

HUMAN RIGHTS ORIGINATED IN THE LAW OF GOD NOT IN HUMAN DIGNITY

A Study of the Origin of Human Rights and its Relation to Human Dignity



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In modern day teachings of the *origins* of the Rights of Man, they are not identified as coming from the Ten Commandments. For instance:

The Preamble of the **International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1976)**

“These rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person...”

The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948)

“The American peoples have acknowledged the dignity of the individual, essentially; the rights of man are not derived from the fact that he is a national of a certain state, but are based upon attributes of his personality...”

The American Convention on Human Rights (1978)

“...the essential rights of man are not derived from one being a national of a certain state, but are based upon attributes of the human personality...”

The African charter on Human and People’s Rights (1986)

“...fundamental human rights stem from the attributes of human beings.”

Marxism also has an idea of Rights that is really anti-rights. As far as the philosophy teaches, man's Rights, originates in economic factors.

“The Marxist view of human rights entails commitment to the following basic doctrines: (i) Human rights depend on social and economic factors. (ii) Private property is detrimental per se to human rights. (iii) The state creates whatever human rights in fact exist. (iv) International organizations, governments, and individual interest groups have no business interfering in the domestic affairs of a state, on the pretense of correcting alleged human rights violations (“the non-interference principle”). (v) The individual is not a proper subject of international law or international human rights protection... The Marxist philosophy of human rights is clearly an uneasy mix of legal positivism (the state determines rights) and secular natural law thinking (True social justice is realized only when man's nature can develop, free of economic inequalities.)”

John Montgomery, Human Rights and Human Dignity pp. 98, 99.

The facts are, all of today's definitions of the origin of man's Rights have taken a leaning towards the idea that Rights originate in what is called “human dignity”.

*“...the protection of human dignity is regarded as a paramount objective of social policy. While they call their approach a policy-oriented perspective, their choice of human dignity as the “super-value” in the shaping and sharing of all other values has a natural right ring to it.” **Ibid**, p.100.*

There was a time when the Rights of man were identified as originating from the Bible. “ First- generation human rights (civil and political liberties) have been widely acknowledged to stem from biblical influence...the Magna Charta was a profoundly Christian document.”

The famous *American Declaration of Independence* (1776) clearly state:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

However, something happened that changed the fact that the Rights of man were once identified as originating in the Ten Commandments.

“Rene Cassin of France was one of the most influential members of the Commission on Human Rights. Having been a professor of civil law at the University of Paris, Cassin was an expert in international law with an impassioned concern for human rights. For these reasons, the delegates to the Commission on Human Rights selected Cassin to compose the first full draft of the Universal Declaration. This early draft would contain most of the rights and much of the language that would later be set forth in the final document.” **Shannon Bartholomew, The Doctrine of Human Rights, p. 9.**

At the drafting of the Universal Declaration, the spirit that prevailed was a **deliberate avoidance** of acknowledging that men’s Rights originated in the Ten Commandments.

“The spirit prevailing during the preparation of the Universal Declaration was completely at variance with any intention of drawing deliberate and direct inspiration from the Ten Commandments” **Rene Cassin, quoted in Ibid. p. 9.**

Mr. Cassin himself was in a large way responsible for causing a departure from identifying the Rights of man as originating in the Ten Commandments, he grounded man’s Rights in the idea of human **“dignity”**

“This fact leads to a number of important conclusions. First of all, if any relationship between the Universal Declaration and more generally the place of the rights of man in the modern world on the one hand, and the Decalogue as the first formulation of man’s basic duties on the other hand does exist, this relation is not a formal one. Never the less, its reality is evident and must be traced back to the earliest periods of ancient history, when man, standing erect, mastering fire, and enjoying the benefits of written language, became aware of his innate dignity. But as we approach the end of a panoramic look at the history of Human Rights, of their eclipse and development since the Decalogue, it is worth making a comparison between the Decalogue, which is the point of departure, and the present Charter which is our temporary point of arrival.” **Ibid. p. 9**

It was this idea that gave popularity to looking for the origin of the Rights of man in human dignity and not the Ten Commandments. Now we need to look into the meaning of the word **“dignity”** as it relates to humanity. Here are some definitions.

“Dignity”...the state of being dignified; eleva-

tion of mind or character; a grandeur of mien; preferment; high office. **The Wordsworth Concise English Dictionary**, p. 267

“Dignity”...formal of restrained deportment, demeanor or speech; self-respect; majesty or stateliness; the state or quality, of being worthy of respect, honor, or esteem; comparative importance, place or excellence; rank, on elevated position, title, or rank.” **The Lexicon Webster Dictionary**. Vol. 1, p. 280

A summary of the two quotations we have given about the meaning of the word dignity can be expressed the following way:

- Elevated mind and character.
- Degree of excellence.
- Restrained deportment or demeanor.
- The quality of being worthy of respect, honor or esteem.

To thus say that the Rights of man are derived from the above definition of human “dignity” is obviously erroneous. This would mean that **all** men do not have Rights, since:

- (a) Not everyone have an elevated mind and character.
- (b) The degree of excellence of some people are almost nil, e.g. a vagrant.
- (c) Some people are totally unrestrained in their deportment or demeanor.
- (d) Respect is earned; not all men are worthy of respect, honor or esteem. e.g. a child rapist.

The Bible presents all men as losing their dignity because of sin. Rom 3: 9-19; Isa 1: 2-6; Isa 44 9-11, 15-20; Ps 135: 15-18; Jer 10: 8, 14, 15; Ps 94: 8-

10; Isa 19: 11.

Man is even called beast-like because of sin. Ps 73: 22; Ps 49: 12, 13; Eccl 3:18-20; 1Cor 15: 32

Here is an example of the King of Babylon losing his **dignity**. Dan 4: 25, 28-33; Job 30: 1-8.

Man was made **upright** or with the **moral image** of God in him at the beginning. (Eccl 7: 29, Gen:1: 26).

But man came to be without God or lost the moral image through sin, this was how he *lost* his dignity. Eph 2: 12; Eph 4: 17-19; Rom 1: 28; Rom: 3: 23.

To ground man's Rights in the concept of **human dignity**, encourages those who think they are more elevated than others, to think they have more Rights than those they esteem as socially inferior; this has caused discrimination, exploitation and Rights violation as seen in the Bible. 1Sam 8: 4-18. 1Kings 21: 1-16.

It is the work of the Gospel to *restore* human dignity. (1Tim 2: 11-14, Eph 3: 16-19.)

The dignity of man is not anything of himself or in himself, or even his deeds. All our righteousness, are like filthy rags. Isa 64: 6. Isa 57: 12.

Human dignity is the ennobling perfect divine Character of Christ in him. Col 1: 27, 28. Eph 3: 17.

Thus this quotation shows us that God by His grace gives us our dignity.

“Divine revelation informs us that human rights exist, paradoxically, by grace alone. Man's dignity does not rest within itself but on the grace

alone of the God of redemption. Man has no claim to it whatever he receives pardon, not by virtue of his merits but as the gracious gift of God.” Ibid. p. 217.

However, *all men* have human Rights, whether they have dignity through salvation or not. Rights exist for all men. Num 9: 14. Lev 24: 22. Num 15: 12-15, 28, 29.

This is why when one sins against his neighbor, who himself is a sinner, that sin is still a breach of the Law of God or the Rights of the neighbor. (1Jn 3:4, Lev 19: 13. Lk 10: 27-29, 36, 37).

The following quotation shows us why it is to be deplored that men have divorced the true concept of Rights being **God-endowed** from their policies.

“It is to be deplored that mankind is no longer prepared to acknowledge God as the author and guarantor of right, as fundamental rights are thereby deprived of their only true sanction. Opinions, Power, and the will of men are substituted for God; the sanctity and effectiveness of right are surrendered. Important rights are all too easily overlooked (either from want of discernment or purposely for “tactical” reasons) and not included in the declaration...” John Warrick Montgomery, Human Rights and Human Dignity, P.64.

A further history as to human rights being divorced as originated in religion is presented by Mr. Cassin. *“The expression: “God created Man in his own Image” characterizes both that **prise de conscience** and the religious form which it adopted initially. Secularization followed. The dignity of*

man has been reaffirmed by philosophers, sociologists, and statesmen regardless of religious beliefs, and has and has been detached from religious credos of cults... The first article of the Declaration—for the sake of achieving unanimity does not contain the affirmation of the ‘divine origin of man’, which several delegations would have wished to insert.”

Rene Cassin, From the Ten Commandments to the Rights of Man, p. 2.

Mr. Cassin further erroneously tells us that the Law of God **does not speak** about the Rights of Man.

*“...there is no direct formulation in the Decalogue of a correlative prerogative, or of any subjective right. It is only “duty” which the Legislator of Israel, stresses in man’s relationship to man.” **Ibid.** p. 2.*

And in case one may reason that the duties commanded in the Law of God is **about** man’s Rights, Mr. Cassin seeks to nullify this reality by expressing it in a doubtful way. This is certainly gross.

“The Decalogue, a religious act, contains only prescriptions and prohibitions. It imposes duties on man, positive or negative ones. The Universal Declaration, a human instrument, proclaims first for most, man’s rights, and only at the very end articulates his duties. One might say that the difference is unimportant: rights and duties are correlative. A man against whom the commission of murder or robbery is forbidden has therefore implicitly the right to his life and his property!”

Ibid p. 7.

Yet this is in fact very true. Our **duty** to our fellow men is to educate them, as to what are their **Rights**. This is why we are told that we owe him the relationship the Decalogue demands. To owe someone something means that, that ‘Thing’, is his **Right**. Rom 13: 8-10.

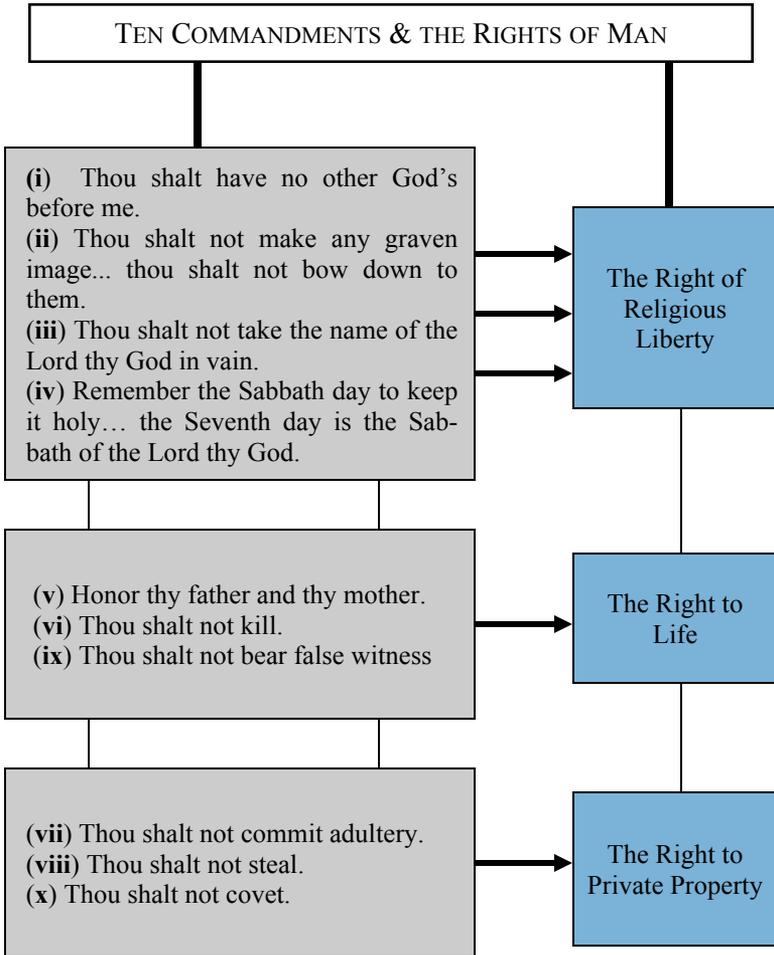
A further curiosity is that the Roman Catholic Church, through a man who later became a Pope, helped Mr. Cassin in drafting the Universal Declaration.

“Many Protestants were also concerned that the declaration did not refer directly to God as the Creator of rights. And while the Papal Nuncio in Paris, Monsignor Roncalli – later to become Pope John xxiii—aided Rene Cassin in drafting the declaration, the Vatican newspaper ‘Osservatore Romano’, attacked it for failing to recognize the sovereignty of God.” **Robert Tracer, Religious Communities in the Struggle for Human Rights, p. 3**

We must, however, never forget that the duties to man as enjoined in the Ten Commandments concerns the Rights of man implied in the Decalogue. Exodus 20: 1-17.

On the following page is a diagram of the three Rights of Man denoted in the Ten Commandments.

A Diagram of the three Rights of Man Denoted in the Ten Commandments





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