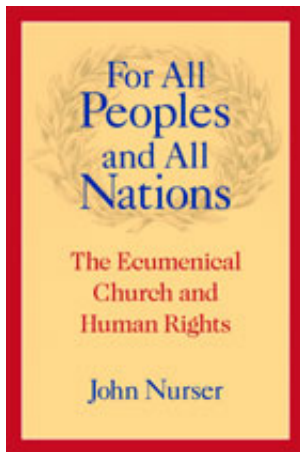


## Religion, Politics and Human Rights: Understanding the Role of Christianity in the Promotion of Human Rights

By Barbara Ann Rieffer



The Global Face of Public Faith by David Hollenbach.  
Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003. 259pp.

For All Peoples and All Nations by John Nurser. Washington,  
DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005. 209pp.

In the last fifty years we have seen human rights, with its foundation in liberalism, take a more prominent role in international relations. During this same time frame, and especially in the last twenty-five years, we have seen religious individuals and movements become more active in the political arena. In numerous countries (e.g., Iran, Israel, the United States, India) religion has taken a more energetic role in society. This is also true of world politics. Religion—whether in the form of religious terrorism, religious freedom, or religious movements—has become an element in political life that simply cannot be ignored.

Religion's impact on political life raises countless debates. What role should religion play in domestic and international politics? Should religion be denied a political role? Should religious organizations and individuals be tolerated in the political realm, segregated to the private sphere, or suppressed altogether? By allowing religious organizations or political parties to play an active role in politics does one run the risk of creating an intolerant political system?

Additional debates arise concerning the relationship between religion and human rights. What role does religion play in the promotion of human rights? Can religion, religious organizations, and religious ideas assist in the protection of the dignity of the individual? Or is religion an impediment to the promotion of human rights? If some religious traditions teach their followers that there is

only one true deity, and that those who do not follow this path are sinful or inferior or incapable of salvation, can these religions truly promote tolerance and human rights?

One can raise questions of equality and tolerance within Christianity. David Hollenbach and John Nurser have not shied away from these issues. David Hollenbach, the Margaret O'Brien Flatley Chair in Catholic Theology at Boston College, explains the role that religion (his focus is mostly on Catholicism) should play in American politics and in international relations. The Global Face of Public Faith is a collection of previously published articles on theology, American politics, and international human rights. He argues throughout these diverse essays that religious organizations and Christian values are important for a healthy democratic polity (both in America and abroad) and for a humane world that values human rights and human diversity. In the course of his work, Hollenbach contends that religious ideas can promote democracy, human rights and peace by playing an active role in civil society.

Part I focuses on theoretical debates and theological issues. Here Hollenbach examines the relationship between liberalism and religious freedom, the role of religion in a pluralistic society, the privatization of religion, the relationship between Catholic theology, relativism and absolute truth, and solidarity and human dignity. The second part addresses the contemporary debates in American politics concerning the role of religion in public life, the privatization of religion in domestic politics, the benefits of religion for civil society, as well as the impact of Vatican II. The last section of the book turns to global issues. It analyzes Christian ethics during the Cold War and the role of Catholicism in communist countries, human rights and development in Africa, and religion as a common global ethic.

John Nurser, a fellow of the Human Rights Center at the University of Essex and Canon Emeritus of Lincoln Cathedral in the Church of England, also examines the position that religious ideas and persons can play in international affairs and in the promotion of human rights. For All Peoples and All Nations is a study of the Protestant Churches' endorsement and encouragement of human rights, specifically the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The opening chapters discuss the backdrop against which the Protestant Churches supported the development of international human rights. Chapter one sets out the creation of the World Council of Churches and the development of the ecumenical movement and its concern for global order. The second chapter looks at the early events that shaped the life of O. Frederick Nolde, an individual who actively campaigned for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on behalf of the Protestant Churches. The remainder of the book looks at the efforts by Nolde and others to influence the global arena after World War II including the creation of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>1</sup> Each of these works engages religious ideas and motivations as they relate to human rights. In their respective books, Nurser and Hollenbach offer arguments and evidence to suggest that religion, specifically Christianity, can be harnessed for the protection of human rights.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, those interested in the development of human rights would be advised to concentrate mainly on chapters 7, 9, and 10.

## Relationship between Religion and Politics

### *Liberalism*

Liberalism as a political ideology incorporates a number of fundamental tenets. It stresses the importance of individuals as free and equal members of a society. Secondly, liberalism believes in the dignity of all persons. Finally, it allows for individuals to assert their rights against their government. Each individual, therefore, has certain rights that no government can violate.

Central to any conception of human rights and human dignity is equality. There cannot be *universal* human rights if all individuals do not share them *equally*. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights echoes this sentiment. The preamble begins: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.”

Liberal democracies represent the best form of government to recognize the equal dignity and worth of individuals through the guaranteed protection of individual freedoms. In his influential book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama suggests that human rights and the liberal political philosophy from which human rights arose represent the end of history as far as theory is concerned. Liberal democracies which respect human rights are the type of society for which persons have been striving over the centuries. The rights articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also attempt to establish the relationship between the individual and the state and protect human dignity.

Human rights are connected to liberalism primarily through the significance that both place on the individual. When conflicts arise liberalism gives priority to the individual over the good of the state. Thus, liberalism demonstrates its belief in the inherent worth of all human beings and its refusal to sacrifice some individuals for the betterment of society (Rawls 1971:3).<sup>2</sup>

Liberalism, since its development in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, has had a thorny interaction with religion. Where and how religion fits into a liberal political system has been the subject of numerous books and articles. Some have argued that liberalism’s focus on freedom of religion and the separation of church and state is the appropriate means by which to promote stability and protect individual rights. Others, however, have seen the separation doctrine as one that privatizes religion and hence makes religious individuals second class citizens.

### *Privatization of Religion*

So how should liberal political societies, which respect human rights, deal with the religious resurgence within their societies and outside of their borders? The relationship between liberalism and religion has a complex history. One of the most influential theorists of liberalism, John Locke argued for religious toleration as the best way to achieve peace in a society with a diversity of religious traditions. Locke saw the destructive nature of the religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in England and in Continental Europe (Wootton 1993). Lockean Liberalism evolved and influenced many Enlightenment thinkers including the Founding Fathers in the American colonies.

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<sup>2</sup> For a classic articulation John Rawls states, “Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of the society as a whole cannot override” (Rawls 1971: 3).

Their response was the First Amendment's freedom of religion and the development of the separation of church and state.

In 1789, the Bill of Rights was adopted and a form of separation of church and state was instituted in the U.S. The First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This has been referred to by some as the *separation doctrine*.<sup>3</sup> This states that the government is prohibited from establishing or sponsoring a religion as well as from restricting religious liberty. Under this conception religious beliefs and practices are not to be prohibited. Citizens are free to worship and believe as they choose. Based on liberal philosophy, the separation doctrine argues the state is to remain neutral among religions, as well as between the religious and the non-religious. On this account, religion is thought of as something which concerns citizens' *private* lives; but it should be left out of the *public* realm (Kymlicka 1995: 3).

#### *Public/Private Distinction*

The neutrality assumption of liberalism, as seen in the separation doctrine in the United States, has had the effect of privatizing religion by expressing the view that the state occupies one realm, the public realm, and religion occupies another realm, the private realm. The public/private distinction suggests that private matters are not the concern of the state and therefore should not be brought into the public realm. The message of American society seems to be that individuals are free to believe what they want, but that religious beliefs ought to remain private and out of the view of society (Carter 1993). In this respect American political and legal culture asks the faithful to act publicly and sometimes privately as well, as though their faith does not matter to them (Greenawalt 1988).

Liberal theorists and philosophers such as Paul Weithman and Bruce Ackerman are defenders of the separation doctrine and the neutrality assumption of liberalism. Weithman suggests that religion has the potential to destabilize a democracy. This concern flows not only from the religious conflicts in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but also represents present day religious conflicts. He argues that religious beliefs make social cooperation difficult to accomplish. Religious groups have often been segregated economically, politically, socially, and geographically (Yarnold 1998). The diversity among religious and the non-religious perspectives prevents citizens from sharing a common religious worldview. Since people do not share similar religious perspectives, Weithman suggests that this could lead to instability. Any appeal to values and beliefs outside of the core set that reasonable citizens would agree upon, has the potential to threaten a well-ordered society. It is for this reason that he encourages religion to be tolerated in the private realm, but not in the public realm (Weithman 1997: 4).

The privatization of religious convictions is also strongly defended in the work of Bruce Ackerman. He argues for a maximal separation doctrine in that religion does not have an appropriate place in the public realm of a liberal democracy (Ackerman 1980). When citizens offer and rely upon deeply held religious convictions, they are violating the spirit of liberal democracy by

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<sup>3</sup> "The general view that in a free and democratic society, the state should neither establish a church nor impair religious liberty" (Audi 1989: 260).

diminishing public discourse. To avoid this, a citizen in a liberal democracy must not rely on religious views or bring religious beliefs or practices in the public domain because they are not available or accessible to everyone. Ackerman articulates his conception of neutrality as:

*No reason is a good reason if it requires the power holder to assert (a) that his conception of the good is better than that asserted by any of his fellow citizens or (b) that regardless of his conception of the good, he is intrinsically superior to one or more of his fellow citizens (1980: 10).*

Essentially Ackerman asks the religious citizen in a liberal democracy to set aside her religious convictions when in the public realm. Since religious citizens assert a “privileged insight into the moral universe” which eludes portions of the society, their beliefs should not penetrate political discourse (Ackerman 1980: 10).

Interestingly, O. Frederick Nolde, director of the Church’s Commission on International Affairs (CCIA), came to a similar conclusion as Weithman, although for more pragmatic reasons. As Nurser explains, by 1944 Nolde came to the supposition that “freedom demands a broader base than can be offered by religion alone, and moreover, that ideas about extending religious liberty needed to be placed in a secular context” (xi). Thus, Nolde came to see that promoting human rights, and specifically the right to religious freedom, was more likely to succeed if secular arguments were presented to which individuals with diverse moral and religious commitments could acquiesce. Nurser, on the other hand, seems to grumble about the privatization of religious ideas:

*There has been pressure since 1960 to label inappropriate and unwelcome any religious contribution (or even language) outside the dimension of private lives and particular communities of faith adherents. The ‘public square’ should display its nakedness for all to see, and it should be inspected frequently to keep it that way (2).*

Hollenbach also disagrees with the privatization of religion, arguing that religion should not be barred nor discouraged from the public square. He explains that “the free exercise of religion is a social freedom and the right to freedom of religion includes the right to seek to influence the policies and laws by which a free people will be governed and the public culture they share” (14).

Hollenbach’s understanding of the public/private distinction offers a significant contribution to this discussion. He conceives of the private realm as outside of the view of society. The public realm consists of civil society. By this Hollenbach is referring to “families, neighborhoods, churches, labor unions, corporations, professional associations, credit unions, cooperatives, universities, and a host of other associations. These communities are not private, but public” (Hollenbach: 153). This is further distinguished from the government. Religion under this conceptualization is part of civil society and can and should influence civil society: “Thus, churches, just like all the other associations that make up civil society, must be both free from domination by the state and free to act and express themselves in public” (Hollenbach: 155).

Privatizing religion would be, in Hollenbach’s view, detrimental to society. If religion remains private, then the vibrancy of civil society will suffer. Drawing on the work of Robert Putnam’s Bowling Alone and Making Democracy Work, Hollenbach argues that civil society is vital to a healthy democracy, and religious organizations can contribute to the strength of civil society. The organizations that constitute civil society allow their members a means to participate and to be active in the development of societal culture and public life. As such, a flourishing civil society strengthens a democratic political system by empowering its citizens to participate. That churches and mosques

and synagogues offer their members the opportunity to participate and partake in public life is main justification for an active role for religious institutions.

Hollenbach acknowledges the concerns of some who fear that religious organizations will try to coerce others to accept their religious beliefs. History and recent public campaigns, he notes, have increased suspicions about religious influence on American society:

*One prominent version of the argument for insulating the political process from the influence of religious convictions harkens back to the dismaying historical record of the Catholic and Protestant communities during the sixteenth and seventeenth century wars of religion. This history is seen as a precedent for what is likely to happen today is religious communities decide to press their beliefs as guides for governmental decision making or public policy. Sometimes this historical appeal is augmented by references to “moral majorities” insisting on prayer in public schools, the teaching of “creation science” in these schools, and the imposition of religious convictions about abortion on those who do not share these convictions (148-9).*

Hollenbach disavows coercive methods to impose religious convictions on society, encouraging instead a rational dialogue in which individuals with different conceptions of the good engage in an honest and respectful exchange of ideas to arrive at a global ethic. This is only possible if everyone, including the pious, is treated with respect.

## **Relationship between Religion and Human Rights**

### *Theoretical Foundations of Human Rights*

Despite the fact that all human beings seek human rights and despite the fact that there have been numerous political and legal developments over the last fifty years to protect and respect human rights in international relations, there has been little agreement about the origin of these rights (Forsythe 2000: 28). While some scholars have argued that human rights originated in the West, others have challenged that conception. In The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen, Paul Gordon Lauren argues that human rights do not have a single geographical or temporal origin but rather developed in all cultures and religions around the world. At various times philosophers, prophets, and spiritual leaders developed the concept of human rights. Lauren suggests that all the major religions express the belief that human beings have an inherent dignity. On account of this, we have obligations to others:

*All of the major religions of the world seek in one way or another to speak to the issue of human responsibility to others. Despite their vast differences, complex contradictions, internal paradoxes, cultural variations, and susceptibility to conflicting interpretation and fierce argumentation, all of the great religious traditions share a universal interest in addressing the integrity, worth, and dignity of all persons and consequently, the duty toward other people who suffer without distinction (Lauren 1998: 5).*

The Judeo-Christian tradition has affirmed the principles of human dignity, brotherhood, and equality. The Torah advocated reciprocity of duties and stressed that as your brother's keeper, you are responsible for his or her well being (Genesis 4:9). The Torah also teaches its followers to feed those who are starving and to care for those in need (Genesis 42, 43). Building on the Old Testament, Jesus of Nazareth taught his followers to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, assist the ill and shelter the homeless.

These religious traditions offered civilization the foundation on which the international human rights framework would be built. These early writings articulated a moral code detailing the duties and responsibilities of all people. The concept that individuals have a duty to others is the basis for the present day belief that governments and individuals have duties beyond their borders. Most importantly according to Lauren, these early religious beliefs promoted the initial discussions about rights (1998: 9). Thus Lauren argues that “ideas about human duties led quite naturally to ideas about human rights” (Ibid). It is in this initial formulation of the inherent dignity of every human being and duties to others in which we see the origins of the idea of human rights which was eventually ratified and incorporated into international law in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While various religious texts suggest that we have duties to others, they often also incorporate ideas and concepts which are incompatible with the notion of human rights. In fact many religious texts have offered their believers a variety of conflicting propositions to follow. For example, while the Judeo-Christian tradition teaches that all individuals were created in the image and likeness of God, and hence should be respected, that has not meant that all individuals in all circumstances deserved that respect. For example, Leviticus instructs individuals to kill homosexuals (Leviticus, 20:13). Furthermore, the Bible does not consistently promote the dignity of women. Often women are depicted as being second-class citizens, unequal to their male counterparts, and are taught to obey their husbands and fathers.

Yet, despite the limitations in Lauren’s argument concerning religion’s ability to provide a foundation for the conceptual development of international human rights, various religious leaders, individuals, and organizations have contributed to the legal development and protection of human rights.

### *The Positive Contributions of Religion*

Individuals, specifically religious individuals, can and do play a prominent role in the promotion of human rights. These individuals, as leaders of a religious tradition (Dali Lama) or as influential politicians (John Foster Dulles) can provide leadership on the importance and protection of human rights.

Much of the focus of Nurser’s book is on Dr. Nolde. Nurser suggests that “the successful outcome of the struggle for global human rights institutions in the period of 1944-48 was influenced to a surprising degree by the part of one person, Dr. O. Frederick Nolde” (173). Nurser laments the fact that Nolde has been largely forgotten in the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and in the historical development of human rights. While Nurser is successful in demonstrating that Nolde was passionate about human rights and active in meeting with church leaders, as well as diplomats and influential leaders (Eleanor Roosevelt), he fails to show how Nolde’s efforts affected policy. There is substantial documentation of letter writing campaigns, participation at conferences, and contact with various people. Missing in much of this work is how others received Nolde’s efforts. Hence, this work lacks the demonstration that his efforts, however gallant, had the intended effect. This is largely a result of the emphasis throughout the book on the activities of Nolde and other Protestant leaders. Therefore Nurser demonstrates activity but not impact. Far too little space is devoted to the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations and other aspects of human rights. One has to look to Schlesinger (2003), Morsink (1999), and others for this historical evolution.

After Vatican II human rights became a reoccurring idea in theological doctrines, and were an essential aspect of Pope John Paul II's papacy (Nurser: 22). Pope John Paul II brought his ideas about human rights, solidarity, and peace to Eastern Europe and affected the transformation from communism there. He argued for and supported civil society in Poland. He also criticized communism for its destruction of community and civil society throughout the world. His ideas and his support encouraged many living in authoritarian regimes to peacefully oppose their oppressors (Hollenbach 2003:196). These are a few examples of individuals who have made a difference in the pursuit of peace and human rights.

Especially important in discussions of human rights and religion is the ability for religions to mobilize their constituency towards policy goals. The grassroots base that many religious institutions have can be used to exert pressure on politicians towards the protection of human rights and dignity of others. Nurser suggests that one of the Protestant community's greatest assets is this ability to mobilize and was evident in the 1940s.

Within the U.S., the coordinated drive by lay and clerical leaders of the mainline Protestant "Christian forces" to produce an educated democratic majority for American commitment to a U.N. organization-vision of global order in 1945 was an invaluable precondition for its political achievement. The membership constituencies from which they could draw ought not be underestimated. It was the biggest organized family of voluntary associations in the country (Nurser: 78). The WCC has continued to educate and mobilize its members when it concludes that human rights violations are occurring. Recently the WCC has recommended that members consider "divesting from companies that aid Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories" (*New York Times*, Feb 23, 2005).

Similarly, the Catholic Church has the power to mobilize its adherents towards issues of justice and peace. This often occurs through pastoral letters and public statements from bishops. In the 1970s and 1980s the world saw a movement towards democracy in various regions of the world. Samuel Huntington coined this movement the Third Wave (Huntington 1991). In diverse places such as Spain, the Philippines, Chile, and Poland, grassroots movements pushed for and achieved the transformation of their political system to a democratic polity. Huntington attributes this to the fundamental changes stemming from Vatican II and the role of the pope and other clerics in supporting the opposition movements (Hollenbach: 127).

In 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations enumerated a set of basic principles, albeit as a nonbinding resolution. These principles are the basic requirements to respect the dignity of all individuals. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), as enumerated in 1948, consists of thirty moral propositions. The UDHR, drafted by representatives from various regions and adopted by numerous countries incorporates both first generation (civil and political) and second generation (social and economic) rights (Morsink 1999). Gaining the acceptance of the ideas in the UDHR was not a straightforward task. John Nurser suggests that Protestant churches were important to the development of this document.

Nurser's *For All Peoples and All Nations* is a study of how the ecumenical churches influenced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For Nurser, "a group of men and women, lay and ordained, from within the Protestant and Anglican Christian traditions of religion was able to play a significant role in including what became a 'universal declaration' of human rights" (1).



The motivation for Christians, as described by Nurser, was twofold. First, the horrors of World War I demanded a response: “the abyss of greed, hatred, and ruthlessness into which the ‘Christian nations’ of Europe stumbled in 1914 provoked an urgent energy” (13). Christians had an obligation to help to create a world in which these atrocities did not recur.

Secondly, there was Christian self-interest. Religious freedom was a necessary requirement for missionary societies and activities:

*If rights designated as human (though unavailable to black slaves) were protected by the U.S. government, why could such rights not be protected in the case of humans living under other governments? For the missionary societies, this question had day to day urgency. If a missionary overseas is not free to worship and to teach, and those who wish for baptism are forbidden to receive it under pain of loss of property or even life, to whom could there be an appeal?...So the argument ran, Christians live an ethos that asserts a clear obligation to campaign for, help, establish, and defend an order that would provide a civil shield everywhere for both personal and community religious liberty (20).*

Furthermore, Nolde and others associated with the World Council of Churches came to realize that religious freedom would only have meaning if other basic rights were also protected. Freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, and the right to life and liberty were also essential if the right to worship would have significance.

The Vatican was not always at the forefront in the defense of human rights. The Catholic Church had a long history of devotion to oppressive monarchs and leaders so long as the Catholic Church retained a protected space in society. Even as recently as the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church was criticized for its refusal to confront Hitler about the killing of Jews during World War II. The Second Vatican Council, better known as Vatican II, fundamentally changed the Catholic Church and its relationship to national governments.

Vatican II (1962-5) was an important event in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. The gathering was significant because it demonstrated that the Roman Catholic Church was not simply a European Church, but with participants from various regions of the world there was no denying the universal membership of the church. This forced the participants to address cultural pluralism (Hollenbach 2003: 8). The results were groundbreaking. Vatican II affirmed not only the right to freedom of religion but in Hollenbach’s view a full range of human rights:

*Thus, Vatican II could state that ‘the right to religious freedom 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.’ Indeed, the Council linked its support for the full range of human rights with both the very core of Christian faith and the continuing commitment to a public morality that can be universally known by all (Hollenbach: 13).*

From this point on protecting human rights became part of the Catholic vision as the church saw securing human rights as a means to promote peace.

Vatican II also discusses the proper relationship between politics and religious freedom. It disagrees with the notion of privatizing religion for the sake of the separation of church and state. As *The Declaration on Religious Freedom* from Vatican II explained:

*It comes within the meaning of religious freedom that religious bodies should not be prohibited from freely undertaking to show the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity (Hollenbach: 109).*

Further, Pope John XXIII acknowledged the importance of universal human rights in *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) (Hollenbach: 7).

*Human Rights Violations in the name of Religion*

While religious organizations can help promote human rights, at times religious beliefs and religious associations have violated human rights and have caused tensions and controversies. Regrettably, neither Nurser nor Hollenbach significantly engage in the religious reasons for human rights violations. But this is also an important part of understanding the relationship between religion and human rights. First, of course are the concerns about terrorism undertaken in the name of religion. Whether Islam or Christianity, religions have seen terrorist actions taken in their name and based on their religious texts (Juergensmeyer 2000). This has been true historically and in contemporary times. Unfortunately, this is not the only issue pertaining to religious violations of human rights.

One of the main questions pertaining to religious liberty is the right to proselytize. Many religious traditions (Catholics and Protestants especially) argue that the right to spread their beliefs is a basic duty that *must* be adhered to. However, voluntary conversions have been viewed by others as a threat. For example, Nurser notes that the Protestant churches were concerned about Catholic expansion that may endanger their own ability to convert others in Latin America and Africa (81). Furthermore, proselytism reminds many in the Third World of their colonial experiences. Since this was such a sensitive issue, the individuals who prepared the Universal Declaration of Human Rights tried to accommodate various views in Article 18:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscious, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance (Universal Declaration of Human Rights).*

Unfortunately, Nurser does not address the extensive discussion and diplomatic debate that ultimately settled on this language. Hollenbach is also unfortunately silent on this important issue.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, there is a concern that religious groups may act as interest groups and oppress others by having their religious beliefs codified in law. The Christian Right in the U.S. has been lobbying for various religious positions, including the posting of the Ten Commandments in classrooms, school prayer, prayers before sporting events and securing religious freedom (evangelical proselytism) around the world.

Hollenbach's response is to deny that religions should act as interest groups, but sometimes it seems as if this is a fine line to walk. This is especially true given the recently elected Pope's strong encouragement for Italians to boycott a referendum on fertility. Does Pope Benedict XVI's recent engagement into Italian politics constitute a valid means of influencing civil society or an illegitimate intrusion into the domestic politics of a democratic state? Hollenbach does not spell out when an individual has crossed that line.

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<sup>4</sup> For a treatment of the diplomatic debate see Morsink (1999) or Schlesinger (2003).

While Hollenbach does not deny that some have harmed others in the name of religion, he focuses on the positive contribution that religion can make. At times he overstates this ability. Hollenbach believes that the Christian cross can be a symbol of friendship and peace (Chapter 4). While this may be true for Christians, the symbol of the cross will represent repression and conflict to Muslims and others around the world. He does not seem to acknowledge this potential.

## Conclusion

Over the last few decades, we have seen a Christian resurgence in some parts of the world. History has demonstrated that religion is essential to many individuals and needs to be respected as such. Whether it is in Poland in the 1980s, or in Florida (Terri Schiavo) in the United States, we see that religion is an essential aspect of some individuals' lives and will not go away. Thus the future of human rights must be one in which religious identity and religious practices are not only tolerated but respected, encouraged and supported.

Whether religious freedom and religious respect in the domestic or international sphere will encourage some religious organizations to promote human rights is an open question. Certainly the changes within the Catholic Church can offer some optimism, even if it is a limited optimism. Other groups with religious leanings such as the Irish Republican Army are unlikely to be concerned about the religious teaching concerning the duties to others when their basic grievances are not being met. All religions contain a variety of teachings, some of which are supportive of human rights and human dignity (obligations to take care of the needy) and others are not (holy wars). Hollenbach and Nurser have shown how some religious teachings (the desire to proselytize) can be used to motivate pious individuals to argue for and develop human rights protections. The question remains how to encourage individuals who are being denied basic human rights (political freedoms, religious freedoms, economic opportunities, etc.) to focus on the positive duties towards others instead of the justification for violence and revenge found in many religious traditions.

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