagogic foundation for HRE. Human Rights offer a universalistic ethic that many different peoples need to be able to embrace and giving a particular religious foundation turns a universalistic ethic into an exclusive one. The pedagogical approach to HRE needs to be educative and should not be religious. Religion itself has an ambivalent relationship with human rights, often linked with cultural forces that are opposed to equality. There are compelling examples of religion as patriarchal and anti-gay, suggesting basic ethics that are not compatible for a grounding for human rights. This ethical incompatibility means we might be most hesitant before adopting or accepting any suggestion of a Christian

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approach to HRE. The suspicion would be that a Christian approach would by definition erode the equality values which human rights education seek to advance.

This might be countered by the claim that Christianity is also found to be a champion of human rights. Christianity professes a preferential option for the poor. A Church of the poor for the poor, Pope Francis has said. It's prophetic tradition is rooted in an concern for the dispossessed, the unjustly treated. It's radical message of liberation, from Moses to Jesus, seek to unleash binds, set the downtrodden free. It's concern seeks active change, the coming of the Kingdom, a time of justice and peace. It's Messianic message is to liberate and save from sin and death, and to challenge wealth and earthly power. Such messages have inspired anti-slavery campaigners for centuries, and are behind enormous charitable donations healthcare. The right to religious freedom has focussed Christianity's attention on the necessary specifics of what human rights do for religion, and the shadow of soviet religious repression is coast long on the Experiences of Easter. Here Christianity is a champion for freedom, and freedom is a basic orientation of human rights ethical framework.

### Part 3: Theological suspicions about human rights

Opposition to human rights and human rights education also comes from theological sources that challenge the idea of Christian human rights schools. This results from a belief that Christian ethics arise out of divine origins, principally revelation. This discussion locates itself around the idea of human dignity. This is the foundation of the secular UDHR, but also, in the Christian tradition, it is at the centre of theological debates around human rights. There are additional theological sources which may support human rights - love of neighbour, justice etc, but here I shall focus on foundational ideas, and in particular dignity.

#### Protestant skepticism of Christian human rights and dignity

Soulen and Woodhead warn against an over emphasis on humanity, without due regard to the fallibility or sinful nature of humanity. The beginning of Christian development is the recognition of one's sinfulness - first you must repent. It's not about raising human beings up in status but accepting fallenness. Martin Luther held that the image and likeness of God was lost after the fall, though it could be restored through the Word and the Holy Spirit as they think, feel and want exactly what God wants (Grenz 2002, p.165). Calvin held that it was corrupted and whatever left is a deformity (Shih 2004). Human rights in this sense becomes a form of idolatry, replacing divine goodness with human superiority. Soulen and Woodhead are concerned that a Kantian sense of dignity which points to the issue with human rights. They want to recontextualise dignity to one which is informed by biblical perspectives centred on creation, redemption and sanctification rather than a Kantian, non biblical sense (Soulen & Woodhead 2006).

Some Christian theologians argue rather than being an inherent feature of humanity dignity is a gift from the founding divine Father, God, from Genesis 1:26ff (see also Psalm 8:5ff and Sirah 17.1- 11) which holds that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. It is a gift given by the Creator to the created, which does not come about because of anything inherent in the created being. The suggestion that dignity can be based on something inherent to humanity, such as human rationality or freedom (as Kant would have it), is to decontextualise dignity from the proper Christian narrative. The secular formulation of dignity and human rights undermines a theological imperative. The specialness of human worth was a gift from God that has mistakenly been turned into an aspect of humanity (Soulen & Woodhead 2006). The theological imperative that human beings are not saved because of any worth of their own but out of God's love, is undermined by making dignity inherent in human beings. Additionally, the notion that moral obligation leads to human rights is in fact a deviation from a more orthodox Christian determination that moral obligation leads to human duties or responsibilities (Fortin 1991).

Soulen and Woodhead identify the shifting condition of the context through which dignity has developed, from the early Christian narratives to the modern period. The early Church provided a process of contextualisation but the modern period has been one of decontextualisation which provides little adequate moral basis. They set about a project of recontextualisation, from a Protestant Christian perspective. This is not aimed at restoring dignity as a foundation, but rather restoring its proper derivative role with God as the foundation. The Christian conception of dignity, therefore, is markedly different from the contemporary conception, outlined in the UDHR, which is founded in an intrinsic and inherent dignity. If dignity is conferred as a gift from God, rather than a possession or quality of humanity, then it cannot be inherent. This forms a stance which is opposed to rights-centred morality. Morality is a recognition of responsibilities, rather than rights. Dignity is part of God's action to humanity and redemption in Christ. It is not self-possession but dispossession, 'not so much entering into oneself but in reaching out in love and care to the other.' (Soulen & Woodhead 2006, p.6) It is an idea that, rather than focusing on the worth of human beings, focuses on Christ. Soulen and Woodhead see the Christian conception of dignity as distant from the contemporary (Kantian) concept. If dignity is founded on any aspect of humanity that is not based on the divine foundation that they see as fundamental to Christianity, then it is incompatible with Christianity.

#### Catholic scepticism about Christian human rights and dignity

A similar case for rejecting what is called the secular understanding of autonomy or freedom is made within Catholic theological circles. Tracey Rowland objects to the use of secular language to set out Catholic claims, because it misleadingly suggests that there is substantial agreement where in fact none exists (Rowland 2003; see also 2005). It makes it easier for Catholics to accept secular understanding of concepts such as autonomy and freedom, and by extension therefore, dignity. The question of exclusivity in this case falls within a general criticism of Catholic use of what MacIntyre calls the 'idiom and rhetoric of rights' which he argues, 'cannot serve genuinely rational purposes.' (MacIntyre 1991, p.110) George Cardinal Pell prefers 'a greater use of Godly language' (Pell 2003, p.1) when conversing with secularists or advancing the Catholic understanding of justice, morality and the common good. MacIntyre, Rowland and Pell all argue that a genuinely Catholic account cannot use the liberal language of rights as this is a distortion.

The liberal language of human rights starts with an orientation for what is owed to human beings, rather than the duty human beings have. Human beings are indebted to God and have a duty to fulfil their side of the covenant, to obey his commands, to do his will. This is the inverse of the self actualising message of human rights which is about freedom, protection from overlords, and entitlement. It is a different starting point from human beings deserve respect. The meta narrative of human rights, the overarching presumption and place about humanity in the universe is, therefore flawed from this theological perspective. Christian ethics should surely be theocentric, rather than anthropocentric.

#### Protestant theologies for human rights and dignity

However, there are alternative theological responses to human rights in both Protestant and Catholic thought. George Newlands offers a different Protestant response. He takes a Christological perspective on human rights and human dignity (Newlands 2006), which he restated and developed with Richard Amesbury in their 2008 collaborative work, *Faith and Human Rights: Christianity and the Global Struggle for Human Dignity* (Amesbury & Newlands 2008). They explore how Christologies contribute to the struggle for dignity, arguing that they should, 'encapsulate the nature of the Christian understanding of the love of God, illuminating the self giving, self-dispossessing nature of divine reality as a pattern of human relationships.' (Ibid. p.123) Common to these offerings is the interest in grounding conception of human dignity in the Christian narrative, as opposed to

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secular philosophical traditions of dignity. Newlands conceives such integration through a Christological conceptualisation of human rights and the dignity of the human person, drawing on Schleiermacher's person based theology. In this theology, the person is the person of God in Jesus Christ, a Christian construal of human love, and a Christomorphic shape in history (a history shaped by Christ) that transcends the social, political and personal and expresses God from within human suffering (Newlands 2006, pp.143-73). Newlands articulates Christology for human rights, rather than a Christology of human rights. Such a Christology gives attention to the reconciling power in Christ and the instantiation of the person of God in a specific human being (the concretisation in the temporal and physical of the abstract and universal). This figure is then identified with the loss of all human rights through the crucifixion. Incarnation presents a reality of the involvement of God with human bodies and His concern about what happens to them. Jesus Christ can be imagined as God's incarnation of human rights, as subject and object of human rights concern. Through this human beings are recognized as God's own, with their worth reaffirmed and a destiny to be fulfilled through His unconditional love. Newlands' Christology is not just a Christology for human rights but a Christology for the dignity of the human person. It is not just human rights that are Christologically understood, but the inherent worth and nature of the person that are seen in these terms.

The claim for the worth of a person is made meaningful through a Christological person based narrative. These may not be the only beliefs that could possibly give meaning to the worth claim of a person. The distinctiveness of Christian theology for establishing dignity is that in Christology, a theology of human rights is person-centred, and therefore particularly well suited for an educational project that is defined by a moral purpose of learning for and in the human person. This moral purpose is expressed through the phrase for the dignity of the human person. It seeks to inculcate values, influence moral decision-making and human behaviour. These moral features are contextualised by the intrinsic worth of the person, a being beloved of God, and the necessity to respond to that worth so that the person may flourish.

Soulen and Woodhead place human rights on a divine foundation, rejecting the basis suggested in Kantian thinking. Those scholars view the relationship between religion and human rights as one in which rights are derived from divine commands or a universal moral law. They locate the source of human rights in something other than the inherent worth, the sacredness of individual human beings themselves. Amesbury and Newlands suggest that this is inadequate, '[I]nsofar as they place the object of moral respect somewhere outside human beings themselves, these accounts are better suited to talk of duties than to talk of inherent rights. Respect for human beings is rendered a by-product of respect for something "higher".' (2008, p.56) This is precisely what Soulen and Woodhead and others do.

### Catholic theologies for human rights and dignity

Contemporary Catholic theology, as articulated in the Vatican II teachings, and the writings of Pope John Paul II provide sources of Christian support for human rights and dignity. In *Dignitatis humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, the Roman Catholic Church declares:

A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man and this has inspired a search into the sacred tradition and doctrine of the Church, the treasury out of which the Church continually brings forth new things that are in harmony with the things that are old. (Paul VI 1965, p.1)

Much of this draws from the belief of *imago dei* in early Christian writers. St Ireneus (2nd century – 202 CE) writes 'For the glory of God is a living man' (*Against Heresies* Book 4, Chapter 20,7, in Robert & Donaldson 1971). Later, Lactantius (240-320 CE), the Christian apologist, spoke of the dignity that humans have as part of

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God's creation when he states that God has made humankind as a sacred animal, (Divine Institutes 6.20, in Robert & Donaldson 1971, p.187). This status conferred duties and responsibilities on others. He places restrictions on the killing of humans including murder, war or infant exposure. Human dignity is equated with sanctity; a special, holy thing that must be protected, irrespective of the person's action, behaviour or social standing. Respecting others is not purely a matter of obedience to God's law, but a response to the worth of the person. Clement of Alexander (160-215 CE), Gregory the Wonderworker (213-270 CE) and John Chrysostom (347-407 CE) believed human beings are reborn in the image of Christ, through God's redemptive power and through life in the Spirit via the practice of Christian virtue (Soulen & Woodhead 2006, p.5). The Church fathers (for example, Origen (185-254 CE), St. Irenaeus (2nd century – 202 CE), St. John Chrysostom (347-407 CE) and St. Basil of Caesaria Cappadocia (329-379 CE) maintain a universalistic perspective and they argue that all human beings possess reason, freedom and immortality (Erhueh 1987). Human beings are rational animals and immortal by virtue of being sons of god (Ibid. p.36). Miguel writes, 'Saint Leo the Great classes dignity as an ontological category, without moral content. This allows him to sustain that the Man "is born" worthy (würdig, dignus) and all the human beings from that perspective share the "same" or "equal" dignity.' (Miguel 2002, p.4). This early Church thought provides a backdrop for contemporary Catholic orientation towards dignity and rights.

David Hollenbach's book on human rights in the Catholic tradition, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* (1979) traces the beginnings of the emphasis on dignity and rights in Leo XIII's encyclicals through John XXIII's writing at the time of Vatican II. The language of the dignity of the person and rights is central in Catholic thinking (Ibid.; Ruston 2004) and is not an abstract or ethereal reality but is realized in concrete conditions of personal, social, economic, and political life.' (Hollenbach 1979, p.68). It is closely aligned to the notion of dignity in the UDHR. Murray noted that the Vatican council statements, 'are programmatic for the future. From now on, the Church defines her mission in the temporal order in terms of the realization of human dignity, the promotion of the rights of man, the growth of the human family towards unity, and the sanctification of the secular activities of this world.' (1966, p.601) The Second Vatican Council's work on religious freedom was founded on dignity. Murray writes, 'the Council declares that the right "has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. The right is therefore inalienable"?' (1967, p.5) Freedom and dignity, key elements of Kantian philosophical thinking, are here expressed in distinctive but compatible terms, as part of the wider recognition of the importance of these ideas in understanding human rights.

John Paul II, like Soulen and Woodhead, rejects Nietzsche's attack on rationality and morality. In *Fides et Ratio* he says the rejection of objective truth is an attack on the grounding of human dignity (John Paul II 1998, p. 90.iii), whereby issues of justice and human rights become matters of social convention rather than necessary extensions in the realization of human dignity. The absolutisation of freedom thus fosters an individualistic ethos wherein each individual possesses 'his or her own truth' (John Paul II 1993, pp.35 & 41). Once freedom has been uprooted from all objectivity, it alone becomes the source of values (John Paul II 1993, paras 32, 48, 84 & 106) granting people the right to determine what is good and evil (John Paul II 1993, paras 35 & 51) and undermining any basis for personal rights commonly held by all.

However the criticism is that dignity is becoming attributive, not that it is derivative of an external foundation. In *Veritatis Splendor* (John Paul II 1993) he describes this as freedom exalted to the point of idolatry (para. 32 & para. 48) gaining 'a primacy over truth', so that truth itself comes to be a creation of freedom. This endangers dignity and the inherent value that it has. In Pope John Paul II's reflection on the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:14-32) in his 1980 letter on God's mercy, *Dives in Misericordia* he refers to the tragedy of lost dignity by the son who wastes his inheritance and finds himself in circumstances below that of his Father's servants. Here moral dignity is a function of man's faithfulness to God. However the man continues to be his Father's son, as Williams suggests, 'That is while moral dignity was truly lost through sin, there is another more rudimentary, ontological dignity that remains.' (Williams 2005, p.157) Elsewhere John Paul II describes this as personal



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dignity, 'Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, and God himself pledges to guarantee this.' (1995a, p.9) On October 5, 1995, he addressed the United Nations General Assembly, repeating a message he gave the UN on October 2, 1979. He said that the quest for freedom 'has its basis in those universal rights which human beings enjoy by the very fact of their humanity.' (1995b) From this survey, Williams, like Ruston and Hollenbach, comes to a different view from that of MacIntyre, Rowland and Pell on the use of liberal language about rights and dignity, and John Paul II when he was Karol Wojtyla wrote in *Love and Responsibility* of a notion of dignity that is inherent and not derivative (Wojtyla 1982, p.27) in Kantian language quoting his maxim 'act always in such a way that the other person is the end and not merely the instrument of your action' (Ibid. p. 28) He indicates that the principle is the foundation for human rights and freedoms, 'This principle, thus formulated lies at the basis of all the human freedoms, properly understood, and especially the freedom of conscience.' (Ibid.)

This theological development presents an understanding of dignity that is both contextualized within a Christian tradition, while at the same time is foundational in a manner that aligns itself closely to the conceptualisation in the UDHR. It presents an example of how resources have been identified within a religious tradition that can support the moral force of the foundational nature of dignity. For some it is a step too far. Ernest L. Fortin is concerned with what he calls, 'John Paul II's unprecedented insistence on the more or less Kantian notion of the dignity that is said to accrue to the human being, not because of any actual conformity with the moral law, but for no other reason than that he is an 'autonomous subject of moral decision' (Fortin 1991, p.229). Fortin sees dignity as contingent on the fulfillment of prior duties, a dignity that is to be achieved and which could be lost. Fundamentally Fortin believes that contemporary Catholic teaching is discontinuous with pre-modern teaching. Pre-modern Christian ethics were ethics of duty, not an ethic of rights.

Against Fortin, Williams has argued that the human rights tradition and conception of dignity expressed in recent Church teachings and the work of John Paul II can be based in the Catholic Church's pre-modern tradition. Fortin is drawing on one of the traditions of dignity found in the early Christian sources, but he seems to not recognize that there are other traditions of dignity, such as ontological or inherent dignity that is associated with the *Imago Dei* doctrine. Williams also notes that Fortin fails to observe John Paul II's criticisms of theories of moral autonomy in *Veritatis Splendor*, 35-41 (Williams 2005, p.154 note 19 and p.155) and also Aquinas' and Bonaventure's understanding that dignity is a mark of personhood, 'not an addendum pasted onto personhood – it is essential to the very concept of personhood.' (Ibid. p.155) Pope John XXIII expresses this when he writes, 'A man who has fallen into error does not cease to be a man. He never forfeits his personal dignity; and that is something that must always be taken into account.' (John XXIII 1963, p.158)

### Concluding Remarks

Maritain, contributing as a member of the group gathered by UNESCO to consider the questions of dignity at the time of the drafting of the UDHR, expressed before either took place in 1944, 'The dignity of the human person? The expression means nothing if it does not satisfy that ... the human person has the right to be respected, is the subject of rights, possesses rights. These are the things that are owed to man because of the very fact that he is a man.' (Maritain 1943, p.37) It is on dignity that Maritain thinks a multiple justification approach to human rights can be sustained:

I am quite certain that my way of justifying belief in the rights of man and the ideal of liberty, equality, fraternity is the only way with a firm foundation in truth. This does not prevent me from being in agreement on these practical convictions with people who are certain that their way of justifying them, entirely different from mine or opposed to mine ... is equally the only way founded upon truth. (UNESCO 1948, pp.10-11)

At the heart of these theological perspectives on human rights is the extent to which Christian thought should be framed mainly by the account of the fall, human sin and redemption, and whether there is an inherent goodness that justifies human rights or an attribute goodness, that comes from God. Christian thought could be framed by the goodness of Divinely created thing of worth, made in the image and likeness of God, the importance of God becoming human so that humanity could become divine, and the centrality of a Christological or pneumatological understanding that sees the divine in the human person, what so ever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do to me. Christology presents the possibility of a Christ centred human rights, an orientation for the other, grounded in a belief that it is out treatment of the other that is our treatment of Christ. Incarnation and divination or theosis. To be Christian is to be Christ like, to seek to be self sacrificing for the other.

The second deciding feature of this theological debate relates to the extent to which the recontextualisation of discourse around dignity and human rights is theologically justified (as in the theologies of interruption) or theologically dubious (as in the claims that theology has been corrupted by liberalism).

The existence of these distinct theological threads explain how Church schools that are human rights respecting can both be considered to be authentically Christian and alarmingly secular, depending on the theological framework adopted.

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