Christianity and Human Rights Reconsidered

This is the first global examination of the historical relationship between Christianity and human rights in the twentieth century. Leading historians, anthropologists, political theorists, legal scholars, and scholars of religion develop fresh approaches to issues such as human dignity, personalism, religious freedom, the role of ecumenical and transatlantic networks, and the relationship between Christian and liberal rights theories. In doing so they move well beyond the temporal and geographical limits of the existing scholarship, exploring the connection between Christianity and human rights, not only in Europe and the United States, but also in Africa, Latin America, and China. They offer alternative chronologies and bring to light overlooked aspects of this history, including the role of race, gender, decolonization, and interreligious dialogue. Above all, these chapters foreground the complicated relationship between global rights discourses – whether Christian, liberal, or otherwise – and the local contexts in which they are developed and implemented.

Sarah Shortall is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. Her work has appeared in Past and Present, Modern Intellectual History, the Journal of the History of Ideas, and Boston Review. She is the author of Soldiers of God in a Secular World: The Politics of Theology in Twentieth-Century France (forthcoming).

Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins is Postdoctoral Fellow in the History Department at Dartmouth College. He is currently the managing editor of Modern Intellectual History and is the former editor of The Immanent Frame. He is the author of Raymond Aron and Cold War Liberalism (forthcoming) and the co-editor, with Stephen Sawyer, of Foucault, Neoliberalism and Beyond (2019).
Human Rights in History

Edited by

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, University of California, Berkeley
Samuel Moyn, Yale University

This series showcases new scholarship exploring the backgrounds of human rights today. With an open-ended chronology and international perspective, the series seeks works attentive to the surprises and contingencies in the historical origins and legacies of human rights ideals and interventions. Books in the series will focus not only on the intellectual antecedents and foundations of human rights, but also on the incorporation of the concept by movements, nation-states, international governance, and transnational law.

A full list of titles in the series can be found at: www.cambridge.org/human-rights-history
Christianity and Human Rights Reconsidered

Edited by
Sarah Shortall
University of Notre Dame

Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins
Dartmouth College
Contents

List of Figures
List of Contributors
Preface
SAMUEL MOYN
Acknowledgments
Introduction
SAMUEL MOYN
DANIEL STEINMETZ-JENKINS

Part I General Reflections

1 The Last Christian Settlement: A Defense and Critique, in Debate with Samuel Moyn
JOHN MILBANK

2 The Alpine Climb between Paris and Rome
JULIAN BOURG

Part II European Catholicism and Human Rights

3 Explaining the Catholic Turn to Rights in the 1930s
JAMES CHAPPEL

4 Catholic Social Doctrine and Human Rights: From Rejection to Endorsement?
CARLO INVERNIZZI ACCETTI

5 Radical Orthodoxy and the Rebirth of Christian Opposition to Human Rights
UDI GREENBERG

6 The Biopolitics of Dignity
CAMILLE ROBCIS
vi  Contents

Part III  American Protestant Trajectories

7  William Ernest Hocking and the Liberal Protestant Origins of Human Rights  139  
   GENE ZUBOVICH

8  Inside the Cauldron: Rawls and the Stirrings of Personalism at Wartime Princeton  158  
   P. MACKENZIE BOK

9  The Dignity of Paul Robeson  189  
   VINCENT LLOYD

Part IV  Beyond Europe and North America

10  On Chinese Rites and Rights  207  
    ALBERT WU

11  “Expert in Humanity”: An African Vision for the Catholic Church  223  
    ELIZABETH FOSTER

12  Neoliberalism, Human Rights, and the Theology of Liberation in Latin America  238  
    DAVID M. LANTIGUA

13  Two Sudans, Human Rights, and the Afterlives of St. Josephine Bakhita  261  
    CHRISTOPHER TOUNSEL

Index  276
Figures

3.1 Mentions of “rights” in encyclical literature from 1890 to 1940  
page 66
Contributors

CARLO INVERNIZZI ACCETTI is Associate Professor of Political Theory at the City University of New York, City College, and Associate Researcher at the Center for European Studies of the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po). He is the author of Relativism and Religion: Why Democratic Societies Do Not Need Moral Absolutes (Columbia University Press, 2015) and What Is Christian Democracy? Politics, Religion and Ideology (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

P. MACKENZIE BOK is Lecturer in Social Studies at Harvard University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences. She is an intellectual historian who specializes in the young John Rawls and his path to writing A Theory of Justice. A Marshall Scholar, she earned her PhD at St John’s College, Cambridge, winning the Quentin Skinner, Sara Norton, and Prince Consort and Thirlwall Prizes. Her published work also received the Society for US Intellectual History’s Dorothy Ross Prize. In 2019, Kenzie was elected to the Boston City Council.

JULIAN BOURG is Associate Professor in the History Department at Boston College. His first book, From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007; 2nd ed. 2017), won the 2008 Morris D. Forkosch book prize from the Journal of the History of Ideas. He is currently writing a conceptual history of terrorism since the eighteenth century.

JAMES CHAPPEL is the Hunt Family Assistant Professor of History at Duke University. He is the author of Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church (Harvard University Press, 2018). He comments on Catholic affairs for Commonweal and other public-facing venues.

ELIZABETH FOSTER is Associate Professor of History at Tufts University. She is the author of Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics, and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880–1940 (Stanford University Press, 2013), which won the 2014 Alf Andrew Heggoy Prize of the French Colonial
List of Contributors

Historical Society. In 2019, she published African Catholic: Decolonization and the Transformation of the Church with Harvard University Press. Her work has been supported by fellowships from Fulbright, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

UDI GREENBERG is Associate Professor of History at Dartmouth College. He is the author of the prize-winning The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War (Princeton University Press, 2015), as well as multiple articles on modern European thought and politics.

DAVID M. LANTIGUA is Assistant Professor of Moral Theology/Christian Ethics at the University of Notre Dame. He is the co-author of Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach to Global Ethics (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) and Bartolomé de las Casas and the Defense of Amerindian Rights: A Brief History with Documents (University of Alabama Press, 2020), and the author of Infidels and Empires in a New World Order: Early Modern Spanish Contributions to International Legal Thought (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

VINCENT LLOYD is Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at Villanova University. He is the author or editor of eleven books, including Black Natural Law (Oxford University Press, 2016), Religion of the Field Negro (Fordham University Press, 2018), and, with Jonathon Kahn, Race and Secularism in America (Columbia University Press, 2016). He co-edits the journal Political Theology and directs the Villanova Political Theology Project.

JOHN MILBANK is Research Professor of Religion, Politics and Ethics at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of Theology Social Theory, Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon, Beyond Secular Order, and numerous other books. Milbank delivered the Stanton Lectures at Cambridge in 2011.

SAMUEL MOYN is the Henry R. Luce Professor of Jurisprudence and Professor of History at Yale University. Moyn is a specialist in the history of human rights, the law of war, international law, and modern intellectual history. His books on human rights include The Last Utopia, Christian Human Rights, and Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World.

CAMILLE ROBCIS is Associate Professor of French and History at Columbia University. Her first book, The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France (Cornell
x List of Contributors


**Sarah Shortall** is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. Her book *Soldiers of God in a Secular World: The Politics of Theology in Twentieth-Century France* is under contract with Harvard University Press. In addition, her work has appeared in *Past & Present, Modern Intellectual History*, the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, and *Boston Review*.

**Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins** is a postdoctoral fellow in the History Department at Dartmouth College. He is currently the managing editor of *Modern Intellectual History* and is the former editor of *The Immanent Frame*. He is the author of *Raymond Aron and Cold War Liberalism* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming). He is the co-editor, with Stephen Sawyer, of *Foucault, Neoliberalism and Beyond* (Rowman & Littlefield). His work has appeared in *Modern Intellectual History, the Journal of the History of Ideas, the Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, and elsewhere.

**Christopher Tounsel** is Assistant Professor of History and African Studies at Pennsylvania State University. He is a 2019 recipient of the Woodrow Wilson Career Enhancement Fellowship, and his book *Chosen Peoples: Christianity and Political Imagination in South Sudan* is forthcoming from Duke University Press.


**Gene Zubovich** is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. He is the author of *The Global Gospel: Christian Human Rights and the Fracturing of the Twentieth-Century United States* (forthcoming) from the University of Pennsylvania Press.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press & Assessment  www.cambridge.org
Preface

Samuel Moyn

In a short time, the study of the relation of Christianity to human rights has passed a critical threshold. Not long ago, except for a dispute among Roman Catholic scholars about origins reflecting a twentieth-century dilemma about whether to treat rights as appalling or indispensable, it was still common to claim that Christianity must have “contributed” somehow to the making of human rights. And the chief reason for this tradition was a larger historiography of human rights that understood its task to be the acknowledgment of influences and the accumulation of precedents.

Nowadays the intellectual situation looks entirely different. From one perspective the intra-Catholic dispute about human rights has been generalized. A default liberalism has been newly challenged from perspectives outside the mainstream, many of which can allow for nagging doubts about the beneficence of rights, or radical interpretations that profoundly transform their ethical and political bearing. To be sure, Karl Marx himself offered an excoriating treatment of rights and the critical legal studies movement revived it a few decades ago. But then, over the same period, liberalism itself clove to rights frameworks like never before in its own contested history, especially after the publication of John Rawls’s *Theory of Justice* in 1971. So it is hard to doubt that the past few years have opened up an intensity of challenge to “human rights” such as would have been surprising shortly before.

From another perspective, the historiographical terrain for stories about where rights came from has undergone a seismic shift of massive proportions. A more or less uncritical historiography of rights that grew over several decades around the turn of the millennium was challenged soon after, starting with Lynn Hunt’s *Inventing Human Rights* (2007). The effect was augmented because, whatever the prior efforts to reconstruct the history of rights generally (and the relation of Christianity to them), an altogether new push to discern the origins of human rights appeared thanks to the great new age of the internationalization of the principles in global politics in the era straddling the Cold War’s end. At
Preface

first this push shared something of the ratification of human rights as the morality at the end of history of some complacent liberal histories. But in short order a more fully critical spirit prevailed and “the dark sides of virtue” became fashionable to highlight, whether because of entanglements of human rights with the hierarchies of geopolitics or neoliberalism.

In short, disputes around both rights themselves and stories of their origins transformed out of all recognition the setting for making claims about how Christianity fit in. This volume marks another stage in that transformation, as scholars clear the wreckage of prior contests for new engagements, or even begin in earnest in taking up new stances on the relationship between Christianity and human rights. A number of the chapters take up my lectures on Christian Human Rights (2015), but this volume is far more than merely a referendum on it from diverse perspectives. An essential purpose of this book, indeed, is to leave the debates sparked by any one position behind, in order to move fully into an age of scholarship with the hallmarks of every mature field: it is always critical but also always pluralistic. For that reason, even when they do directly engage my own book, various chapters are best read as establishing a range of interpretive options for continuing disagreement. Fortunately, when it comes to Christianity and human rights now, there is a conversation in which no one gets the last word.

This is especially true insofar as some of the chapters shift the timeline far toward the present from the middle of the twentieth century where others linger, while another set of authors explores far beyond the transatlantic geography of initial discussions. For that matter, historians of the United States have insisted that their evidence suggests a very different landscape than historians of Europe have depicted even when they have striven to include American Christianity – and other authors push the geography of inquiry into Africa and Asia too.

At the end of the exercise, if anything stands out, it is the question of what risks loss – including loss when Christianity receives too much attention as a source of human rights ideals and practices. After all, in the long history of Christianity, affirmations of and resistance to human rights may never have been much more than marginal and other concerns prevailed – and the same could occur again in the future. It is possible that the greatest risk is that Christianity, whether it invented human rights or not, and whether its agenda is advanced through appeal to them or not, is reduced when its relation to human rights is at the forefront.
Acknowledgments

The editors would like to thank Michael Watson, Emily Sharp, and the series editors at Cambridge University Press for supporting this project and shepherding it through to its completion, as well as the anonymous readers who provided invaluable comments on earlier drafts of the essays in this volume. Thanks as well to Stephanie Taylor, Richards Paul, and Ami Naramor for seeing the manuscript through the production phase. We would like to thank the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame for providing funding for the index and Pam Scholefield for creating the index. Finally, we would like to thank Humanity and South Atlantic Quarterly for permission to reprint material from chapters 4 and 6, respectively.