

Globethics Repository

The logo for Globethics, featuring the word "Globethics" in white sans-serif font on a blue rectangular background.

Mission, Human Rights, and religious freedom : a relationship of light and shadow : historical, ecumenical, and interreligious perspectives

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository.
More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy
of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Werner, Dietrich
Publisher	Globethics.net;World Council of Churches
Rights	2022 WCC Publications & Globethics.net;Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International
Download date	2026-07-16 22:49:41
Item License	http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4260412

Mission, Human Rights, and Religious Freedom —A Relationship of Light and Shadow: Historical, Ecumenical, and Interreligious Perspectives¹

Dietrich Werner

“Human rights are not the ‘context’ of our mission but its very ‘text’ and the heart of the freedom-bringing Gospel. ‘Human rights’ is not just the slogan of the political activist; it sums up the Christian missionary imperative.”² Passionate pleas like this one from the former general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Emilio Castro, are not found too often within Protestant missiology publications. At first glance, the impression prevails that Christian mission and the discourse and proper understanding of human rights and religious freedom have been rather distant from each other, if not meeting at all.

For superficial first viewing, the picture seems to confirm that mission and human rights have been alien to each other for long periods. An entry on human rights is missing in some of the older German dictionaries on Christian mission,³ some major monographs on Christian mission history do

1. This is an updated and shortened version of an earlier essay in German language on „Mission und Menschenrechte“ in : Studienband Menschenrechte und Entwicklung, EKD-KED, Hamburg 1995, also published in: Dietrich Werner, *Wiederentdeckung einer Missionarischen Kirche*, Hamburg 2005, p. 405-428. This footnote should not be numbered but indicated with an asterisk *

2. Emilio Castro, “Editorial: Human Rights and Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 56:263 (1977), 216.

3. See z.B. H. Rzepkowski, “Lexikon der Mission. Geschichte. Theologie, Ethnologie, Styria Verlag 1992,” in Stephen Neill and Niels-Peter Moritzen, *Lexikon zur Weltmission, Wuppertal-Erlangen*; 1975 can be found on page 347. Under human rights there is only a brief reference to the WCC Commission on International Affairs and Religious Freedom. An exception is the lexicon of mission-theological basic terms by K. Müller and Th. Sundermeier, eds., *Lexikon Missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe* (Berlin: Reimer, 1987). However, there is no contribution by a mission scientist, but there is an article by social ethicist Wolfgang Huber (270ff).

not provide a major essay on the topic,⁴ and a major German monography on mission and human rights is still missing—in striking contrast to the situation of research and publications in the Anglo-Saxon world.⁵ This will confirm the overall and much cited broader historical assessment that, by and large, a clearer and systematic formulation of human rights was an achievement of modern times, often fought for in opposition with dominating Christian churches rather than with Christian churches as vanguards of religious freedom. A deeper understanding of religious freedom and human rights historically resulted from the historical processes of struggling with attempts for renewal after the confessional wars in Europe in the 17th century and the aftermath of two devastating world wars in the same continent, which led to a process of defining essential human rights on international levels only after the Second World War.⁶

A second glance, however, into the history of Christian mission and the interrelated history of global ecumenism, which resulted from the International Missionary Council and its integration into the WCC in 1961, reveals differing results. These lead us to be more cautious in terms of fast and generalizing statements on the interrelation between mission, human rights, and religious freedom.

Even with superficial knowledge of ecumenical history, the vivid ecumenical debate on human rights⁷ before and after the famous international consultation in St Pölten (Austria) in 1974 as well as the WCC assembly in Nairobi in 1975 is widely known. It has initiated a lot of resonance and publications in the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in

4. See Stephen Neill, *Geschichte der christlichen Mission* (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1994).

5. See Max L. Stackhouse, *Human Rights and the Global Mission of the Church* (Cambridge, MA: Theological Institute, 1985).

6. See Klaus Schäfer: "Menschenrechte—ein Thema für die Kirchen der Welt," in *Jahrbuch Mission 2005*, 9f: "Man wird sagen müssen, daß die Gültigkeit der Menschenrechte auch gegen die Kirchen erstritten werden mußte, wobei man allerdings unter den Großkirchen und den Freikirchen in historischer Perspektive auch unterschiedliche Grade der Reserve, Ablehnung oder der differenzierten Zustimmung gegenüber den Menschenrechten beobachten kann."

7. See Ulrich Scheuner, "Die Menschenrechte in der ökumenischen Diskussion," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 24 (1975), 152–62.

Germany (EMW)⁸ and in resources from regional mission boards⁹ as well as in later international conferences.¹⁰ The confrontations of churches in the global South, particularly in Latin America and Africa, with dictatorial regimes in the post-colonial decades, have left clear marks on an intensified ecumenical dialogue on the understanding of human rights in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Thus, a first tentative conclusion concerning the interrelationship between mission, human rights, and religious freedom cannot be properly summarized with the general statement “Christian mission defends human rights”¹¹ or with the blunt and too often recited other extreme: “Christian mission has violated basic human rights throughout all its history.” The interrelation is too complex to be summarized with easy generalizations. Certainly, there are traditions within Christian mission history, particularly those types of Christian mission which were built on a strategic alliance with colonial, state, or majority powers, which have gravely violated our contemporary understanding of human rights.

It is not difficult to show how much of Christian mission, in its various historical contexts, has been part of and subject or even captive to the spirit of the time. But it is at the same time productive and encouraging to look into those parts of Christian mission history which provide counterevidence to the general prejudice that Christian mission has been an ally of injustice and

8. See the important EMW publication on Rogate-Sonntag der Weltmission 1978, “Gott gibt uns Rechte, treten wir dafür ein!” Contributions on the topic of world mission and human rights, EMW-Hamburg 1978, with the first two contextual publications “Human Rights in Asia” and “Human Rights in Africa” (series “Weltmission heute”).

9. See the important Votum des Berliner Missionswerkes, which reflects experiences with partner churches in South Africa, South Korea, and Taiwan, among others: *Mission und Menschenrechte. Ein Wort des BMW zu aktuellen Problemen seiner Arbeit* (Berlin: 1984); Peter Saladin, *Der weltweite Kampf für die Menschenrechte – eine Aufgabe für Christen. Texte und Dokumente Nr. 1* (April 1979) (Basler Mission), from the Catholic side; Alfons Brüntrup, “Menschenrechte – ein Thema für Theologie und Kirche?” in *Mission-Korrespondenz* 3/85; *Mission im Dienst der Menschenrechte* (Immensee: Verlag der Immenseer Missionare, 1986).

10. In the Internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Missionstheologen [International Working Group of Missionary Theologians] (IAMS), there have been several attempts to talk about mission and human rights. See “Christian Mission and Human transformation: Report of the Sixth IAMS Conference,” Harare, 8-14 January 1985, 70–72, and *Mission Studies* 1:2 (1984), 13–17.

11. For the Catholic discussion, see Jochen Erlenberg, “Von Las Casas bis Kardinal Sin. Mission verteidigt die Menschenrechte,” *Mission aktuell* Heft 5 (1988), 26ff.

colonialism. An alternative history of missionary engagement for the rights of Indigenous people, for freedom of thought and cultural traditions, exists as well. Often, the general historical assessment is shared that for a long time, theology and churches on the European continent kept a critically reserved attitude toward the understanding of human rights and religious freedom—particularly as much of the later human rights discourse was inspired by concepts from the French Revolution and based on certain concepts of natural law and autonomous reasoning, which remained alien to much of the earlier traditions of Protestantism.¹²

However, striking voices within early Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian mission history developed a genuine and initial understanding of human rights and freedom of religion which was articulated many decades before the international discourse on human rights came to its culmination in the decades following the Second World War.

In the following paragraphs on *missiological perspectives*, we will first gather some historical evidence to correct the often heard one-sided generalization which would claim a general abstinence of Christian mission from any understanding of human rights and Christian freedom. This is to contribute some historical perspectives on the interrelationship between the debate on Christian mission, human rights, and religious freedom.

Second, we will highlight some *ecumenical perspectives*, that is, leading motives in the early post–Second World War institutionalized phase of the ecumenical movement, as this was a formative phase for much of the conceptual debate on human rights and freedom of religion. Certain relationships exist between the ecumenical concept of *missio Dei*, the emerging understanding of a secular state, and the concept of human rights, including freedom of religion, in this phase.

Finally, we will shed some light on *interreligious perspectives*, that is, the interrelationship between the concept of human rights, religious freedom, and interreligious dialogue which determines much of the later phases of dialogue on human rights and freedom of religion toward the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

12. See Huber's brief historical conclusion: "Kirche und Theologie auf dem europäischen Kontinent (stehen) dem Gedanken der Menschenrechte lange Zeit eher reserviert gegenüber; auch für die frühe Missionsbewegung bilden sie deshalb keinen kritischen Maßstab." "Menschenrechte," in *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe*, 271.

Christian Mission, Human Rights, and Religious Freedom: Some Missiological Perspectives

Beyond a doubt, parts at least of what can be called the history of imperial Christian mission (mission from above, with support by state force, coercion, and violence) can be read as a gigantic list of transgressions against human dignity and freedom on the side of Christian mission. This could be the Spanish Conquest in Latin America; the war against the Herero in Namibia, in which the Rhenish Mission was involved; or large parts of the French mission in Congo. It is not without historical evidence that for many people, after the Pope's famous statements from 1452 and 1493 for the Spanish-Portuguese mission—which authorized the kings of both countries, due to “apostolic entitlement and authorization,” to seize and “take into possession all heathen people and to subjugate the Indigenous People into eternal slavery”—the terms “mission” and “slavery” sounded more synonymous than “mission” and “individual rights of freedom.” However, even referring to this dark chapter of Christian mission history, the outstanding and courageous example of Bartolomé de las Casas should not be forgotten.¹³ His manifest from 1546 reminding the bishops to treat the “Natives” with respect, to defend their dignity and to stand up for their liberation from tyranny can be regarded—although historically not successful in his time—as a key contribution to later attempts to argue in favour of equality and justice for all human beings.¹⁴

For later historical periods, in several historical research publications on the origins of human rights, the two major traditions which have contributed to an understanding later consolidated are usually mentioned: the specific Christian and religious traditions which culminate for the first time in the first American constitution in 1776 (with their Virginia Declaration of Rights, the first mention of the terminology of “human rights”); and the secularist-humanistic tradition based on concepts of the natural law as resulting from

13. As early as the 16th century, Las Casas developed ideas about the equality of all peoples and the rights of the Indians. See, among others, Fernando Mires, *Im Namen des Kreuzes. Der Genozid an den Indianern während der spanischen Eroberung: theologische und politische Diskussion* (Fribourg: Exodus, 1989), esp. the chapter on “Rationalismus und Egalitarismus von Las Casas,” 166ff; see also “Bartolomé de Las Casas – der Vater der Indios,” in Helmut Höfling, *Gebet hin und lehret alle Völker. Missionare von Las Casas bis Albert Schweitzer* (München, Econ, 1982), 31–72.

14. See “Bartolomé de las Casas,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolom%C3%A9_de_las_Casas.

the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, 1789.¹⁵ Both have their distinct role in the development of the concept of human rights. For the American context, certainly the leading role of the Free Church traditions should be mentioned. Having had to defend their rights to dissent, the dissenters brought concepts of freedom of conscience and freedom of confession into new approaches of social and political thinking. Members of the Free Church, of Calvinist and Anabaptist traditions, formulated these new concepts within their “voluntary associations” to safeguard their acclaimed “divine rights” for self-organization, freedom to assemble, and public meetings for proclaiming their faith.¹⁶ How the heritage of liberal concepts from the Enlightenment emphasizing equal human dignity of each person interrelated with the concepts from Puritan circles according to which all human beings are equally sinful before God has been documented and researched extensively.¹⁷ Crucial for the development of the concepts of human rights was the interaction of Free Church traditions in England and America, with the anti-slave trade movement in the 19th century. Nonconformists, those who stood in opposition to the state church tradition, were leading circles in the campaign against slavery. The Quakers, a religious tradition discriminated against in Europe, formed the first Committee for Abolition of

15. See Wolfgang Huber and Heinz Eduard Tödt, *Menschenrechte. Perspektiven einer menschlichen Welt* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1977).

16. “These Liberal ideas (of the equal dignity of each person) had an enormous impact on American Protestantism. American history is peppered with a series of enthusiastic revivals, awakenings, and mass movements designed to induce religious experience. The source of much populism in America is precisely in the Lockean Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards and the Liberal neo-Puritanism of Baptist and Methodist revivalists. Subsequent attempts to seek and save every individual by evoking that kind of experience—in which one would be given religious assurance, be brought to moral rectitude, join in the covenanted community, witness to the universal moral law, and become a responsible citizen—have permanently shaped the American ethos.” Max L. Stackhouse, *Creeds, Society and Human Rights: Study in Three Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 72.

17. “The Liberal-Puritan synthesis has brought about a pluralistic society centred in ecclesial and voluntary associations. This society presumes that Judeo-Christian traditions are central sources of meaning, needing understanding of human reason. ‘Freedom,’ ‘equality of opportunity,’ ‘multiple political parties,’ ‘the limited state,’ ‘separation of powers,’ ‘government under law,’ and the ‘relative autonomy of ‘corporations’”—legitimated by the ‘agreement of the people’—emerge from these foundations. The freedom of religion and the right of religions to influence persons and the body politic from an inviolable social space are the basis of these developments. The hallmarks of ‘human rights’ are rooted in these fundamental presumptions” (Stackhouse, *Creeds*, 76).

the Slave Trade in 1778.¹⁸ Evangelicals in England (William Wilberforce and others) played a leading role in promoting the Abolition of Slavery Bill in the British colonial empire. Some mission societies on the continent, such as the Basel Mission, joined the anti-slavery campaign explicitly.

Missiologically speaking, we can observe two key theological motives which come up again and again within Protestant mission history, paving the way for emerging concepts of human rights and religious liberty at a later stage:

- One is the emphasis put on the concept of God having created each human being in his own image (the *imago Dei* concept); if all are created in God's image, nobody can be discriminated against in referring to some kind of inferior status or even non-human status (an example can be amply studied in early Protestant Indian mission history in how missionaries dealt with cultural practices such as dowry and *sathi*, discrimination against *dalits*, the role of women in education, etc.).
- The second motive can be understood as an extension of one of the core concepts of the Reformation itself, namely, the emphasis on the need for each individual to have access to the biblical tradition in his or her own language. The *sola scriptura* principle has had an implicit egalitarian dynamic, as it recognizes and demands that the Bible be translated into all existing human languages. This, in essence, also includes the recognition of cultural traditions and rights for each individual to have access to education and appropriate means to learn writing and reading. The emphasis on Bible translation and education, which in turn led to the founding and spread of primary and secondary schools in Protestant mission territories worldwide, had a profound impact on the self-esteem, the emerging sense of value of Indigenous traditions and cultures, and later even the formation of an anti-colonial attitude and early nationalist movements of young Christian intellectuals in several Asian and African countries.¹⁹

18. Klaus Schäfer, "Menschenrechte," 11.

19. See, in detail, Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), esp. ch. 3 ("Vernacularization and Westernization"), 123: "Missionary translation was instrumental in the emergence of indigenous resistance to colonialism. Local Christians acquired from the vernacular translations confidence in the indigenous cause. While the colonial system represented a worldwide economic and military order, mission represented vindication for the vernacular. . ."

It is remarkable to realize that German mission history—although certainly influenced in broad terms by the spirit of its time, marked by cultural superiority feelings, the concept of combining Christianization and civilization, and colonial mentalities—provided some striking early examples of a campaign against colonial subjugation of Africans and an emerging concept of Indigenous human rights. This is worth mentioning and remembering here as one example for two key theological arguments.

It seems to be less known and written about that toward the end of the 19th century there was already an almost self-evident talk about and terminology of “universal human rights” (*allgemeine Menschenrechte*) in some Protestant German mission circles—more than half a century before a legally binding formulation of human rights within the United Nations system was emerging after the Second World War.

An example is the striking plea which the mission’s director, Plath, from the Berlin Mission Society presented in 1886 in his official “desires and proposals how German colonial administrations should treat the natives,” as he vehemently argued that

the newly beginning German colonists should by all means respect the common agreed principles of fidelity and honesty, of the respect of the universal human rights, of impartiality as well as of impartial distribution of similar rights to all natives as well as any strangers which have come to them, the protection of the rights of laborers over against the interests of landlords and colonial administrators, and put this strongly on their agenda, i.e. not only should they proclaim this by their mouth, but put this into practice without hesitation.²⁰

20. G. Plath (Berlin), “Aus der Erfahrung der Missionsarbeit geschöpfte Wünsche und Ratschläge, wie die deutschen Kolonialverwaltungen die Eingeborenen zu behandeln haben,” *AMZ* 13 (1886), 62ff, 68f.: See, in German, Es sollen “die neu beginnenden deutschen Kolonisatoren entschlossen sein (müssen), die als richtig erkannten Grundsätze ‘punktlioser Redlichkeit,’ des *Respektes vor den allgemeinen Menschenrechten*, der Unparteilichkeit, des von allen Rückhaltsgedanken freien Zuteilens gleichen Rechtes an die Eingeborenen sowie an die zu ihnen gekommenen Fremden, des bewußten Schützens der eingeborenen Arbeiter gegenüber den Plantagenbesitzern und Verwaltern und ähnliches auf ihre Fahnen zu schreiben, das will besagen, solches alles nicht nur zu proklamieren sondern es in strenger Gewissenhaftigkeit und mit deutscher Treue auch in der Praxis des Lebens auszuführen.”

It is obvious from further readings that this embryonic stage of the concept of human rights is marked by a general philanthropical-humanistic motive of the Protestant Christian mission movement but is also combined with the claim to contribute to a strategy of cultural uplifting for the Indigenous populations which Gustav Warneck had earlier formulated.²¹ Thus, in early Protestant mission, the emphasis put on human rights is not yet a contradiction to the colonial mission mindset but still is understood as part and parcel of Protestant cultural upliftment, as understood within the colonial framework. Human rights at this stage have not yet become a distinct and clear component of Christian mission work, as became a reality in the periods after the Second World War. There is, however, clear evidence that the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* and the principle of the *imago Dei* as imparted to all human beings, together with a universalist tendency within the Pietist tradition, have paved the way toward an understanding of the equality of all human beings and philanthropy within early Protestant mission.

The most explicit and interesting conceptual contribution to the early understanding of human rights can be found in the continental missions conference in 1901 in Bremen, in which Julius Schreiber from the Barmen Mission Society developed his keynote address on "The Human Rights of the Natives in the Colonies." Equality, brotherhood, and freedom of all human beings are here regarded as genuine Christian ideals, although on the other hand one can still also sense a clear hesitation to draw too direct and straightforward political consequences from the Christian concept of human rights leading to any legal or state-related framework to protect these rights. It was stated bluntly in 1901:

The concept of human rights owes its existence to Christianity. It stems from the two key truths propagated by Christianity, first of all the doctrine of all human beings created by God and secondly by the doctrine that in Christ salvation is made accessible and real for all human beings without any distinction. From this it results quite clearly that we have to view and to treat all human beings, from whatever race or colour as fellow human beings, i.e., as co-

21. "Indem die Mission die Heiden zu Christen macht, macht sie sie auch erst recht zu Menschen, und indem sie ihnen das Himmelreich pflanzt, pflanzt sie auch die wahre Kultur. Die Kultur ist nicht der Hauptzweck der Mission, aber sie ist die notwendige Folge, eine Zugabe, ein Nebenwerk, ein von dem reichen Tische des Evangelii abfallender Erdensegen." Gustav Warneck, *Die gegenseitigen Beziehungen zwischen der modernen Mission und der Cultur. Auch eine Kulturkampfstudie* (Gütersloh, 1879).

heirs of salvation and brothers in Christ. However the Holy Gospel has not drawn any immediate consequences out of this and has not followed that all those who turn to Christianity should immediately free all their slaves; rather the Christian Gospel has brought the general principle of human love into this world, in order that this principle becomes operative and transforms all institutions which are in contradiction with the love of God.²²

What follows is a radical refutation of the violation of human rights as seen within the practices of German colonial governments in various parts of the world. Schreiber is appealing to mission boards to understand their role as advocate for human rights of the “natives.” It is interesting to see that this courageous plea already had to defend itself in that historical context against the accusation of having fallen prey to “humanistic idealism” and that “we do not want to demand things from the colonial government which are simply impossible or not justifiable by scripture.”²³ But, on the other hand, German mission circles at this stage had developed a list of key components of human rights and formulated their understanding succinctly: mention is made of equal treatment of each human being, the right to education and progress in civilization, protection against discrimination and exploitation, a similar legal position of all natives, a respect for existing cultural traditions and customs, and the right of land property and for Indigenous languages. The right for

22. J. Schreiber, “Die Menschenrechte der Eingeborenen in den Kolonien, Kontinentale Missions-Konferenz, Bremen 14.-17. Mai 1901,” *Buchhandlung der Berliner evangelischen Missionsgesellschaft* 43 (1901), 13.

23. See ebd. S. 23, wo es dazu heißt: “daß das Christenum zwar die prinzipielle Gleichheit aller Menschen vor Gott klar lehrt, aber keineswegs daraus etwa die Folgerung zieht, daß nun auch sofort volle Gleichheit und Gleichstellung eingeführt werden müßte.”

choosing their own religious identity, however, is not yet mentioned explicitly in this list.²⁴

As a consequence of these recommendations from Bremen, the German mission committee was asked to form a Continuation Committee for Safeguarding the Rights of Native People and launched several petitions, which were sent to various German colonial governments.²⁵

We cannot follow the historical developments in more detail here, except to draw attention to the fact that it was during the Saxonian mission conference in Halle in 1902 that a key lecture of Alexander Merensky (Berliner Missionsgesellschaft) again pointed to the need to reconfirm “basic rights of natives”: not only from an individual understanding, but also including their collective rights.²⁶ However, at the same time, it alluded to rather conservative

24. ebd. S. 24. See the recommendations in literal quotations:

- daß “die Eingeborenen aller Kolonien . . . eben als Menschen anzuerkennen und also auch menschlich zu behandeln sind”;
- daß “namens der Menschenrechte . . . für ihre Erziehung und Hebung nach allen Seiten hin ausreichend Sorge getroffen werden muß”;
- daß im Blick auf ihre Arbeit “Vorschriften zu erlassen sind, um die Eingeborenen gegen Bedrückung und Ausbeutung zu schützen”;
- daß “von Rechts wegen alle Eingeborenen ohne Unterschied in die Wohlthaten einer geordneten rechtlichen Stellung eingeschlossen sein (sollen)”;
- daß “die Menschenrechte der Eingeborenen darin zu respektieren sind, daß man ihre Sitten und Gebräuche..so viel wie möglich ruhig bestehen läßt”
- daß die Bevölkerung der Kolonien einen eigenen Anspruch auf Landbesitz und das Recht auf die eigene Sprache behalten muß.” Abschließend wird sogar die “Bildung eines ständigen Komites zur Wahrung der Menschenrechte der Eingeborenen von seiten der Missionsleute und anderer Menschenfreunde” gefordert.

25. See den Bericht über die 10. “Kontinentale Missionskonferenz in Bremen,” *AMZ* 28 (1901), 342ff, at 344.

26. See the following:

- “Wir verlangen für die Eingeborenen das Recht auf Besitz. Wir verlangen deshalb, daß man ihnen ihren Besitz an Land, Häusern und Herden nicht raube . . .”
- “Wir verlangen für die Eingeborenen das Recht des freien Erwerbes und sind deshalb gegen Einführung direkten gewaltsamen Arbeitszwanges. . . .”
- “Wir verlangen als Menschenrecht für die Eingeborenen auch das Recht auf Bildung. . . .”
- “Wir verlangen auch Schutz der Eingeborenen gegen Gewalthat aller Art. Wir verlangen, daß man ihre Rechtsbegriffe und Sitten schont, daß man ihnen nicht ohne weiteres unsere Gesetze aufdrängt, die ihren Anschauungen und Bedürfnissen gar nicht entsprechen. Wir verlangen auch Schonung ihrer Sprache. . . .” ebd. 168ff.

restrictions in understanding human rights based on the traditional Lutheran two kingdom theory.²⁷

It would be worth doing a distinct follow-up study to see what has happened to the general committee for the rights of the Natives as recommended by the German Mission Committee from Halle in 1902.

It is clear, however, that the embryonic form of the (German) Protestant mission discourse on human rights in the context of protest against forms of oppression and mistreatment with the colonial regimes by and large did not yet entail any thinking or discourse on the issue of freedom of religion before the Second World War. The addition of the dimension of religious freedom to the early discourse on human rights within the missionary movement is due to two major, although quite different, contexts. One is the Asian context of Christian mission, which was discussed during the Tambaram conference in 1938; the other is the East and West European confrontation with totalitarianism in the encounter with fascism and communism, which occurred in the second half of the 20th century and was discussed in the period leading to the assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. This will be elaborated in the second major part of this chapter.

Mission, Human Rights, and Religious Freedom: Ecumenical Perspectives

Apart from the role which the emerging debate on human rights has played in regional mission boards and national mission conferences, the internationalization of Christian mission itself had an impact on the understanding and dynamics of the discussion on human rights and religious freedom. The coming together of Christian mission networks in the 19th and early 20th centuries provided the fundamental background for the emergence of the international ecumenical movement. Christian mission included the concept of the universality of the gospel and its relevance for all human

27. See die Verteidigung Merenskys gegenüber dem erneuten Vorwurf der "Humanitätsduselei": "Die Feinde der Eingeborenen suchen häufig jedes Eintreten für diese Leute dadurch zu verdächtigen und leichter Hand abzuweisen, daß sie uns unterscheiden, wir träten törichterweise für gesellschaftliche und politische Gleichberechtigung der Eingeborenen mit den Europäern ein. Das ist aber keineswegs der Fall. Wir vertreten die Gleichberechtigung aller Menschen im Reiche Gottes, aber nicht im Reiche dieser Welt. In letzterem mögen Rang- und Standesunterschiede bestehen mit ihren verschiedenen Ansprüchen und Rechten." Merensky, "Die Mission der Anwalt der Eingeborenen," *AMZ* 29 (1902), 153ff, at 168.

people as a key conviction in its DNA for a long time. It is therefore not surprising, but a consequence of the unfolding of the concept of mission, that the international movement became a major arena for highlighting human rights. Major impulses in this direction were articulated during the world mission conferences organized by the International Missionary Council (founded in 1921). Increasingly, one can observe a gradual widening of the concept of human rights in this process. The three essential challenges of the international missionary movement in the period before the Second World War in which this gradual widening of the concept of human rights and religious freedom can be observed are:

- the debate on Christian mission and racism
- the debate on Christian mission and the consequences of industrialization in countries of the South and its impact on the understanding of human work
- the emergence of new concepts of a secular state which ought to allow for free practice of all religious traditions, particularly in Asia

At the world mission conference of Jerusalem 1928, we see explicit references to an emerging new understanding of human rights, particularly in the session on racism (Section IV) and in the sessions dealing with industrialization in Asia and Africa (Section V). The struggle against racism in IMC circles was deeply indebted to the anti-slavery movement of the 18th and 19th centuries,²⁸ which was brought about and spread in Europe through the Clapham Sect and its spiritual leader, Lord William Wilberforce (later also the broad anti-slavery campaign of Cardinal Lavigerie).²⁹ Through close connections between the movement of the Abolitionists with circles

28. "Grundsätzlich war der missionarische und kolonisatorische Imperialismus um 1800 von einer neuen, dritten Kraft umgeben, der es, unabhängig von den divergierenden Interessen der Handelsmächte und Missionen, primär um die Beseitigung menschenunwürdiger Behandlung der Eingeborenen durch die Weißen und Araber ging und die darum erstmals aktiv gegen Sklaverei und Sklavenhandel kämpfte. Die Geschichte des angelsächsischen Abolitionismus gehört schon darum in eine Geschichte des Christentums, weil sich seine Promotoren von christlichen Antrieben geleitet wußten, auch wenn sie zu deren praktischer Durchsetzung sich nicht mehr, wie die ähnlichen Anstrengungen spanischer Missionare des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts an ihre weitentfernte Ordensoberleitung oder den Papst wandten, sondern - wie damals auch an den König - nur noch an die politischen Instanzen ihres Landes." In Karl Hammer, *Weltmission und Kolonialismus* (München, 1978), ch. 4, "Philanthropie und Antisklavereibewegung," 41ff, at 43.

29. See Horst Gründer, *Christliche Mission und Imperialismus* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1982), 357ff.

of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), these early concepts of human rights for all also found entry into the ecumenical networks of the IMC, particularly due to the leading influences of the Peace Church traditions from Mennonites and Quakers.³⁰ In the centre of this embryonic concept of human rights, one can find the notion of the “sacredness of personality,” which was understood as integral component of an uncompromising witness for the values of the kingdom of God in society. The Jerusalem 1928 declaration on race conflicts put all its weight on demanding from all Christian churches an uncompromising commitment to the rights of all peoples:

All Christian forces . . . dedicated as they are to prepare for the establishment among all mankind of the Kingdom of God, are bound to work with all their power to remove race prejudice and adverse conditions due to it, *to preserve the rights of peoples*, and to establish educational, religious and other facilities designed *to enable all alike to enjoy equality of social, political and economic opportunity*. The Fatherhood of God and *the sacredness of personality* are vital truths revealed in Christ, which all Christian communities are bound to press into action in all the relationships of life.³¹

Although a distinction is made in the spirit of colonial mentalities between situations of racial balance (two or more races living side by side in the same country) and other contexts with clear dominance of a colonial regime (subject peoples), for countries in which several races are living alongside each other, a clear concept of similar civil rights is demanded, such as for Jerusalem 1928:

To establish the utmost practicable equality in such matters as the right to enter and follow all occupations and professions, the right of freedom of movement and other rights before civil and criminal law, and the obtaining and exercise of the functions of citizenship, subject always to such general legislation as, without discriminating between men on grounds of colour and race, may be necessary to maintain

30. See Schreiber, *Die Menschenrechte der Eingeborenen in den Kolonien*. Schreiber weist darauf hin, daß die Proteste gegen die Sklaverei in Pennsylvania im Jahre 1688 durch Mennoniten und Quaker begannen, bis sie zur Abschaffung der Sklaverei (in Pennsylvania 1780, in England 1804 und 1807) führten (ebd. 16f.); cf. dazu: Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

31. Statement adopted by the Council on Racial Relationships, in *The Christian Mission in the Light of the Race Conflict*, Vol. IV, Jerusalem Meeting of the IMC (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) 237.

the social and economic standards of the community as a whole.³²

Another remarkable attempt to defend and articulate the concept of a common human dignity of all and fundamental rights of human beings as a key criterion for the economic system was formulated in the Jerusalem report on the Impact of Industrialization in Asia and Afrika (Section V):

In particular he [the Christian] will try the social and economic system by three simple, yet fundamental criteria:

1. Christ's teaching as to the sanctity of personality. The sanctity of personality is a fundamental idea of Christian teaching, which is reiterated again and again in the New Testament. . . . In the light of such sayings any form of economic organization which involves the treatment of men primarily as instruments of production, or which sacrifices the opportunity of full personal development which should be the right of every child, is evidently Anti-Christian. Human beings, the New Testament teaches, are not instruments, but ends. In the eyes of God all are of equal and infinite value.
2. Christ's teaching as to brotherhood. The teaching of the New Testament is that all men are brothers, because all men are children of one Father. . . .
3. Christ's teaching as to corporate responsibility. It follows from the emphasis laid by the New Testament upon brotherhood that a Christian society is under an obligation to use every means in its power to bring within the reach of all its members the material, as well as the ethical, conditions of spiritual growth and vitality. . . . All forces therefore which destroy that fellowship—war, economic oppression, the selfish pursuit of profits, the neglect of the immature, the aged, the sick of the weak—are definitely and necessarily in sharp contrast with the spirit of Christianity. . . . The teaching thus briefly indicated makes it clear that the New Testament does not recognize the antithesis frequently emphasized

32. Statement adopted by the Council on Racial Relationships, in *The Christian Mission*, 239.

by later ages between individual and social regeneration . . .³³ One could argue that in this vision of a Christian order of society, in which—based on the traditions of the Social Gospel—also economy and industry were understood to be under the rule of basic Christian values and general ethical criteria, already a plea for the holding together of individual and collective human rights is foreshadowed. However, the continental German reaction over against this Anglo-Saxon trend and vision remained ambivalent, if not hesitant.³⁴

Taking up and building on the achievements of Jerusalem was the next world mission conference in Tambaram in 1937, a significant first encounter of Christian mission with Asian cultures and religious traditions as well as an implicit critical dialogue with forces of aggressive nationalism and totalitarianism in Europe. The conference in Tambaram widened the concept and understanding of human rights by deliberately adding to equality in terms of race and colour as well as equality in terms of practice and access to religious freedom. Whereas, in the previous discourses, the theological reference point often referred to was an anthropocentric one—based on Galatians 3:28 as

33. Statement by the Council: *The Christian Mission in Relation to Industrial Problems in Asia and Africa*, Vol. V, Jerusalem Meeting of the IMC, 181, 183ff.

34. See the interesting assessment (or devaluation) by Martin Schlunk on section 6: “Dabei waren diese Männer (die Hauptreferenten der Sektion über die Rassenproblematik) stark von dem geschichtslosen Denken der amerikanischen Demokratie bestimmt. Vor ihrem Geiste stand anscheinend das Zukunftsbild einer Menschheit, in der im Grund alle Unterschiede verschwunden sind, in der jedes Individuum *gleiches* Recht, *gleiche* Bildung und *gleiche* Möglichkeiten der Selbstentfaltung haben sollte. Von keinem Redner ist dies Ideal klar ausgesprochen worden, aber als eine Vision schien es vor ihren Augen zu stehen und ihre Darlegungen zu bestimmen. Auf der anderen Seite sehen die Vertreter der führenden Rassen die Schwierigkeiten in der Lösung nur zu deutlich . . .” – Und direkt distanzierend in Bezug zum Eingangsabschnitt und zur Zentralformel des Berichts in der “Heiligkeit der Persönlichkeit”: “Gewiß kann man den Worten ‘Heiligkeit der Persönlichkeit’ einen biblischen Inhalt geben. Aber von diesem biblisch verstandenen Begriff bis zu den Forderungen des bürgerlichen und politischen Lebens ist es ein *weiter* Weg. In den Verhandlungen wurde der Begriff der ‘Heiligkeit der Persönlichkeit’ immer wieder mit einem Inhalt gefüllt, der aus der amerikanischen Verfassung oder aus dem Naturrecht, aber nicht aus der Verkündigung Jesu stammte. Darum sind aber diese Ausführungen (der Sektionserklärung) nicht überzeugend.” In M. Schlunk, *Von den Höhen des Ölbergs* (Stuttgart, 1928), 161f. and 166).

an early ecumenical key passage for the understanding of human rights³⁵—Tambaram was moving to an ecclesiocentric perspective and argument for deepening an understanding of religious freedom: demanding religious freedom according to the theological perspective at that time was demanding the church's rights. The rights of the church were understood as a fundamental condition for the very existence of a Christian church and at the same time as a critical limitation of any claim of state authorities to become a superpower or totalitarian in nature:

There are minimum rights of religious freedom upon which the church should insist, else it will be unfaithful to its calling, and its own power and effectiveness crippled. Without endeavouring to make a final or exhaustive statement on the content of these rights, we hold that they should comprise at least the right

- a) to assemble for unhindered public worship
- b) to formulate its own creed
- c) to have an adequate ministry

35. See this section:

"1. We would look on every man as a man, without prejudice or discrimination on account of race, birth, colour, class or culture. The sacredness of a human personality becomes a working fact. A man is no longer a man—he is 'a man for whom Christ died.' In this new Kingdom, there cannot be Greek and Jew—racial discrimination; there cannot be Barbarian or Scythian—cultural discrimination; there cannot be bond or free—social discrimination; there cannot be male or female—sex discrimination. . . .

2. There are undeveloped races and classes, but none permanently superior or inferior, for every man has within him infinite possibilities.

3. We would therefore demand equality of opportunity for every man for his complete development. All men have not the same abilities, but they should have equal opportunities. An economic system which disregards the personality of the worker, and, for the profit of the few, condemns the many to soul-destroying work for the corrupting idleness, stands under the judgement of God.

4. Since economic means can purchase opportunity there can be no equality of opportunity without a redistribution of the world's economic goods. We therefore stand for a just distribution of those goods among the nations, and within each nation, so that every man may have enough to promote his full growth as a child of God and not too much to stifle it.

5. Among the causes of war we recognize the present inequality of economic opportunity open to various nations which gives to some a privileged position in access to the world's raw materials, financial assistance and open areas which is denied to others." "The Church and Changing Social Order," in *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the Meeting of the IMC in Tambaram 1938* (London, 1938), 128f.

- d) to determine its conditions of membership
- e) to give religious instruction to its youth
- f) to preach the gospel publicly
- g) to receive into its membership those who desire to join it.³⁶

Without this clear evidence of an early concept of religious freedom in Tambaran, articulated in 1937, it cannot be understood that issues of religious freedom immediately gained prominence and were given first priority in the agenda of the ecumenical movement and the WCC-in-formation right after 1945. It is widely known that religious freedom was a prominent issue in the founding assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948. Some three months before the solemn proclamation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights on 10 December 1948, the Amsterdam assembly (22 August–4 September 1948), in its fourth section (The Church and Disorder of Humankind), formulated a solemn plea for the reformulation of agreed principles of an international legal system and an international agreement on a common understanding of human rights. Religious freedom was declared to belong to the essential human rights, not to be misunderstood as rights which state authorities can grant or withdraw from people.³⁷

All human rights, including religious freedom, are traced back theologically to the universal calling of each human being to understand himself or herself as a child of God and of bearing God's image.³⁸ It is in the post–Second

36. *The Church and the State*, Vol. VI, Tambaram Madras Series (Oxford: IMC, 1938), 81f.

37. See from the report: "Die Völker der Welt müssen sich zu der Herrschaft des Rechts bekennen"—so lautet die Überschrift über einer Schlüsselpassage des Amsterdamer Sektionsberichtes, der als erste ökumenische Magna Charta des Völker- und Menschenrechts verstanden werden kann. Ausdrücklich wird gefordert, "daß die innere Gesetzgebung eines jeden Landes in Übereinstimmung mit den Grundsätzen eines fortschrittlichen internationalen Rechtes erfolgt. Sie (die Kirchen) erkennen dankbar an, daß die neuerlich erhobene Forderung nach grundsätzlicher Formulierung der Menschenrechte ein neues Bewußtsein internationaler Verantwortung für die Rechte und Freiheiten aller Menschen erkennen läßt." *Amsterdamer Ökumenische Gespräche Bd. 4: Die Unordnung der Welt und Gottes Heilsplan. Bd. 4: Die Kirche und die internationale Unordnung* (Genf/Zürich 1948), 265f.

38. See from the report: "Wir stellen fest, daß die Rechte der Menschen unmittelbar auf ihre Gotteskindschaft zurückgehen. Der Staat maßt sich etwas an, das ihm nicht zusteht, wenn er glaubt, er könne die Grundrechte verleihen oder versagen. Es ist Sache des Staates, diese Rechte in sein eigenes Rechtssystem einzubauen und ihre tatsächliche Beachtung zu sichern." *Amsterdamer Ökumenische Gespräche*, 266.

World War period that major attention of the institutionalized ecumenical movement was focused on issues of religious freedom. The first director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), Frederick Nolde, travelled from Amsterdam to Paris immediately after the founding assembly of the WCC to attend the preparatory meetings at the UN level which led to the formulation of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.³⁹ The aftermath of the German Nazi terror regime and the impact of Russian State Socialism were the background against which this emphasis can be easily understood. Affirming the principles of religious freedom as well as the interrelationship of religious freedom with proper international guarantees for the “protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights” also remained key ecumenical demands on the agenda of the WCC’s New Delhi assembly (1961), articulated in a distinct ecumenical declaration on human rights.⁴⁰

It is interesting that at the world mission conferences in the following two decades (in Whitby 1947, Willingen 1952, and Mexico City 1963), the thematic thread of human rights was not prominent. In these years, the processes of decolonialization, the crisis of traditional Christian mission due to the shock of China—as well as the correction of liberal, social gospel-oriented kingdom of God visions—led to a reconsidering of the concept of Christian mission focusing on its relation to the church rather than to society (“Mission muß wieder Mission werden”⁴¹) and demanding stricter integration of church and mission. The achievement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁴² in the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948 does not receive explicit reference in the world mission conferences of the 1950s and 1960s. Active lobbying for human rights and deepening of the concept of religious freedom in the 1960s and 1970s came more from the social ethics wing of the ecumenical movement than from the missionary tradition. The

39. Rüdiger Noll, “Die Menschenrechte und die ökumenische Bewegung—ein Überblick,” in *Jahrbuch Mission 2005: Menschenrechte* (Hamburg: 2005), 27.

40. Neu Delhi 1961: Dokumentarbericht der dritten Vollversammlung des ÖRK, Bericht des Ausschusses für die Kommission der Kirchen für Internationale Angelegenheiten (Stuttgart, 1962), 298ff.

41. Walter Freytag, *Mission zwischen Gestern und morgen. Vom Gestaltwandel der Weltmission der Christenheit im Licht der Konferenz des Internationalen Missionsrats in Willingen* (Stuttgart, 1952), 91ff.

42. Der Text der Allgemeinen Erklärung der Menschenrechte sowie alle wichtigen offiziellen Schlüsseltexte der Folgezeit finden sich in der Sammlung: *Menschenrechte. Eine Sammlung internationaler Dokumente zum Menschenrechtsschutz*, Hrsg.: Christian Tomuschat, DGVN-Texte 42 (Bonn, 1992).

CCIA, however, played a key role in deepening and lobbying for the concept of religious freedom as it was elaborated by the UN Convention on Human Rights (1966).⁴³ It was the networks around CCIA which decided on an action-oriented program around the Universal Declaration on Human Rights during the central committee in Toronto⁴⁴ (1950) and which developed crucial sections in both assembly reports in Evanston⁴⁵ and New Delhi⁴⁶; this demanded a proper international legal framework for providing recognition and compliance with human rights standards at national levels.⁴⁷

The human rights agenda, however, was strongly picked up in deliberations and reports of the early regional conferences of churches (REOs), which historically are the offspring of regional mission conferences in Asia and Africa. Both in the reports of the first two East Asia Conferences of Churches in 1959⁴⁸ and in 1964, as well as in the second conference of the All Africa Church Conference from 1958,⁴⁹ one can find important passages which point to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a signal for liberation from colonial bondage and demand for its incorporation into new national

43. Ulrich Scheuner, *Die Menschenrechte in der ökumenischen Diskussion*, a.a.O. 153ff; Jürgen Moltmann, *Christlicher Glaube und Menschenrechte*, in: "erkämpft das Menschenrecht." Wie christlich sind die Menschenrechte. Hrsg.: Eckehart Lorenz im Auftrag der Studienkommission des LWB (Hamburg, 1981), 15ff.

44. Minutes and Reports of the Second Meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC held at Toronto, July 1950, and Geneva 1950, 72–84.

45. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954* (Geneva: WCC, 1954), 140f.

46. *The New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of the WCC* (London, 1962), 276f. (see also deutsche Fassung oben),

47. For an overview of the most important texts, see also Ans van der Bent, *Vital Ecumenical Concerns: Sixteen Documentary Surveys, Part XIII. Human Rights* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 243ff.

48. *Witnesses Together: Official Report of the Inaugural Assembly of the EACC*, Kuala Lumpur, 1959, and Rangoon, 1959, 62.

49. *The Church in Changing Africa. Report of the All-Africa Church Conference held at Ibadan, Nigeria* (New York: IMC, 1958), 56f.; for further contextualization of the understanding of human rights in Africa, see also the 1981 declaration of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which, apart from reiterating the economic, social, and cultural rights of people, also underlines the right for a "harmonious development of the family" as well as the "affirmation of positive African cultural values"; see Klaus Schäfer, *Menschenrechte*, 16f.

legal and constitutional systems in the countries of the South.⁵⁰

The WCC assembly in Nairobi in 1976 can be regarded as the completion and bringing together of the different streams of thought around human rights and religious freedom in the ecumenical movement. The earlier traditions reminding Christian churches and societies about the “sanctity of each human person” and the passionate plea of the Tambaram conference for religious freedom came together in the new concept of the “basic right to life” which served as a new umbrella concept. It brought together individual and social human rights, economic and cultural rights, religious freedom and protection rights of social or religious minorities—as prepared by the ecumenical study consultation in St Pölten 1974.⁵¹ It is clear that this concept of the basic right for life is developed and conceptualized with the insights of Christian mission and of social ethics traditions within the ecumenical movement, read from the perspective mainly of the churches in post-colonial struggles for independence, of Christian minority situations, and of churches suffering from dictatorial regimes during those decades.⁵² The contextualization of the concepts of human rights and religious freedom within an overall framework of social development and properly related to the struggle against economic exploitation and marginalization of the peripheries can be seen as an expression of the growing impulse and role of the churches of the South within the ecumenical movement, which did not cease to ask

50. An example of this is the declaration of the EACC meeting in Bangkok in 1964, which stated: “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has exerted considerable influence in countries where such rights were denied to a large section of people. Many of the East Asian countries have written into their constitutions these basic rights which express the liberation of the human spirit. In others, the demand for it goes on. The growing demand for human rights and *the widening scope of the concept itself* are indeed matters of joy to Christians everywhere. The post war world has been constantly made aware that the denial of rights to people in any nation constitutes a threat to world peace and a matter of concern to the international organs and agencies working for peace. There is a special responsibility for Christians everywhere, who believe that human rights are the gift of God to all his creatures, not only for the use of the rights bestowed on them but also for the attainment of their neighbours rights.” *The Christian Community within the Human Community: Statements from the Bangkok Assembly of the EACC* (Madras, 1964), 37f.

51. See die zentralen Abschnitte im Sektionsbericht V, “Strukturen der Ungerechtigkeit und der Kampf um Befreiung,” in Nairobi 1975, 76–84 and 91–94.

52. On the relationship between the Western-liberal, the socialist and the tertio-terrenean human rights tradition cf. J.M. Lochmann, “Um eine christliche Perspektive der Menschenrechte,” in *Gottes Recht und Menschenrechte. Studien und Empfehlungen des RWB* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976), 7ff.

critical questions like “Whose human rights?”⁵³ The universality of human rights which was claimed in the name of natural law or global common values was contextualized within the primary orientation toward Jesus’ solidarity with the poor and marginalized. If human rights are truly to be regarded as universal, then their content and claim has to include the living realities of those who are far from having access to and being able to properly claim the ordinary individual civil rights of civilians in Western society, such as freedom of speech, freedom to assemble, or freedom of religion. Before all of these rights, the majority populations in several countries of the global South still do not have a roof for shelter or simply daily food to live on.⁵⁴

Mission, Human Rights, and Religious Freedom: Interreligious Perspectives

While within this brief overview we cannot provide all details of the multifaceted history of human rights and religious freedom within the Christian mission discourse and the ecumenical movement,⁵⁵ the following observations can be concluded in summarizing:

- Without bypassing the darker sides of mission history, which had its own facets of grave injustices and violations of human dignity, it needs to be maintained that early Christian missionary thinking in the 19th and 20th centuries in Protestantism brought about several key insights for the later conceptualization of basic human rights, such as the reminder of the sacredness of the human person, the universal dimension of the missionary mandate, and the emphasis on the rights of each individual to read and to understand

53. José Miguez Bonino, “Whose Human Rights? A Historico-theological Meditation,” *International Review of Mission* 66:263 (1977), 220–24.

54. “The universal scope and significance of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is not restricted but defined and highlighted in the concrete priority of the poor that he taught and illustrated in his life. This is the heritage and mission that the Church has received. It is not that universality has ceased to have meaning. What happens is that universality is never abstract. There are always historical tests for universality. In biblical terms, the test for the universality of justice is the condition of the poor. Here we have the basis for a deeper understanding of the struggle for human rights.” Miguez Bonino, “Whose Human Rights?” 223.

55. See, for further reading, Ulrich Scheuner, “Die Menschenrechte in der ökumenischen Diskussion,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 24 (1975), 152–64; Ron O’Grady, *Bread and Freedom: Understanding and Acting on Human Rights*. The Risk book series, No. 4 (Geneva: WCC, 1979); Albert van den Heuvel, “The Churches and Human Rights,” in Council on Christian Unity of the Disciples of Christ, *Missions Mid-Stream* (Indianapolis, 1977), 218ff.

biblical tradition—all of this articulated in critical opposition to some of the worst oppressive dimensions of Western colonialism.

- The anti-slavery movement of American and British missionary Protestantism brought about a strong awareness of the racial dimensions of human rights, while early missionary reflections on the negative side effects of rapid industrialization in the mission territories paved the way for a deeper understanding of social, economic, and cultural rights of Indigenous populations.
- The debate on the interrelation of human rights and religious freedom was strongly developed in the context of Christian mission and the role of younger churches in Asia as well as in the context of defending the existence and freedom of churches in the shadow of totalitarianism and fascism in the period after the Second World War. While the concern for religious freedom was a strong focal point in the years following the 1st Assembly of the WCC, religious freedom was later seen as being integrated with other dimensions of social, economic, and cultural human rights and understood as part of a holistic concept of the “right for life,” as articulated at the Nairobi assembly in 1975.

It should also be mentioned that the WCC, while having shown a strong commitment for the defence of human rights in the struggle against dictatorial regimes in Latin American countries in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa (that is, in the countries of the global South), was later accused of having been less visibly committed to and active in the defence of human rights, especially religious freedom, in the period of the Cold War in countries of Eastern Europe.⁵⁶ Dissidents within socialist

states in Eastern Europe in several cases did not feel sufficiently supported by the ecumenical movement, which was structurally handicapped by having to confine its commitment to the mechanisms of internal endorsement with their Eastern European member churches; these often feared a worsening of their own limited space for existence within their given political conditions.

It is only in the context of the UN world conference on human rights in Vienna 1993 that the central committee of the WCC called again for a review

56. Rüdiger Noll, “Die Menschenrechte und die ökumenische Bewegung—ein Überblick,” in *Jahrbuch Mission 2005: Menschenrechte* (Hamburg, 2005), 33.

of the ecumenical engagement for human rights: this led to seven regional human rights consultations between 1994 and 1997 (with participation of representatives from other religious traditions) and a new general declaration on human rights, which was passed during the WCC assembly in Harare in

1998.⁵⁷ Accompaniment of churches in difficult situations of discrimination, the increased use of team visits and fact-finding missions in situations of grave violations of human rights, as well as lobbying and advocacy work in international organizations became stronger components after this process.

In the 1990s it was becoming much clearer that more work and more challenges were emerging regarding the understanding of human rights in multireligious contexts:

- The situation of Christian churches living as religious minorities within Muslim states (such as in Pakistan, Malaysia, and Arab countries) had not yet been adequately dealt with.
- The challenges of minority churches within countries dominated by one major Christian denomination in a socialist context (such as the situation of Baptist churches within Russia) proved to have specific challenges.
- The emerging discourse on the relationship between Western values and Asian values in the late 1990s gained new momentum in the dialogue, with Chinese and other Asian governments claiming that the universal applicability of individual human rights should be questioned or even clearly rejected, as genuine Asian values such a discipline, work, and loyalty to family and social groupings should take priority over an extremely Westernized concept of individual human rights.⁵⁸
- The emerging political Islam, both in Europe and in Africa, developed its own specific understanding of human rights. Examples include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Islam from the Islamic Council in Europe in 1981, as well as the Islamic Declaration of Human Rights from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, which put certain or even all human rights clauses within and under a particular understanding of Islamic *shari'a*; this

57. John Clement, "Menschenrechte auf der ökumenischen Tagesordnung," in *Jahrbuch Mission 2005: Menschenrechte* (Hamburg, 2005), 51f.

58. Klaus Hock, "Die Menschenrechte und die Religionen," in *Jahrbuch Mission: Menschenrechte*, 42f.

takes precedent in the understanding of human rights.⁵⁹

- In addition, new challenges emerged with the instrumentalization of religion in new movements of religious extremism from Islamist

groups which radically questioned any universal validity of human rights, as these were regarded as disguised imperial weapons of the West to subjugate Muslim people.

All of these new trends challenged the ecumenical movement to deepen the understanding of human rights and religious freedom, particularly in the context of religious pluralism. The Asian insight, which was particularly developed within Indian theological circles, that defending human rights and religious freedom is possible only while at the same time demanding and defending the secular nature of the state was again articulated strongly.⁶⁰ Wherever civil rights are understood in the context of an explicit or implicit religious state concept which identifies citizenship with belonging to a certain religious tradition, one cannot speak of a proper and full respect of religious

freedom, as—according to the International Charter on Human Rights—this includes not only freedom of religion as freedom of individual religious consciousness, but also the rights to express religious beliefs, to teach religious practices, and to hold worship both privately and publicly. The concept of a secular state and religious freedom are therefore inseparable: any religious self-glorification or legitimization of state authorities is therefore to be rejected.

59. Hock, “Die Menschenrechte,” 39f.

60. See S. Robertson, “Freedom of Religion: A Human Rights Issue,” *BTESSC/SATHRI* (Bangalore, 2007); Ninan Koshy, *Religious Freedom in a Changing World* (Geneva: WCC, 1992); Konrad Raiser, “Die Auseinandersetzung über die Religionsfreiheit,” in *Religion, Macht, Politik. Auf der Suche nach einer zukunftsfähigen Weltordnung* (Frankfurt, 2010), 142ff.