

Can Christian Theology Provide a Foundation for Human Rights?

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I. Introduction: The Dialectical Relationship between Human Rights and the Christian Faith

From the very beginning, the relationship between human rights and the Christian faith is complicated. Let us look at the two foundational documents of modern human rights: the American Declaration of the Rights of Virginia (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), and compare their ideological justifications. The American one affirms that all men are created equal. It appeals to the *imago Dei* as a ground of the “inalienable” dignity and the rights of man. On the other hand, the French document is based more on the rationalism of the Encyclopedists, which can be traced back to the classical humanism of Greece. The human rights are a revelation of Reason (which seems to be the secularized God of the Enlightenment) which the human nature shares and recognizes in himself. This makes human beings transcendent. Since freedom is the expression of the transcendent Spirit, this is also the basic right of the human being.

These two traditions, the idealistic humanism of a Greek origin and the Christian tradition of a Hebraic origin, in fact speak in diverse terms, one of creation and the other of