

From there Ruston moves to Locke and to hold that Locke's view has roots in this tradition as well and that Locke took the theological foundation of his thought with great seriousness. Thus he finds a golden thread upholding and developing human rights theory from the theologians of the sixteenth century through philosophy in the seventeenth century and on to our own time.

The importance of this work is illustrated in the book by a fascinating chapter on Fair Trade Coffee – an example in our day of the issues that lead to the need for the Human Rights Tradition. This is a timely and outstanding book which deserves to be studied by all who want to understand the links between faith and Human Rights.

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*FOR ALL PEOPLE AND ALL NATIONS: CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND HUMAN RIGHTS* by JOHN NURSER, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2005, xix + 220 pp incl bibliography and index (Paperback, £13.50) ISBN 2-8254-1415-8.

'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience 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.' John Nurser shows how a group of American liberal Protestants worked for an article on religious freedom, expressed in words such as these, to be included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, since they saw the right to religious liberty as the bedrock for all the other human rights in the Declaration. Their concern for freedom to preach the Gospel developed into a concern for a wider freedom which transcended religious difference and provided a solid basis for a plural society.

Nurser's book challenges current understandings of the creation of the UDHR. The part played by liberal Protestants like Friedrich Nolde, in effect the hero of this book, has been, to quote his assessment, 'airbrushed out'. Nurser has done brilliantly to throw light on this, as the dominant current narrative is one in which since the Second World War (secular) 'human rights' have triumphed over religious claims to prescribe what is 'right' for people: 'human rights' are crudely seen as a universal bulwark against the illegitimate and particularist claims of the religiously benighted. This, for example, is the line taken by Francesca Klug in her popular introduction to the Human Rights Act 1998, *Values for a Godless Age, The Story of the United Kingdom's New Bill of Rights* (London: Penguin, 2000). Klug writes, 'The concept of human dignity is widely recognized to have replaced god or nature as the main justification for claiming human rights since the Second World War' (p 214). Nurser shows why this is completely mistaken.

The pivot of Nolde's work was his concern for religious liberty. Nurser piles up evidence (which does not always make for easy reading) to show how effectively Nolde operated. By his energy and command of the issues, Nolde managed to convince key players that he could speak authoritatively for the concerns of the emergent World Council of Churches. Nurser is at pains to show how, almost single-handed, Nolde built a bridge between world Christianity (excluding the Vatican) and its secular analogue, the emergent United Nations.

At one level, Nurser is concerned to right a wrong: to take a stand against an account of history distorted by an anti-religious bias. At a second level, he is concerned for the very thing which concerned Nolde: the recognition that a religious basis for a commitment to liberty is perfectly valid (in this, he acknowledges his debt to Acton). Given his admiration for Acton, it is surprising to find that the one obvious weakness of the book is Nurser's lack of discussion of the part played by Roman Catholics (with the exception of Maritain's intellectual contribution) in the emergence of the UDHR. Inevitably, one wonders whether there is yet another story to be told.

Nurser's narrative raises a number of important questions. The threats to religious liberty today come not so much from aggressively anti-Christian socialist regimes or from reactionary fascist regimes that have made an accommodation with Christianity, but from resurgent Islam and reactionary Western liberalism. It is good to be reminded by Nurser that, at the meeting of the UN assembly which voted in the UDHR, the Pakistani delegate Sir Mohammed Zafrullah Khan, welcomed the article on freedom of religion, arguing that, since Islam was a missionary religion, it could not possibly argue against an individual's right to change religion (p167). The toleration of Europe is now under strain as it has not been since the drafting of the UDHR, whether over the wearing of the *hijab* in French schools, the right to asylum of those who fear religious persecution, or proposed legislation against incitement to religious hatred. Nurser's historical account illuminates the background to Article 18 of the UDHR at a time when its tensile strength is being tested in ways its original supporters could never have envisaged.

There is a moral to this tale, which should not be lost. It is that, given the right conditions and individuals with the right skills, the churches can still, through individuals, make a powerful and creative impact on secular, public life. Reading Nurser's account of events sixty years ago, one realises not only how much the world has changed but how bold and imaginative were the initiatives Christians then took in support of human rights. It would be tragic if the War Against Terror had made Laodiceans of us all.

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