Thank you for coming to the symposium today. For those of you who were here last night, thank you for coming back! If you were not here last night, let me briefly recap the main points of my first paper. I asked a question: As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the declaration of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), will human rights survive the 21st century?

A few years ago, this would have been a ridiculous question. However, it is a serious question in 2018. We all need to be concerned about the future of human rights given the rise of nationalism and selfish politics. The extremely rich are getting even richer. The majority of the rest are seeing incomes stagnate or decline. Electors are being tempted by politicians who offer simple solutions to complex problems. Popularist politicians are promising tougher immigration measures to keep out foreigners; trade barriers to protect business; harsh treatment of opponents without concern for fairness. The future of human rights is not secure. As Professor Linda Hogan wrote in 2016: ‘Human rights theory has never been more insecure, yet human rights politics has never been more important.’

Human rights has become closely associated with secular western influences. These forces have had little time for people of faith. They passionately believe that their interpretation of human rights is correct. They are remarkably intolerant of anyone who disagrees with them. For example, Deborah Orr, wrote in 2013 in the British Guardian Newspaper:

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For human rights to flourish, religious rights have to come second to them. We are all human. We are not all of the same religion, or religious at all. One cannot protect religious rights if they are used as a reason to abuse human rights, human equalities, as so often they are.
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Orr is right to challenge those who use religion as a cover to abuse other human beings. However, Orr claims religious rights often clashes with human rights. Orr overstates the problem of religion and fails to see its potential for good. In this paper, I will argue that human rights needs religion in this time of global crisis.

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1 NB: Popularism is defined as any political doctrine chosen to appeal to the majority of the electorate. Populism is a different word with a different definition.


By ignoring the complementarity of human rights and religion, the secular, liberal establishment have discredited human rights in the eyes of non-westerners – who are mainly people of faith. The advocates for secular human rights are quick to accuse faith groups of proselytising, while seeing themselves to be neutral. They consider themselves superior to people of faith because of their ‘neutrality’.

Let’s stop and consider the idea of neutrality. It sounds like a good thing. However, it is impossible. No one is neutral. Everyone sees the world through lenses formed by our experiences, convictions, attitudes. My lens is not the same as yours. Each one of us has a unique perspective on life. Those who promote liberal, secular human rights have put their faith in that worldview. They passionately believe human rights is the way, the truth and the good life for all. They are entitled to their beliefs and passions but they should not claim to be neutral or superior.

It is healthy for all of us to stop regularly and reflect on the lenses we are using to make judgments. Our lenses are not fixed for all time. They change depending on the circumstances we face. It helps to consider how others see us.

Mahathir Mohamad, who was Prime Minister of Malaysia from 1981 to 2003 (and was just re-elected last month at the age of 92) has an interesting perception of the secular, western human rights worldview. He writes:

> The West’s interpretation of human rights is that every individual can do what he likes, free from any restraint by government. Individuals soon decided they should break every rule and code ... beginning with the little things.. They went on to disregard marriage .. extramarital sex became the norm ... cohabitation with ... frequent changes of partner.. Children were begotten without known fathers, which will in time lead to incest. But then incest is not wrong either if that is what is desired by the individual.4

Mohamad promotes a worldview that prioritises the needs of community and society ahead of individual rights.

Given the current situation, can human rights become stronger with religion?

1. **We need to emphasise what human rights and religion share in common**

Human Rights and religion should be allies in the fight for equality, justice and reconciliation. Human rights is a direct descendent of natural law and natural rights. The official teaching of the Catholic Church is very positive in appreciating the theological and philosophical foundations for human rights. *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* emphasises the importance of human dignity:

> The movement towards the identification and proclamation of human rights is one of the most significant attempts to respond effectively to the inescapable demands of human dignity. The Church sees in these rights the extraordinary opportunity that our modern times offer, through the

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4 Source: Hogan, 2016, 27.
affirmation of these rights, for more effectively recognizing human dignity and universally promoting it as a characteristic inscribed by God the Creator in his creature.5

This paragraph is important. First, there is a statement upon which all defenders of human rights can agree – human rights is a significant attempt in the history of the world to secure human dignity. Second, the statement explains how universal human rights are grounded in Christian theology. This is important for The Salvation Army’s commitment to human rights. We do not support human rights because the United Nations or the political rulers of this world say we should. We support human rights because they are a gift from God for every person and therefore there is an universal obligation upon every person to defend the rights of all persons.

Catholic Social Doctrine and the UN Human Rights Commission describe human rights as ‘universal, inviolable, inalienable’.6 The Catholics explain:

**Universal** because they are present in all human beings, without exception of time, place or subject. **Inviolable** insofar as “they are inherent in the human person and in human dignity” and because “it would be vain to proclaim rights, if at the same time everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them by all people, everywhere, and for all people”. **Inalienable** insofar as “no one can legitimately deprive another person, whoever they may be, of these rights, since this would do violence to their nature”.7

It is not my place to explain why Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, atheists or peoples of other faiths should support human rights. Everyone must do the work of articulating how human rights compliments their worldview. This is important work. We should not expect Muslims to give an identical theological justification for human rights to that given by Jews, Buddhists or Christians.

Perhaps human dignity is the unifying concept upon to bring together all defenders of human rights. This was restated recently in the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights in March 2017 – a declaration made by religious experts with the support of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The declaration states:

We ground our commitments in this Faith For Rights declaration first and foremost in our conviction that religions and beliefs share common core values of respect for human dignity, justice and fairness. We also ground these commitments in our acceptance of the fact that “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”. (Article 29, paragraph 1, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).) Our duty is to practice what we preach, to fully engage, to speak up and act on the ground in the defence of human dignity long before it is actually threatened.8

2. **We must be honest with each other**

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7 Ibid, 76.
Up to this point, I have been critical of some secular human rights activists for their suspicion of religion and religious belief. However, in making the argument that human rights needs religion, it is also essential to admit and address the failings of religion.

I have personal experience of failing to speak up in the face of human rights abuses. I was born in a country that no longer exists. I was born in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia – now called Harare, Zimbabwe. My mother was also born in Rhodesia and my father arrived as a young boy. All four grandparents were missionaries sent out to Africa by The Salvation Army. I have no doubts that my grandparents were sincere in their desire to serve the indigenous peoples of Africa. However, they were part of the colonising forces that swept out of Europe and across the world. The church – including The Salvation Army – played a key role in colonialism. It was not all bad. The Christian Church in South America, Africa and Asia developed many schools, clinics and hospitals. However, in doing so, they aided colonisation resulting in the denial of human rights to millions of people.

Until I was 15 year old, Rhodesia was racial divided. I was born in a whites’ only hospital, our home was in a whites only area, I went to two whites only schools, only white people worshipped at my church – a Salvation Army corps. The only black man who attended the services was the janitor.

My parents did not bring us up to be racist. No racist language was permitted at home, school or church. We were taught to respect all people. However, there was an implicit acceptance that this was how life had to be. Black people were different to white people. As I look back now I can see I lived in a bubble. A privileged, racist ‘whites only’ bubble. I was aware that there were lots of ‘black’ African people around. I was rarely aware of any tension but we lived separate lives. There was some racist language but divisions were rarely fuelled by anger. Racial divisions were taken for granted. Most ‘white’ people were indifferent. ‘Non-whites’ were not like ‘us’.

As I look back now, I realise the brokenness of the state of Rhodesia but also the brokenness of the Church. Why did followers of Jesus accept the segregation of people based on the colour of their skin? Unfortunately, race was not the only discrimination. Women and girls were not treated equally to men and boys. In these, and many other cases of discrimination, the basic dignity of all people as made in the image of God was ignored. The church has much to confess.

I shared my personal story last year to people in Lurgan, Northern Ireland – a community where religion has been used to divide people. I spoke about growing up in a racist bubble. After the meeting ended, a number of the men told me they had also grown up in a bubble – a protestant bubble which meant they never interacted with Catholics who lived just a mile away. When you live in a bubble, it is easy to dehumanise those who are outside the bubble. ‘They’ are not like us. ‘They’ quickly become sub-humans who do not deserve human rights.

There also needs to be humility and honesty from those who place their confidence in human rights. My parents now live in Cape Town, South Africa. It was exciting to see the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, the collapse of the apartheid state, the birth of the new South African nation in 1994. The new South African constitution marked the high point in the articulation of human rights. The new nation of South Africa was to be the example to the world of how a nation could go from pariah to be a model human rights based nation.
Today, twenty-four years since the birth of the nation, South Africa is going through challenging times. The third President of the new republic, Jacob Zuma has been forced to resign but not before plundering the nations resources for his personal gain. The South Africans call it ‘state capture’. The institutions of the State were skilfully manipulated and co-opted for the personal benefit of Zuma and his cronies. Despite all the world class human rights legislation and institutions, Zuma and friends managed to capture the state.

The good news is that the Church spoke up and challenged the politicians. There were still brave voices in the ruling ANC party, and the media who fought back. The courts remained relatively independent. However, it took a massive effort to rid South Africa of the crooked Zuma regime – despite the best human rights legislation in the world.

We live in a broken, imperfect world. Humility is required from all parties.

3. **How to move forward?**

3.1 **What is a human?**

The answer to the question – what is a human? – is fundamental to the whole discussion on human rights. As I said, I grew up in a society where white humans were treated as more human than non-whites. Obviously, racism is always wrong. All people are made in the image of God. The paralysed old woman who lives on the streets of Sao Paulo is as valued, in the eyes of God, as the football stars like Willian and Neymar. All supporters of human rights – secular and religious – agree that every person deserves dignity.

However, there is disagreement when we dig a little deeper into this question: What is a human? Human rights law focuses on the rights due to each person, without any mention of the groups or communities to which individuals belong’. 

An understanding of people as autonomous, rational, distinct individuals is at the heart of contemporary secular, western human rights. Alistair MacIntyre, the famous philosopher, argues the current difficulties with the category of human rights arises precisely because it has been cut adrift from its original philosophical hinterland of natural rights – that is from the only foundation that could give it legitimacy’. 

Christianity has a rich understanding of what means to be human. People are not, as Harvard Professor Edward Wilson argues, ‘self-made, independent, alone and fragile’. What a depressing picture of what it means to be human – self-made, independent, alone and fragile! In contrast, Christians believe each human life is a gift, made in God’s image and we believe each person has a planned place in the divine will of God. Therefore, each life must be respected and given every opportunity to glorify God throughout the time on Earth.

When we say made in the image of God, we need to be clear who God is. We believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is a relationship. Therefore, we believe people are, in very essence, relational beings. People are created as ‘body-soul in relation’ from the moment of fertilisation. This

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10 MacIntyre, After Virtue, 1981, 8.
11 *The Tablet*, 17 January 2015.
understanding of ‘personhood’ is very important. We do not value the body more than the soul or the soul more than the body.

Just as the three persons in the Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit – are equal, so are all human beings created equal. This is the basis for the Christian rejection of all the “isms” racism, sexism, ageism. Equality and relationships go together. It is not about my rights being protected because I am an individual but rather our rights are protected because we are in relationship with all of creation and with our creator.

Christianity believes God’s intention is the harmony of himself with humanity and all creation: A perfect world was created and we are stewards of all creation. Out of this comes our understanding of “environmental” ethics, of the equitable distribution of resources, tithing, care of the Earth, etc.

Most religions have a richer theology of humanity than the secular vision of humanity as a collection of individuals who are ‘self-made, independent, alone and fragile’. Most people in the world reject this too. The future of human rights depends on people of faith promoting a richer, multi-layered appreciation of what it means to be human.

3.2 What do we mean by rights?

Once we have this multi-layered, rich appreciation of what it means to be human we are better able to understand our rights. The rights given to all people are part of God’s gift to the world. The Catholic Church’s teaching is helpful:

(Human) rights apply to every stage of life and to every political, social, economic and cultural situation. Together they form a single whole, directed unambiguously towards the promotion of every aspect of the good of both the person and society ... The integral promotion of every category of human rights is the true guarantee of full respect for each individual right. The common good, in fact, can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good. In other words, we should be concerned for the rights of people, but also the rights of peoples.

The emphasis on rights and duties point to the importance of relationships to human rights. Since the earliest days of the church, Christians have believed more fortunate people should renounce some of their rights for the benefit of those who are less fortunate. The Catholic Church teach that this principle of the common good stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people. It is fundamental to every aspect of life. ‘The common good, in fact, can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good.’ In other words, we should be concerned for the rights of people, but also the rights of peoples.

The Salvation Army Handbook Of Doctrine states:

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid, 77.
14 Ibid, 79.
15 Ibid, 83.
Humanity is a special part of God’s good creation. Therefore we must learn to value the worth of all human beings as having been made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27; Psalm 8:5). God will hold us accountable for how we live: in community, in relationship to all living creatures as well as to the whole of our natural environment. This knowledge will shape our moral choices and our stewardship of creation.\textsuperscript{16}

This is the main point in this series of lectures: our relationships matter. Not just our relationships with those we know but also the relationships between communities of people. By seeing ourselves as relational beings we will make better moral choices and be good stewards of creation. For Salvationists, the commitment to live in relationship to the whole of creations is at the heart of the covenant made by every person when they are enrolled as a soldier. Every Salvationists has publically said: ‘I will maintain Christian ideals in all my relationships with others: my family and neighbours, my colleagues and fellow Salvationists, those to whom and for whom I am responsible, and the wider community.’\textsuperscript{17}

I hope this essential point is clear. If the purpose of human rights is only to enable autonomous, rational individuals to have what they deserve, then human rights needs to die. The world will be damaged irreparably in the next few decades if the purpose of human rights is only to secure individual rights. However, if human rights can recapture a priority for the common good; for a rights based approach that is grounded in relationships, then we all need to fight for human rights to flourish.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In conclusion, this paper argues that human rights in the 21st century needs religion. Some religious people may argue that religion does not need human rights to survive the 21st century. However, human rights are helpful in building God’s Kingdom on Earth.

There are risks. Christians need to be careful not to allow faith to become an instrument of the Human Rights establishment. Recently, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that religious leaders are potentially very important human rights actors in view of their considerable influence on the hearts and minds of millions of people.\textsuperscript{18} This is true but religious leaders should not become parrots – reciting messages sent from UN Headquarters in New York! All people of faith need to be able to explain why human rights are central to their understanding of the way God wants people to live.\textsuperscript{19}

There are examples of people of faith working well with Human Rights. The recent Beirut Declaration is one example. The declaration states:

\begin{quote}
Human rights can benefit from deeply rooted ethical and spiritual foundations provided by religions or beliefs. Rather than focusing on theological and doctrinal divides, the Beirut Declaration favours the identification of common ground among all religions and beliefs to uphold the dignity and equal worth of all human beings.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine, 2010, 39.
\textsuperscript{17} Soldier’s Covenant, HOD, 321.
\textsuperscript{18} Faith4Rights
\textsuperscript{19} A good example of Muslims doing this work is ‘The Marrakesh Declaration’ on the rights of religious minorities in predominantly Muslim majority communities, 2016 \url{http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/}
The identification of common ground is key. We do not claim to share the same purpose – such as pretending we worship the same God. Pretending we have no substantial doctrinal differences will certainly result in failure and conflict. Instead, let us can find areas of common concern where we can come together and find practical solutions to real problems.

The Beirut Declaration – a declaration made by religious experts with the support of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights – includes 18 commitments on ‘Faith for Rights’, with corresponding follow-up actions. These include some very practical actions which all leaders – religious and secular – need to act upon. For example: 20

- to prevent the use of the notion of “State religion” to discriminate against any individual or group;
- to revisit religious interpretations that appear to perpetuate gender inequality and harmful stereotypes or even condone gender-based violence;
- to stand up for the rights of all persons belonging to minorities;
- to publicly denounce all instances of advocacy of hatred that incites to violence, discrimination or hostility;
- to engage with children and youth who are either victims of or vulnerable to incitement to violence in the name of religion.

My final two sessions will consider more ways people of faith – and particularly members of The Salvation Army – can help make human rights a reality for every person without discrimination. Thank you.

References


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20 Ibid