

Interreligious Dialogue and Human Rights

Terry C. Muck
Professor of World Religions
Asbury Theological Seminary

Can interreligious dialogue contribute to the human rights project? Apparently many people think the answer to that question is yes.¹ Academics have associated the two: the Bruggeman Center for Interreligious Dialogue at Xavier University, for example, lists human rights as one of the primary subjects with which its dialoguers deal.² United States political groups have begun to see the association: for a number of years now the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) has commissioned extensive social scientific studies of religion related human rights violations in various countries around the world and published the resulting monographs. Church groups have seen the connection: the World Council of Churches has made religiously rooted violence one of its principle topics of interreligious dialogue. And of course the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights not only identified freedom of religion as an essential indicator of human rights compliance, the document itself was supported and developed with religious ideas at its base.³

In addition, there is no shortage of books dealing with the two subjects. The Ethics of World Religions and Human Rights, Hans Kung and Jurgen Moltmann, eds. (London: SCM, 1990) deals with both subjects throughout, as does Human Rights and Religious Values, Abdullahi A. An-Ma'im, Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen, and Hendrik M. Vroom (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995). It is true that the more common subject in these books is the theoretical relationship between human rights as an ideology and its historical and theoretical rootedness in the religions of the world. Still, implicit in such discussions is the idea that religions should not just provide the mandate and justification for a commitment to human rights. Religions, these books argue, should also provide practical help in making sure that human rights

¹ An internet Google search for "interreligious dialogue" and "human rights" turns up over 7000 hits. Search on November 15, 2003.

² www.xu.edu/brueggeman_center

moves beyond theory and becomes ever more fully implemented in societies and cultures of the world.

Thus, when one talks about interreligious dialogue and human rights, one is tipping the question toward the practical implementation of human rights, using dialogue among adherents of different religious traditions as a means of promoting human rights. To write about this subject, one usually stipulates that (1) human rights are a good thing and (2) religions should promote them, since religions (at their best) are advocates of human flourishing in all its forms. Interestingly, in order to discuss and advocate this subject, one does not have to, strictly speaking, agree that human rights are rooted, both historically and theoretically, in religious thinking, although almost all who are involved in the use of interreligious dialogue to promote human rights would do so (as we will in this paper).

Once this stipulation is made, the question becomes more focussed: How can interreligious dialogue contribute to the human rights project? Or even better, How does interreligious dialogue contribute to the human rights project?

This question is worth asking for three major reasons, one theoretical, one historical, and one pragmatic. Theoretically, it is important to identify just what it is about interreligious dialogue that has the potential to further the cause of universal human rights. Historically, it is worth asking because it has not always been self-evident that religions have contributed positively to the human rights agenda. And pragmatically, just how to use interreligious dialogue to promote human rights is a skill that must be learned and practiced in order for positive benefits to result.

What are Human Rights?

The most official document regarding human rights, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, adopted as policy by the member countries of that body in 1948, defines human

³ See Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, *The Human Rights Reader* (New York: Meridian Books, 1979), 3-16

rights as the “rights a person has simply because he or she is a human being.”⁴ This basic definition explicitly emphasizes the universal nature of human rights and it implicitly emphasizes the culture-specific character of the actual “rights,” that is, the legally enforced entitlements each of the world’s cultures have come to believe are expressions of what every human being should see as their human birthright. The modern discussion of human rights in the Western world has been characterized by these two ideas, universality and cultural specificity.

The Universality Principle. Many authors have noted that the idea that everyone is entitled to certain human rights simply because they are human beings is a modern innovation.⁵ Human rights, according to this view are not denied to any human being, regardless of their age, sex, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, social class, caste, education, wealth, health, or ability. Of course, the universality principle does not pretend that any human society has ever lived up to this total concept of human rights. Without exception all have fallen short of even the ideal set out in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights. All have and do discriminate in practice. But it is only with modern times that universality has even been embraced as an ideal, and growing numbers have endorsed the universality principle not only in theory and law, but in practice.

The Cultural Specificity Principle. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the idea first introduced into modern intellectual discourse by late nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropologists, that all ideas are culturally embedded, and in that sense are unique. As expressed by these early scholars, the idea of cultural specificity de-emphasizes the practice of applying universal principles of behavior and understanding to all cultures everywhere, and instead insists that each culture be allowed to speak for itself and express its own ideals unencumbered by principles applied by outside observers. In this view, human rights, at least in their behavioral expressions, must be seen as culture specific, determined by each culture in practice.

⁴ See Laqueur and Rubin, pp. 197-201.

⁵ See Max Stackhouse, “Some Intellectual and Social Roots of Modern Human Rights Ideals,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20:4 (December 1981), 301-309.

It does not take a great deal of imagination to see that the Universality Principle and the Cultural Specificity Principle have the potential to conflict with each other. One culture's sense of what constitutes a universal human right entitlement may be seen by another culture as nothing more than a fascinating quirk. As one reads, for example, Mary Ann Glendon's book, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, one is struck by the insight that a very high percentage of the discussions generated by the process of producing the document can be traced to precisely this concern.⁶ The genius of the document is that it seems to arrive at a balanced conclusion that there are universal human rights, but great latitude must be given to individual cultures in how that so-called universals are expressed in those cultures, thereby honoring the cultural specificity principle.

The Individual/Communal Balance. A third idea (and perhaps the major unresolved conflict) emerges as one reads the U.N. Declaration. It is the idea that a careful balance is needed between considering human rights as legally enforced entitlements that each and every individual must be given access to, and considering human rights as matters of public policy, both civil and economic, public policy that has the effect of leading to overall human flourishing of the community. That is, the word "human" in the phrase "human rights" refers to both individuals and to communities of human beings (and, finally, the community of all human beings). Countries that have refused to sign on to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (that is, voted against it and/or have resisted its full implementation among their constituencies) did/do so most often using the rationale that the document is overly Western. By this they may mean many things, but the core complaint is that the document over-emphasizes the individual nature of human rights at the expense of their understandings of communal rights that lead to overall human flourishing--sometimes at the expense of individual rights.

⁶ Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (New York: Random House, 2001).

The modern understanding of human rights, then, includes a careful balancing of two spectrums of understanding, one a spectrum ranging from universal principles to specific cultural mores, the other ranging from an individual understanding of human rights to a communal understanding (see Chart 1). Human rights discussions get off the track when anyone of these four poles are either under-emphasized (or ignored) or overemphasized so that any one of the other three are ignored. Implementation of a human rights document like the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, then, demands careful discussion and negotiation, so that cultural differences can be honored, and, in cultures where the individual reigns supreme, the common good is not forgotten and in communal cultures the disenfranchised or ostracized individual is fully protected. That is, proper implementation of any human rights program demands a great deal of dialogue.

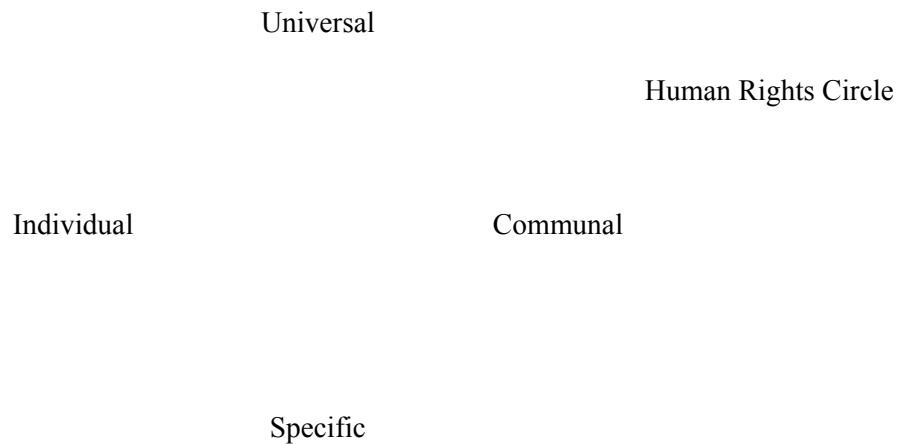


Chart 1. The Universal/Specific Spectrum and Individual/Communal Balance. Effective human rights initiatives must fall within the Human Rights Circle.

What is Interreligious Dialogue?

A useful definition of interreligious dialogue was published in 1981 by John Taylor, a Methodist bishop in Africa: “Interreligious dialogue is a sustained conversation between parties

not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect contradictions and mutual exclusions between their various ways of thinking.”⁷ Three specific ideas emerge from this definition.

Intentionality. A sustained conversation is one to which both parties commit over a specified length of time. That is to say, dialogue is not a haphazard, one-time, or one-sided discussion. Further, intentionality implies that the topics of discussion are mutually agreed upon.

Disagreement. Dialogues are unnecessary if the two parties agree on everything. One can have very good conversations among people with whom one agrees of course. But these are not dialogues. Dialogues begin with the premise and expectation of disagreement, and it is understood that at the end of the dialogue, disagreements may still remain. Disagreement is not a sign of unreadiness, it is an expectation of dialogue. Informed disagreement is not a sign of failure of dialogue, but simply an acknowledgment of increased understanding.

Respect. A dialogue is neither an argument nor a competition. A dialogue turns into an argument when one or both partners become uncomfortable with the basic expectation of disagreement. It becomes a competition when the search for common ground in the midst of ongoing disagreement is abandoned. The basic questions being asked in a dialogue are *Where do we disagree? Where do we agree? And, Is the ground of the agreement wide enough on which to build common understandings and intercultural behaviors?*

These three points—intentionality, disagreement, and respect—apply to all dialogues. What distinguishes interreligious dialogue from other dialogues is the subject matter, and, to some degree, the style of argumentation used. Interreligious dialogue is dialogue about disagreements that in some sense are religious. And the warrants and rationales of interreligious dialogue not only do not exclude the transcendental, but one expects frequent resort to non-empirical warrants.

⁷ *Mission Trends* #5. Gerald Anderson and Thomas Stransky, eds. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1981), 94.

A Brief Historical Tour

Is interreligious dialogue a necessary or at least useful tool in promoting human rights? This is a legitimate question. Religion throughout history seems to have been both one of human rights biggest endorsers and one of human rights biggest violators. One can with all seriousness ask the question why should we attempt to involve the world's religions and religious people in the human rights project at all. Indeed, many in the human rights movement see religion as a drawback to human rights rather than an ally. It may be convincing to argue that *dialogue* itself is an important methodology in adjudicating the two spectrums, the universal/particular and the individual/communal, they might say. But why *interreligious dialogue*?

Consider some of the world's most populous religions, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. On the human rights minus side, Christians led a military campaign against Muslims in the Middle East in an attempt to recapture the Holy Land, led an internal purge against heretics that involved torture and murder of its own adherents, and in modern times forcefully imposed Western civilization on Asian and African societies. These are all clear violations of human rights as defined by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. On the other hand, Christian missionaries almost single-handedly raised the world's health quotient to unprecedented heights, have been responsible for laying the groundwork for entire modern educational systems in many two-thirds world countries, and often have been in the forefront of movements for social reforms such as proscriptions against widow-burning in India. These are all clear championing of human rights issues throughout the world.

Other religions have equally ambiguous records when it comes to human rights. Muslims have throughout their history led military campaigns against infidel nations, and sometimes insisted on indigenous people's conversion to Islam at the point of a sword. On the other hand they have shown themselves to be humane rulers, giving protection to even non-Muslims in lands they control and establishing social institutions that have been models for other nations. Hindus regularly attacked Buddhists in Sri Lanka in an attempt to establish the teachings of the Vedas in

that island nation, and the abuses of the Hindu-based caste system in India have been copiously documented. Yet Hindus have been models of religious tolerance when it comes to diverse teachings in their own land and have contributed an enormous amount of spiritual wisdom, particularly in the areas of religious philosophy. Buddhists, for their part, were equally aggressive in attacking Hindus in Sri Lanka and South India. Yet it is arguable that the Buddha, more than any other Indian religious leader, mitigated the excesses of caste, and in the modern world there are no more admirable champions for human rights than engaged Buddhists fighting for social justice on a number of fronts around the world.

An ambiguous record indeed. One almost wants to ask for the real religions to stand up and be counted. Are you for or against human rights, in the modern sense. That is, universal human rights for all people, not just adherents of your own particular religion. Why the ambiguity?

There seem to be two major reasons. The first has to do with self-advocacy. All of the religions mentioned have been very aggressive in promoting themselves and their teachings to people who do not belong to their tradition. Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim dharmadhatus, missionaries, and dahwists have aggressively spread the substance of their teachings to new cultures throughout their histories. Hindus have come late to the self-advocacy enterprise, but have made their mark on the modern with an energy befitting the scope and resources of the second most populous nation in the world. Although self-advocacy in itself is not a violation of human rights (indeed, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights considers a religion's right to advocate its teaching to others a fundamental human right),⁸ the methods used to self-advocate have often trampled on other important human rights, such as freedom of religious choice and freedom of speech. Too often there has been a disconnect between the peaceful messages of brotherhood and sisterhood of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and the methods used to communicate those messages.

The second reason has to do with the incestuous relationship throughout world history between spiritual power and political power, between church and state, mosque and state, temple and state. In Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, this relationship has never been an easy one. It has frequently led to abuses of power, usually in the nature of establishing one religion as the official religion of a country, meaning freedom of religious choice has been abrogated. This has led to the religions teaching on the one hand that human beings must be free to choose and practice their own religion, and on the other hand giving either tacit or explicit support to political regimes that insist on uniformity of religion. In such scenarios, human rights are often trampled upon.

This ambiguous history notwithstanding, there is reason to hope that modern political and economic conditions will gradually emphasize religion's positive role *vis a vis* human rights and diminish its negative potential. Religions are waking up to the fact that if they want to retain their rights to self-advocate in a world increasingly hostile to religious institutions, they will have to make sure that the methods they use for self-advocacy are more consistent with their messages of peace and love, or at the very least do not violate the competitive market rules that govern all other modern forms of human exchange.

Politically, the separation of church and state, the creation of religiously plural democracies as the political forms of choice, are beginning to defuse the highly volatile mix of religion and politics that seems to so often lead to human rights abuses.

But these are negative reasons why religion and interreligious dialogue need to be involved in the human rights project. Two essential positive reasons make the involvement of religion and interreligious dialogue in the human rights campaign mandatory.

⁸ See Article 18.

The Universal Demands the Transcendent

It is entirely understandable that proponents of the modern idea of human rights, that is, universal human rights, would want to endorse universal human rights without appealing to any universal principles underlying them. When one looks at the dismal history of the universal ideas of the twentieth century—Hitler’s final solution, Stalin’s ideas of worldwide Soviet sovereignty, Pol Pot’s social engineering in Cambodia—it is understandable that one would become highly suspicious of anyone who comes forward with an idea that is good for all times, all places, and all people--that is, my idea.

Yet it is equally understandable that in a century of so much abuse of large groups of the most vulnerable people everywhere—the poor, women and children, the ethnic other, the religiously different—that one would want to insist on universal patterns of protection for these ignored, silenced, and disenfranchised. When a choice is forced between a cultural endorsement of the subjugation and abuse of women, for example, and the universal idea that all women, everywhere should have equal rights before the law and in comparison with men, we must choose the universal idea. And, indeed, there have been other notable attempts at implementing universal ideas in the twentieth century that seem admirable, such as the human rights movement itself.

The choice, then, is not between universal human rights ideas and no universal human rights ideas. The choice has to do with what warrants we use to argue for specific universals: Do we argue for specific universals based on specific cultural ideas? Or do we argue for specific universals based on religious warrants that claim some kind of transcendent or supra-cultural referent? Our argument is this: In order to have universal human rights, one must appeal to universal justification, and the only kind of universal justification that will work is the way religions understand the transcendent.

All human conceptions have elements of both a universal idea and culturally specific expressions of those ideas. There is no purely abstract idea in terms of what human beings can

understand. And there is no way a human being can understand a discrete, culturally conditioned datum without putting it in the context of a wider set of ideas. For some reason, (and theorists disagree on the reason) human beings think in ways that incorporate both universals and particulars. Kenneth Burke thought it was a function of human (and especially religious thinking) to be always pushing ideas to their totalized end point.⁹ Michael Polyani taught that human beings, for whatever reason, tend to hold ideas with “universal intent:”¹⁰ if something is good for a few then it is probably good for all. Traditional religious thinkers of course assign the source of universalistic thinking to God or the gods or dharma, some underlying universal principle. For all of them, however, the idea was that in order to have a truly universal idea, that idea must be the ground of all, outside of the usual ways of empirical or logical justification, a presupposition, an unproved assumption. One cannot have a set of universals that apply to all, nor can one have only individual cultural systems, incommensurable with one another, each deciding on their own unique set of human rights. One must have somewhat unique cultural patterns of human rights that express universal human rights that can only be expressed in somewhat unique cultural patterns.

The obvious problems with the false universals, the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century, is that they were/are culturally specific ideas masquerading as universals. Not just masquerading as universals, but imposed on others, against their will, through the use of coercive power.

The obvious problems with the systems of culturally specific choices presented in the twentieth century (whether the cultural relativisms of the anthropologists or the postmodernisms of the philosophers) is that they are based on single transcendent ideas (There are no cultural universals, there is no single universal metanarrative) that are themselves universally applicable,

⁹ Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1970), 7-42.

¹⁰ Michael Polyani, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

systemically essential foundations to these systems of thought—even as the systems themselves deny that such exist.

What is needed is a way of recognizing the existence of the transcendent as the ground of universal human rights, without reducing that transcendent to just one more in a long series of proposals by political theorists, ethicists, or philosophers, that, in turn, prove to be just one more in an almost endless series of competing justifications for various human rights systems. Some have called this “domesticated transcendence,” that is, transcendence that turns out to be just a human program for doing it my way. Where might one find systems of thought that teach us how to comprehend and use a true conception of transcendence? Of universally based ideas? The religions, of course.

The way religions understand the transcendent. The religions understand that their transcendentals, whether God or the gods or an underlying reality like the dhamma, are not, in the end, subject to the same kinds of justification processes as other parts of our reality. They are not finally subject to empirical justification, as scientific data must be; they are not finally subject to popular support as political ideas must be; they are not subject to logical consistency as philosophical systems must be. Of course, the religions do believe that their transcendentals are manifested in empirically measurable positive ways, that they last a long time because they contribute to human flourishing and thus people support them, that they are logical and rational in their human expressions. But the religions believe their transcendentals are transcendent precisely because they are supra-empirical, revelatory, and supra-rational (not irrational). They go beyond the scientific, political, and philosophical.

It is interesting to look more closely at the historical instances of when religion became a counter-productive force in terms of the human rights project and ask why that was so? It was almost always so because religion succumbed to the temptations of domesticated transcendence. Crusading Christians decided to use political means to achieve spiritual goals. Christian

inquisitors turned to “science” (if torture and mental abuse can be called that) to persuade “heretics” to become orthodox.

The religious contribution to the human rights project lies in its ability to understand the true nature of transcendence, and its realistic ability to help people understand true transcendence in culturally specific ways. Since this is not science or politics or philosophy, the methodology used to communicate this contribution is not experiment, nor vote, nor logic, but dialogue, a give and take between a religion’s best understanding of the transcendence and the cultural forms in which that understanding must be embedded. No other human institution can do this—or even wants to. Thus, all other appeals to universal justification end up being disguises for a limited, cultural understanding—that is, not truly universal, but just what each proponent would like to be universal.

Thus, the first contribution of interreligious dialogue to the human rights project is a way of talking about universals that avoids the dangers of either totalitarianism or cultural relativism. In this understanding, religion is a way of talking about universals in ways that do justice to cultural specificity. The transcendent in such conversations remains truly transcendent. It cannot be too precisely defined because by definition it goes beyond definition. Yet the transcendent cannot be too specifically tied to cultural expressions, because cultures are different and thus the expressions of the same transcendent in different cultures will look both the same and different.

In a way, this contribution, this dialogue, is a conversation between religion and the secular human powers necessary to the implementation and enforcement of human rights. Religion supports human dignity, and it helps cultures discover ways to human dignity through their cultural forms. It is up to the cultures themselves, and to the human community as a whole, to implement and enforce the human rights project.

The Specific Demands of the Religions

Interreligious dialogue makes a second major contribution to the human rights project. It not only facilitates the necessary negotiation between religion and society in trying to implement true transcendence as a basis for culturally specific human rights, but it facilitates the necessary negotiations among the religions regarding the differences that are evident among the various religions' understandings of the transcendent. Put simply, the religions don't always agree. Some of the most obvious human rights violations in the world today are carried out in the name of religions seeking to impose their understandings of the transcendent and the world on people who have different understandings of the same.

In addition, religions don't stop in their contribution to human rights with a positing of the transcendent and the methodology for making the transcendent accessible to specific cultures. The religions of the world all have specific programs of what can be considered human rights: Christians have the ten commandments, Buddhists the various lists of sila or moral rules, Hindus the Manusmriti, etc. Although a great deal of good work has been done by several groups to show that in their essence these "human rights programs" are the same, the differences are still there and religions themselves do not consider the differences to be minor.¹¹

Thus, interreligious dialogue contributes to the human rights project by providing a forum (or forums) where the religions of the world can discuss their differences and hopefully arrive at both religious and cultural expressions of human rights in various places at various times that will be acceptable to all the religions represented in that area. The tension addressed here is not between the religions and secular culture, but among the religions themselves. The results of these dialogues can be divided into three classes: continuing disagreement, compromise, or complementarity.

¹¹ See Hans Kung and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds. *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York: Continuum, 1993). From a religion's point of view see Arvind Sharma, Joseph Runzo, and Nancy Martin, eds., *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions* (OneWorld Publications, 2003).

Continuing disagreement. As we have seen above, interreligious dialogue does not always eventuate in agreement. Dialogue takes place because there is disagreement, and sometimes ends there. When this is the case, sometimes the human rights category in question has to be drawn larger in order to incorporate two or more understandings of it that are operative in the same culture. Religious groups that wish to educate their children in private schools are allowed to do so, but must follow general educational guidelines provided by the state, and determine ways to incorporate their religious interests in pedagogically acceptable ways. In a sense, two sets of guidelines are operative in such a case.

Occasionally, a group's religious scruples cannot be accommodated by a culture. Christian Scientists in the United States who don't believe in giving medical care for certain categories of disease, and reject that care for their children, are often forced to provide that care under penalty of law, because the wider culture deems it necessary. The concern is not for just the religious involved, but for the wider culture. Some religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, reject inoculations against disease, but when the danger of the spread of the disease threatens the whole culture, courts have insisted on the inoculations in spite of the violation of the human rights of the specific groups.

Compromise. Sometimes it is possible for a single solution to be arrived at through dialogue. When Muslims want their female children to wear veils in public schools, sometimes an agreement can be reached where a form of the veil can be used that does not violate the spirit of either the Koran or public school policy. In certain communities, different religious groups have often gotten together to decide on a fair way to accommodate celebration of the different religions' holidays. Similarly, in some communities interreligious groups have gotten together to agree on guidelines for how to teach the sometimes ticklish subject of religion in the public schools. It is often possible to incorporate all the religions' interests in win/win agreements, instead of insisting on a unilateral, single-religious solution.

Complementarity. Because different religions view different human rights issues using different theoretical/theological lenses, it is sometimes possible for the religions to each contribute insights to the issue that make for a stronger human rights statement than one religion alone could produce. The potential for such an understanding (still unrealized, perhaps) is the issue of human rights we discussed earlier between the importance of individual human rights and the importance of communal human rights. We suggested that a balanced human rights program must take into account both the individual and the community. Interestingly, if one looks at the world religious scene, Western religions, in particular Christianity, have tended throughout the history of their cultural manifestations to emphasize the individual nature of human rights, while Eastern religions, in particular Chinese religions, have tended throughout the history of their cultural manifestations to emphasize the communal nature of human rights. It seems that the global human rights project can benefit from incorporating insights from both of these religious traditions. Instead of seeing them as mutually exclusive, they could be seen as complementary, eventuating in a much stronger course of action when they are both allowed to contribute to the project.

Interreligious dialogue of this sort should be seen as a way of contributing information to secular bodies that ultimately carry out the implementation and enforcement of human rights programs. This type of dialogue does not create policy, it creates information and possible courses of action that can help policy makers make decisions. Actually, dialogue is made easier by removing religions from policy-making authority in human rights discussions.

Conclusion

Interreligious dialogue is crucial to the human rights project. It is societies' way of insuring that human rights can be truly universal without imposing one culture's interests on another. It is the mode of choice in insuring that both universality and cultural specificity are honored.

Interreligious dialogue also ensures that the common religious interest in the transcendent can be communicated to global secular culture without losing the specific interests of the different religions themselves. Dialogue is a means of allowing religious difference to positively inform the human rights discussion instead of making such differences the occasion for lessening the universality of the human rights agenda.

Interreligious dialogue does not replace other modes of action necessary to a successful human rights program. Cultures are still needed to implement specific human rights programs, cultures that operate through the power of honor, shame, and relationship. Political and legal systems are still needed to enforce the demands of human rights programs, systems that operate through the power of national and international law. Religion oversteps its role when it attempts to become overly involved in either implementation or enforcement. Revelation becomes demonic when it is reduced to the forms of the secular and the mundane.

But cultures and legal systems become equally demonic when they ignore the revelatory aspect that religions bring to human rights discussions.