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Introduction by Martin Conway

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**Introduction by Martin Conway, Balliol College, University of Oxford**

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Each age of historical writing gets the controversies it deserves. If historians have argued in the recent past about the origins of the Cold War, about the nature of the French Revolution of 1789 or, in more general terms, about the impact of the linguistic turn on our attempts to construct artefacts of historical truth out of language, we now find ourselves debating the way in which human rights emerged from the Second World War onwards as an intellectual preoccupation, a focus of political campaigns, and a reference point of inter-state and global diplomacy.

It is not difficult to identify the more general reasons why this should be so. Almost all of the conflicts which have occurred since the end of the Cold War have focused on the interrelated problems of civil and ethnic conflict, population migrations, the denial of individual and collective freedoms by state authorities, and the difficulty of guaranteeing a basic regime of human welfare. But the attention of historians has come to be focused on the issue of human rights for more specific reasons. Our narratives of the twentieth century have changed, and more especially those of the second half of that century. We no longer focus as much as we used to on the origins and remorseless logics of the so-called ‘age of extremes,’ which reached their culmination in the 1940s. Instead, we prefer to identify longer-term logics of the growth of state power, of the evolution of imperial structures, and of the gradual evolution of intellectual traditions. This changes the shape of the history we write. More especially, it creates looser and more capacious chronological frameworks, a history of Europe that is turned outwards towards global interactions, and which leads us away from the formal occupants of political power and towards the civil servants, technocratic experts and intellectual figures whose actions are perceived to have had a more durable influence.<sup>1</sup>

In all of this, human rights have an evident centrality. The rhetorics and structures of human rights were a slow-burn, stretching from reactions to the massacres in Anatolia and the Balkans at the opening of the century through the nascent internationalism of the League of Nations and other organisations in the inter-war years, to the first formal attempts at establishing charters and institutions of human rights in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, to the campaigns for national and individual rights in the post-war decades, and to the codification of regimes of human rights at the end of the twentieth century. Over the course of this multi-layered process, the definition and advancement of human rights involved a wide cast of actors, including lawyers and judges, civil servants and politicians, activists and freedom fighters, as well as intellectuals and religious figures. In geographical terms, too, it was similarly capacious, embracing not only Europe and North America, but also at different points, territories such as Palestine, China, Algeria, and South Africa, as well as the different flash-points of the decolonising and post-colonial world.

All of this makes the history of human rights something of a microcosm – or indeed a theme-tune – of the ways in which we now think about the history of Europe across the twentieth century. It reconfigures the twentieth-century past by providing a new understanding of how the strands of international, political, and intellectual history interacted in complex ways to generate the human-rights culture of the late twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> One prominent example of such history is Philip Nord, *France's New Deal: from the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

It is into this contested field that Samuel Moyn rather deliberately steps with *Christian Human Rights*. The author is hardly unknown: his previous works, most notably *The Last Utopia*,<sup>2</sup> have already been distinguished by the forceful exposition of his distinctive understanding of the intellectual origins and political uses of a rhetoric of human rights, as well as by a cheerful insouciance in challenging the narratives of others. In none of this does his most recent volume disappoint. Nobody with any familiarity with Moyn's previous work on the subject would have any difficulty in identifying him as its author. This is primary-colours history, written without the safety net of the qualifying subordinate clause, and carried forward by the confident conviction that the mid-century adoption of a rhetoric of human rights was primarily the work of a Christian intelligentsia, predominantly conservative and Catholic in their orientation, who found in the language of human rights both the means of expressing their hostility to modern state power and of advancing a Christian-derived language of the person in an era of mass politics. Seen in this way, human rights becomes something of a refuge: a place where Christian intellectuals such as Jacques Maritain could advance their ideas, and fashion their continuing relevance to a world that had floated loose of its Christian moorings. This convergence of human rights and of a Catholic Christianity was not accidental, but it was circumstantial. Moyn has little truck with those who would claim a long-standing affinity of Christianity and of human rights. Too much of the modern history of the Catholic Church from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, he argues, had been preoccupied with the denial of individual liberty for that to be the case. But, in response to the emergence of what Catholics came to understand as the 'totalitarian' character of regimes such as those in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, a body of European Catholic intellectuals, in France, but also by the 1940s in exile, notably in North America, developed a language of human rights which by the end of the decade had succeeded in imprinting the post-war discourse of human rights with their particular intellectual assumptions.<sup>3</sup>

To say that this interpretation will not meet with universal assent risks being something of an understatement. Moyn sees himself as an intellectual controversialist, advancing arguments which consciously stand at odds with the mainstream. Thus, although the tone Moyn adopts in *Christian Human Rights* is unfailingly reasonable, he leaves little doubt that his purpose is to correct the errors of those who have been too ready to locate the genesis of human rights in the development of a form of liberal internationalism. For many, such as Mark Mazower and Jay Winter, the concern with human rights was a reaction to the horrors of the mid-twentieth century. The ideas of formerly isolated figures, such as the lawyers Raphael Lemkin and René Cassin, acquired a new centrality, in an attempt to prevent the resurgence of the horrors committed by regimes and peoples in the 1940s. Liberal, progressive, and secular – and also often Jewish in origin – these figures laid the basis of a more broad-based campaigning for human rights that developed amidst the conflicts of decolonization, and had become part of the Western self-image by the end of the century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> The Catholic discovery of totalitarianism is the subject of James Chappel, "The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe," *Modern Intellectual History* 8 (2011), 561-590.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Mazower, "The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933-1950," *The Historical Journal* 47 (2004), 379-398; Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *René Cassin and Human Rights: from the Great War to the Universal Declaration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Moyn's assertion of what he terms an "ideological history" (243) of human rights disrupts that narrative, suggesting instead a more conservative stabilization of Europe and North America after the Second World War, whereby human rights was one of the means by which a hostility to mass politics and a certain liberal individualism – so deeply rooted in Catholic worldviews since the nineteenth century – regained ideological currency after 1945. This is not an isolated point of view: for a number of years, intellectual historians, notably Jan-Werner Müller, have been drawing attention to the often tacit conservatism which characterised much post-war thought.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a substantial body of recent work on more political themes has emphasised the way in which Catholicism had a real centrality to the political culture of post-war Western Europe.<sup>6</sup> Moyn's book is therefore part of a trend, and perhaps more so than Moyn is inclined to admit. This helps to explain the tone of underlining that, at times, characterises *Christian Human Rights*, and also Moyn's determination to see clarity where others might be inclined to emphasise complexity and simply muddle in Catholic ideas.<sup>7</sup> Above all, he is concerned to draw straight lines from past to present, arguing in the final essay in this volume that this Catholic heritage explains why Western definitions of human rights have often displayed a hostility to non-Christian values, most notably those of Islam, as has been demonstrated, to his mind, by recent debates about the use of the headscarf in French education and public life.

This wider political and historical agenda helps to explain the tone of polite but firm disagreement that characterises this round-table debate. The contributors praise the attention which *Christian Human Rights* brings to the role played by Catholic figures such as Jacques Maritain in the genesis of the language of human rights in the formative decade from the late-1930s to the end of the 1940s but express differing degrees of scepticism as to whether Moyn has quite identified the birthplace of modern human rights. Instead, they emphasise the pluralism that characterised early human-rights activism, which embraced Protestant intellectuals (and church leaders) in the United States as much as Catholic ones, and that had more long-term linkages with Christian ideas than Moyn's circumstantial alliance of the 1940s would suggest. In his reply, Moyn readily concedes many of these points, admitting disarmingly that, in a North American context, Protestant figures did indeed play an important, if transient, role. But of course he does so, because for him the real issues lie elsewhere. In asserting the Christian origins of human rights, he is intervening in history, by questioning the intellectual lineages of a certain liberalism. But he is also, and especially in a North American context, intervening in more political debates, by asserting the Christian heritages of the present.

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<sup>5</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Thomas Kselman and Joseph Buttigieg (eds.), *European Christian Democracy: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspectives*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003); Maria Mitchell, *The Origins of Christian Democracy. Politics and Confession in Modern Germany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012). See also Sean Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics after 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent description of the complexity of Catholic ideas in the mid-century decades, see John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother. The Revolution in Catholic Thinking on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2012).

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**Review by Michael Barnett, The George Washington University**

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As the author of much discussed *The Last Utopia* and the founding editor of the interdisciplinary journal *Humanity*, Samuel Moyn has become one of the premier interpreters of contemporary international human rights.<sup>1</sup> His impressive combination of disciplinary instincts and skills, including those of the historian, legal scholar, and social theorist, certainly help explain much of his prominence. But arguably the major reason why his scholarship commands attention is because he writes with a purpose that can unsettle those who have helped to build and continue to defend the dominant narratives of human rights. All communities, including communities of practice and communities of scholarship, need their myths. And, for the longest time, these communities and their myths helped to sustain each other – the human rights community presented itself as representing light against darkness, and many scholars turned to human rights in part because it enabled them to free themselves of tragic narratives of contemporary history in favor of narratives of progress. Enter Moyn, who is attempting to topple human rights from its pedestal and place it on the same uneven moral terrain on which everyone and everything rests.

*Christian Human Rights* is a fascinating, and at times idiosyncratic, reading of the recent history of human rights, but in order to fully appreciate its accomplishments, and limitations, it must be read against the human rights community's self-sustaining narratives and Moyn's broader, highly ambitious project of creative destruction. I want to emphasize, though, that the degree to which the reader is unsettled, or perhaps even scandalized, by Moyn's account depends on his or her priors about human rights – the more one holds to a view that human rights is a highly secular and progressive form of cosmopolitan politics, the more one is likely to be affronted; conversely, a view that human rights can be part of the profane and represent delusions of emancipation, the more one is likely to read in stride. Two themes loom large.

The first is the relationship between religion and human rights. One of Moyn's contributions is to provide additional evidence that the discourse of human rights owes much more to religion than the standard human rights narrative allows. It is typical for many human rights histories to embed human rights with a broader secularization, modernization, and liberalization storyline: there is a growing recognition that all humans are equal, have dignity, are of equal moral worth, and should enjoy the opportunity for human flourishing.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in many of these histories of human rights, religion is either written out of the story altogether or cast as part of the opposition.<sup>3</sup> Moyn's chapters on the origins of the concept of human dignity, the influence of the religious doctrine of personalism on the idea of the human person, and the connections between Christian realism and human rights make for fascinating reading in this context. Religious thought deserves much more credit than it gets in the standard accounts of these behind-the-scenes moments in the evolution of modern human rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Linklater, *The Problem of Harm in World Politics: Theoretical Investigations* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Paul Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*, third edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (New York: Viking Press, 2011).

But these are not just religious and secular ideas that float freely and happen, by chance and circumstance, to form an unlikely union. Instead, one of the hallmarks of these episodes is the extent to which religious figures and authorities were actively attempting to appropriate interject religious elements into a secularizing rights discourse in order to address a broader crisis in society. In contrast to his *The Last Utopia*, which credits American power and American human rights organizations with creating the modern movement, here religion becomes center stage. The backdrop for each chapter is a broad crisis of legitimacy of the old order, or, in the case of the French and the veil, the disappearance of the old Cold War order. It is not that society simply turned to religion to answer these crises (though there is some of that) but rather that there were and are agents, mainly religious leaders, that attempt to use the crisis to maintain the relevance of religion in public and private life. The challenge then becomes one of attempting to graft, sometimes surreptitiously, religious elements onto secularizing trends. What we have here is political theology (a term that Moyn does not use) in two senses of the concept. There is the Schmittian view that all secular concepts are themselves legacies of religious concepts; as he famously observed, “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.”<sup>4</sup> And there is the more standard view that religious and societal leaders are always looking for ways to make religion ‘usable’ in the service of contemporary problems. Toward that end, they pick and choose those elements from the religious songbook that are most likely to resonate with the times and make sense for answering contemporary questions of particular urgency. Both readings of political theology are evident in Moyn’s historical analysis.

Although the recovery of the religious roots of various trends in human rights is important, and especially so for the human rights audience, this connection is already well known among many scholars of religion and politics. There is, of course, the Durkheimian argument that part of secularization included the transformation of the sacred from God to human. There are scholars such as William Cavanaugh who have picked up on this Durkheimian tradition to see how seemingly secular concepts such as nation, state, and rights have strong religious undertones.<sup>5</sup> There are others, such as Charles Taylor, Hans Joas, and Jose Casanova, and many many others, who have been arguing over the connection between religion and rights.<sup>6</sup> My point is not that Moyn might have acknowledged more fully this other body of work, but that their scholarship might have strengthened the evidentiary basis of his own argument. In any event, *Christian Human Rights* suggests that there is a mutually beneficial conversation to be had between scholars of human rights and religion.

A second theme in *Christian Human Rights* that also unsettles the conventional narratives of human rights is the assumption of progress. Moyn is pointing not only to the role of religion, he is identifying, by and large, conservative religious doctrine. Moyn is not only emphasizing the role of conservative religious doctrine in the emergence of human rights, he is also suggesting that these religious ideas were intended to help repair a

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<sup>4</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>5</sup> William Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Hans Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013); José Casanova, “Cosmopolitanism, the Clash of Civilizations and Multiple Modernities,” *Current Sociology* 59:2 (2011): 252-267.

crisis of the old order, and thus have a conservative element. These are incredibly important arguments that deserve far more attention and consideration, but I have two initial thoughts on the matter.

First, as we look at religious thought, it is important to examine the role of both conservative and reformist religious thought. My casual reading of the relationship between human rights and religion, especially in the early twentieth century and post-World War One period, suggests that there were many religiously inspired individuals (including missionaries) who were simultaneously having their own crisis of conscience, wanting to introduce reform to the Church, and using these new precepts to inform their public commitments.

Second, at the end of the day, it is not clear how important these religious ideas actually were. Moyn himself hedges his bets throughout the book. A history of ideas can take us only so far, and while Moyn, at times, hints that these ideas had a lasting impact, he also understands that the evidence is not quite there to make a compelling case. A more convincing argument would, at the very least, need to explicate clearly the alternative explanations, how his argument works in relationship to them, and a more precise statement regarding how much influence it has in relationship to the broader outcome of concern. Consider his argument regarding the role of Catholic thought in the making of the concept of human dignity. On the one hand, he devotes a chapter to it, presuming that it really does matter. On the other hand, he is not prepared to argue that it had a lasting impact. The concept of human dignity had already circulated prior to the 1930s, and many of the most intellectuals who championed the concept after World War Two did not do so under the influence of Catholic teaching. Moreover, he recognizes that the meanings of doctrines and ideologies can change over time, and that a human rights that once had a strong tie to religious discourse might become detached and married to more secularizing doctrines. In other words, while religion might have played an important role in the origins of human rights, it might be that it simply helped to prepare the ground that was later occupied by non-religious forces. In general, more work needs to be done in order to sustain the claim that it is better to “regard human rights as a project of the Christian right, not the secular left” (8).

In the Epilogue, Moyn switches gears and moves from a close reading of particular historical moments to broader thoughts about the future of international human rights. Indeed, he abandons any attempt to answer whether, why, and how Christianity can claim credit for the rise of international human rights, and instead offers speculation on its standing as “one of the most successful moral movements in the history of human affairs – and which therefore provides for reflection on how the human rights movement might develop in the future” (174). Christianity, and not human rights, has become instilled in the psyche, lifestyles, everyday habits, transitions of a growing part of the world. Moyn credits this success not simply with the fact that Christianity had an 1800-year head start on human rights, but also that it had access to “a much larger range of techniques” (175). Although Moyn does not identify the techniques he is referring to, there is a sense that these techniques are better able to answer both primordial questions and provide rituals that help to anchor oneself in the world and the community.

Yet all universalizing ideologies have their limits, and Christianity’s limits, according to Moyn, have two lessons for human rights. First, there were institutional limits; or, rather, institutions became larger than the ideas. In this respect, his argument is reminiscent of Stephen Hopgood’s distinction between “Human Rights” and “human rights.”<sup>7</sup> The other is its failure to deliver on its promise, or rather, the failure of its most fervent followers to live their beliefs. It is not just rank hypocrisy that is a problem, but rather the

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

failure to deliver the goods. I will leave it to others to weigh in on whether or not Moyn is too hard on Christianity or whether there might be other reasons for swings of secularization and desecularization. In any event, Moyn argues that human rights has similar faults. “Human rights activism has transformed the nature of idealism to an impressive extent over a short space of time but has left the world more similar than one might hope” (179). Does this mean human rights has not changed the world in any way? Or merely not as much as ‘one might hope’? And whose hopes are disappointed? And, if human rights can be vernacularized, and even absorbed into religious practice, then might it not be possible that both might strengthen each other? Or, do we need to understand better how different religious traditions are likely to generate different understandings of the theory and practice of human rights?

Samuel Moyn deserves considerable credit for shaking up the emerging field of international human rights. It is thanks to him (and others working in a critical tradition) that a once rather self-congratulatory and morally confident domain of study has been forced onto its heels and had to adopt a much more sober register.<sup>8</sup> *Christian Human Rights* adds another important layer to the discussion: the role of religious thought. Although seemingly more modest in its scope and reach because of its title, in many ways it is more ambitious and hard-hitting than *The Last Utopia*, precisely because it moves away from a discussion of how to carbon date the origins of human rights to untangling the different kinds of transcendental politics that have become constituted by the political.

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<sup>8</sup> Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights*; Harri Englund, *Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Mark Goodale, *Surrendering to Utopia: An Anthropology of Human Rights* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Lori Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Cynicism and Politics in Occupied Palestine* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013).

**Review by David A. Hollinger, University of California, Berkeley**

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*Christians of a Certain Kind*

**C***hristian Human Rights* establishes that Christianity-espousing organizations and the symbolic capital of Christianity played very large roles in the creation of the human rights ideology that won official acceptance in the anti-Soviet West during the years immediately following World War II. The book gets so many things right about this historical episode that I will offer only modest elaborations and corrections, mostly about the American side of what is rightly a chiefly European story.

“Christian Human Rights were part and parcel of a reformulation of conservatism in the name of a vision of moral constraint,” as Samuel Moyn summarizes his central argument. Christian Human Rights were not about “human emancipation or individual liberation” (10). These statements would be downright false if applied to many of the American ecumenical Protestant leaders of the 1940s whom Moyn correctly identifies as constituting an important tributary of the movement to which his book is devoted. That bunch was most definitely committed to “human emancipation” and “individual liberation,” even if their understanding of what those goals might entail was limited. Aren’t they always? Perhaps this is always a matter of degree? Moyn remarks that the movement he studies was not “so much about inclusion of the other as about policing the borders and boundaries on which threatening enemies loom” (24). Fair enough, but not all borders and boundaries are equally confining. Do not some people sincerely desire a wider community than others? Moyn himself advocates for a wider moral community than we got within the enterprise he calls “Christian Human Rights.” I think he is right to want this. Some in his cast of characters wanted this, too.

Midway through this book Moyn quotes, without endorsing it but apparently considering it of cautionary value, Carl Schmitt’s oracular pronouncement that “Whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat” (132). Well, perhaps. Looking at any and all documents with the hermeneutics of suspicion is generally a good idea, up to a point. But ‘love makes the world go around’ strikes me as on a cognitive and heuristic par with Schmitt’s pseudo-profundity. Neither claim, in isolation, gets us very far in understanding anything, including “Christian Human Rights.”

Moyn’s center of concern is the conservative political order that was stabilized in Europe after the war. He believes that this order had much more in common than is recognized with the officially Catholic governments in place before and during the war in Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Vichy France. He shows that leaders of Christian Democratic parties in several European nations were central agents in this post-war settlement, and that they advanced the ideal of religious freedom as a basic human right to be protected by governments. He also shows that these predominantly Catholic (but sometimes Lutheran) politicians linked this ideal with the principle of private property and invoked both to mark the superiority of their societies to the restrictive regimes of the Soviet Empire. Moyn notes that religious freedom had not been a standing priority in these European circles. Its sudden popularity after the war was partially inspired by American Protestants, who endorsed their own nation’s constitutional tradition of liberty of conscience. Moyn observes that the development of human rights ideology in Europe, even as it emphasized religious freedom, did not entail the slightest repudiation of European imperialism. That ideology was mostly interested in the rights of Christians, and it understood Europe to be an essentially Christian civilization.

Moyn establishes that American Protestants were the most loquacious of all the Christian human rights voices during the war itself, and that their strivings significantly enabled the triumph of human rights ideals in the

post-war era. He does not make much of how distant the American ecumenical Protestants were from the constitutional regimes of Catholic Ireland, Portugal, and Spain. In fact, most of the American Congregationalists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists who made a big deal of human rights espoused a sweepingly universalist construction of the faith. Frequently, they directed that faith explicitly against European imperialism and depicted that faith as the possession of indigenous peoples around the globe no less than of the whites of America and Europe. Even in 1943, in the midst of a war in which the United States was closely allied with Britain, missionary daughter and Nobel Prize winning novelist Pearl Buck denounced British Prime Minister Winston Churchill as a racist and castigated the British empire as an enemy of the cause of human liberation. Rarely did the leaders of ecumenical Protestantism in the United States fail to identify Roman Catholicism as an enemy, not an ally, of a decidedly ecumenical Christian International that promised to bring peace and stability to the globe.

Some of these leading American Protestants did maintain collegial relations with the liberal Jesuit, Jacques Maritain, a major character in Moyn's story. But by and large the ecumenical Protestant leadership was preoccupied with four of what they took to be Catholicism's serious flaws: 1) the denial that any non-Catholic could be a true Christian, 2) the refusal to endorse church-state separation, 3) the cooperation with right-wing regimes in Europe, and 4) the extensive support of colonial establishments abroad. The Irish and Portuguese constitutional orders of which Moyn makes so much would have been anathema to virtually all of the Americans mentioned in this book.

This more universalist construction of Christianity can be found all over the ecumenical Protestant publications of the 1920s and 1930s, especially in the magazines *Christian Century* and *World Tomorrow*. A book that appeared too late for Moyn to use by Michael G. Thompson, *God and Globe*<sup>1</sup>, traces the promotion of a Protestant International throughout the interwar decades. This version of the faith was articulated all the more adamantly during the several years immediately preceding the American entry into the war at the very end of 1941, and was set forth in great detail in March 1942, at a massive conclave of ecumenical Protestant leaders led by none other than John Foster Dulles, future U.S. Secretary of State. Moyn attends to this important meeting, but its character invites underscoring here. The resolutions adopted at this meeting listed U.S.-controlled Puerto Rico along with Japanese-occupied Korea and numerous possessions of the British Empire as among the problematically colonized regions of the globe.

Dulles himself moved sharply away from this outlook once the Cold War began. Dulles, as Moyn understands, was a force for the integration of American power into the Europe-centered regime of "Christian Human Rights." What most changed Dulles's mind was the willingness of the western Europeans to respond to American military and diplomatic leadership (including under the canopy of the new United Nations). Earlier, when watching the failure of the League of Nations and the refusal of the French and British to stand up to Axis aggression, Dulles concluded that the only promising framework for world order was a network of Protestant organizations based in the United States and Britain. Once he saw the potential for a new political order as the war ended—and as the Western leaders showed greater potential for unity in the face of a perceived threat from the Soviets-- Dulles virtually dumped the Protestant International.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States Between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

Dulles was not alone in making taking that direction. Many of the “Christian realists” led by Reinhold Niebuhr and also mentioned by Moyn made similar moves, if less decisively. Many of them had been much less interested in human rights prior to the war, anyway; that cause had been pushed more aggressively by the pacifist and internationalist groups within the ecumenical leadership. But a large swath of the ecumenical Protestant leadership resisted Dulles and the ‘realists’ throughout the late 1940s and even during the 1950s. If we confine ourselves to the Niebuhr-focused activities of the ‘realists’ we miss the story of these people, as Gene Zubovich has shown in a dissertation that Moyn properly appreciates but underutilizes.<sup>2</sup> G. Bromley Oxnam, a President of both the Federal Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, exemplified this resistance both publically and privately. Oxnam was a personal friend of Dulles’s and wrote him often to disagree with his policies as Secretary of State in the early 1950s.

Moyn does not mention the rival American Protestant group, the evangelicals who in 1942 organized themselves as the National Association of Evangelicals. The theologically conservative Protestants opposed the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the grounds that neither was explicitly Christian. These evangelicals constantly accused the ecumenical Protestants of being soft on communism and, as late as the early 1960s, still allied themselves with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in discrediting the ecumenical leadership as disloyal to America and to the Christian faith. It would have stunned these American evangelicals to be told that the political order being stabilized in Europe, especially with such a strong Catholic element, was “Christian.”

The ecumenical Protestants lost most of their battles of the years following the war. But they were prominent in the ranks of dissenters from several features of the foreign policy regimes of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. The National Council of Churches was the first major American organization to demand American recognition of the People’s Republic of China, in 1958. The reason for attention to these losers in the struggle against the Dulles-Niebuhr ‘realists’ is that the causes for which the losers fought can remind us how deeply a universalist, anti-colonial style of Christianity was engrained to begin with in this particular tributary of the human rights movement. Dulles and his kind successfully redirected the American Protestant discourse about human rights toward the Eurocentric Cold War alliance the explanation of which is among Moyn’s major goals. Moyn is correct about that. The American ecumenical Protestants whom Moyn properly identifies as important to the promotion of human rights were not able to sustain much of anti-imperialist program in a Cold War context.

Moyn is justifiably critical of “Christian Human Rights” as an ideology that has proved-- especially as seen in the anti-Muslim attitudes of contemporary France but also more generally—to be a program more of exclusion than of equity and inclusion. “The principle of religious freedom,” Moyn laments, “became annexed to an exclusionary secularist agenda” (167). This understanding of the historical process makes perfect sense in the context of Moyn’s demonstration of the extent to which human rights flourished as a weapon against East European styles of secularism. The diminution of Christianity in Western Europe since the 1960s has required, Moyn argues, a secular framing of the same conservative, decidedly Eurocentric priorities that could once be presented as the glory of ‘Christian Europe.’

Ultimately, Moyn worries that human rights thinking today is “not secular enough” (167). He speculates about “another kind of secularism,” (166) by which he does not mean the Soviet variety but rather one that

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<sup>2</sup> Gene Zubovich, *The Global Gospel* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2015).

would be more genuinely capacious than the secularism that now informs restrictions on head-scarfs in the name of human rights. What might that more capacious secularism look like? Moyn does not answer that question directly, but it is worth noting how close his complaints about “Christian Human Rights” are to the more universalist outlook of the American ecumenical Protestants who were defeated in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

These Protestant liberals were secularizers of a kind in that they rejected the Christian parochialism of their evangelical rivals and of the Roman Catholic Church. The key event was a decision made by Frederick Nolde, the American Protestant leadership’s point person in the negotiations over the UN Charter. As John Nurser has shown in detail in his important book, *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights*<sup>3</sup>, Nolde was going to insist on a Christian justification for human rights but dropped that framework when he realized that given the spiritual diversity of new international body such religious sectarianism was simply a mistake. Nolde’s crucial move in a secular direction was consistent with, and can be seen as a culmination of, the entire drift of ecumenical Protestant leaders of the period. That is why the evangelicals were so angry with them.

For the ecumenical Protestant leadership, the very idea of *human* rights was a pivotal secularization of Galatians 3:28 (in Christ there is no Jew nor gentile, etc.) and the second chapter of Acts (the faithful of all tribes hear each other speak in the hearers’ own tongue). This leadership was driven to that measure of the de-Christianization of public life by three things, above all. One was their own assimilation of Enlightenment styles of universalism, which is visible, for example, in Nathaniel Emmons’s legendary sermon of 1787, “The Dignity of Man,” which I cite given Moyn’s emphasis on the ideal of dignity in the development of Christian Human Rights. Second was the increasingly prominence in American public life of Jews, both religious and secular. None of the European societies at the center of Moyn’s attention had in 1945 a Jewish intelligentsia of remotely the importance of that found in the United States. Third was the experience of missionaries, who brought back home sympathetic accounts of indigenous populations whose dignity and personhood demanded recognition and defense. The ecumenical leaders of the middle decades of the twentieth century pushed their inherited “brotherhood of man” doctrine harder and harder until they found Christian identity a barrier to the creation of the global community they believed their old Gospel demanded. The evangelicals understood exactly what was happening, and gradually took over more and more of the unreconstructed proselytizing mission while the ecumenists switched to service projects abroad and to criticizing their home society for failing to live up the ideals of human brotherhood.

Were these ecumenical Protestant leaders secular enough? Not for my tastes, if that matters, any more than for what I take Moyn’s tastes to be. I hasten to observe that by using Christianity as a vehicle for their moral universalism, these American Congregationalists, Methodists, etc., were enablers, in a fashion, of the more particularistic “Christian Human Rights” that Moyn shows to have been a triumph of the Cold War. This dynamic parallels a domestic one, in which the ecumenical Protestants long endorsed the concept of the United States as a “Christian Nation” only to find, once they repudiated that idea as too exclusive, that the notion was taken up with great energy by evangelicals and many of their Republican Party allies. The belief in America as essentially Christian would not have such staying power had the liberal Protestants not endowed it with such respectability. Hence it would be a mistake to exaggerate the prophetic standing of these

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<sup>3</sup> John S. Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

ecumenical Protestants, ascribing to them a deeper wisdom than they had. Their limitations are revealed by the ease with which the people in power were able to sideline them, and to install a version of human rights quite different from the one they espoused.

I doubt if Moyn could find the kind of politics he is looking for by embracing the versions of Protestantism Dulles and his kind abandoned. Even at their most extravagantly egalitarian, the American ecumenical leaders of that generation tended not to understand how their program for human rights under American leadership could function as a justification for American political dominance of the globe. But Moyn is correct to emphasize in his epilogue that Christianity is “one of the most successful moral movements in the history of human affairs,” and he is right to feel that “reflections” on this truth are very much in order. (173)

I wish the book displayed greater familiarity with some of the internal tensions inside that presence, especially Protestant-Catholic, ecumenical-evangelical, and realist-universalist. And I wish he had confronted more directly the difficult challenge of determining when Christianity is primarily an instrument or vehicle and when we can properly ascribe to it the authority to define something. This last matter is actually very difficult, as specialists in religious history know full well. Is it really helpful to label as “Christian” the human rights regime that Moyn analyses? Perhaps, but I can see why some might want to debate the issue. Yet these are minor cavils. *Christian Human Rights* is an admirable exploration of an important example of the presence of Christianity in a setting where few have recognized its ordinance.

Review by Mark L. Movsesian, St. John's University

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In this very interesting collection of essays, Samuel Moyn makes a provocative claim: Human rights, the foundational principle of global, secular progressivism, actually originated as the project of Christian conservatives in the mid-twentieth century. During and immediately after World War II, these Christians – Moyn is concerned principally with European Catholics, but he also discusses American Protestants – appropriated the Enlightenment's concept of human rights and transformed it into its opposite. The Enlightenment had advanced human rights to promote secularism and break the power of a reactionary Church. In the postwar period, however, Christian thinkers and politicians like Pope Pius XII, Jacques Maritain, Charles Malik, Robert Schuman, John Foster Dulles, and others captured the language of human rights, particularly the concept of human dignity, precisely in order to combat secularism, especially the secularism of the totalitarian left. It was, whatever one thinks of Christian conservatism, an incredibly successful act of intellectual jujitsu.

Moyn's claim will no doubt irritate many people. Christians will reject the idea that they came to human rights late. Human dignity and rights have long been part of Christian tradition, going back at least as far as the sixteenth-century neo-Scholastics, and, before them, to Thomas Aquinas.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, secular progressives are made uneasy by the fact that their strongest commitments originated with their ideological adversaries. Do their Christian associations mean that human rights carry within them the seeds of social conservatism? Are human rights "poisoned at the root?" (139). On both the right and the left, advocates of universal human rights – neoconservatives and internationalists – will resist the idea that human rights are, at bottom, a sectarian invention.

Notwithstanding such criticisms, Moyn's history seems quite sound. True, human rights are part of Christian tradition. But the Church felt threatened by the Enlightenment's version of human rights, and particularly by the cataclysm of the French Revolution, and so refused to accept human rights as individual civil rights. (Not without some reason, it must be said: the revolutionaries were not notable for the gentleness with which they treated the Church). Many papal statements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries demonstrate the Church's attitude, most notably the 1864 encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, and its appendix, the so-called Syllabus of Errors, which condemn, among other things, freedom of speech and religion.

Catholic scholars argue that, in context, these early documents do not really question human rights, and therefore nothing in subsequent Catholic teaching contradicts them. There certainly seems to be a tension, however, between *Quanta Cura*, which rejects as "insanity" the idea that "liberty of conscience and worship is each man's personal right, which ought to be legally proclaimed,"<sup>2</sup> and *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), which demands that the state protect individual religious freedom. At the very least, mid-century Catholic thinkers creatively recast the Church's earlier positions to render them amenable to new interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., John Witte, Jr., *Introduction, in Christianity and Human Rights* (John Witte, Jr. & Frank S. Alexander eds., 2010), 8, 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Quanta Cura* (Condemning Certain Errors) (1864), available at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/P9QUANTA.HTM>

Similarly, Moyn is persuasive in arguing that the postwar left, the ideological forebears of today's secular progressives, mostly ignored the human rights project. In Europe, it was Christian conservatives who most championed human dignity and rights, in large part to counter the threat of atheist totalitarianism. In Chapter One, Moyn explains that the first appearance of the term 'human dignity' in constitutional law is de Valera's Irish Constitution of 1937, a document that begins with an invocation of the Holy Trinity. In the United States, it was Republicans like John Foster Dulles (and also, it must be said, Democrats like Eleanor Roosevelt, but she would not qualify as part of the left as it is understood in Moyn's terms). At the United Nations, Christians like Malik were instrumental in making human dignity a central feature of the new Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Not only Christians, of course. As Mary Ann Glendon has shown in her important history of the Universal Declaration, the drafting committee had representatives from non-Christian cultures as well.<sup>3</sup> Plus, one should not overstate the specifically Christian content of the term 'human dignity' as it appears in the Universal Declaration. The drafters famously left the term vague in order to achieve passage. Still, the influence of Christians is, as a historical matter, unmistakable, and Moyn is right to highlight it.

What happened? Moyn does not go into detail in this work – he has written about it elsewhere<sup>4</sup> – except to note that, starting in the 1960s, Christianity experienced an entirely unexpected collapse in Europe, and that this collapse has “had the tributary effect of making human dignity open to new understandings” (61). One “new understanding” -- indeed, it is the probably the primary one in international human rights law today -- is the secular, progressive one. For most contemporary human rights advocates, dignity denotes a radically subjective concept: the capacity of individuals to act consistently with their authentic selves, free from external constraints, including religious tradition. This understanding is quite inconsistent with the objective concept of dignity in Catholic thought, which ties human dignity to eternal, received truths about human nature.

This distinction explains why Catholic and secular human rights advocates disagree on issues like same-sex marriage. In Catholic thought, same-sex marriage cannot be a human right, because it denies objective facts about sexual difference and complementarity and thus violates human dignity. By contrast, for secular human rights advocates, same-sex marriage is obviously a human right, since it reflects individuals' capacity to attain their own ideas of human flourishing, which is the very essence of human dignity.

At the moment, the latter, subjective view, is clearly winning in the West – though not elsewhere – and worries that Christian antecedents threaten contemporary human rights law are greatly exaggerated. In fact, when Moyn departs from his historical analysis to address current concerns, the book is less successful. For example, he sees remnants of Christian conservatism in recent European Court of Human Rights decisions rejecting Muslims' claims for religious freedom. For example, the court has ruled against a right to wear burqas in public places, headscarves in public universities, and to form Islamist political parties. Today's Muslims, he suggests, have replaced yesterday's Communists as the object of irrational Christian fears.

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001), 225.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Maybe – but in two of the landmark cases he cites, *Şahin v. Turkey* (2004) and *Refah Partisi v. Turkey* (2003), the European Court actually ruled in support of Turkey’s secular government. In fact, the two cases are shot through with references to the importance of the secular political order. Perhaps the judges were expressing a crypto Christian conservatism, but it is much more likely that, if they had a bias, it was one in favor of secularism. Indeed, now that Christianity seems moribund as a social force in Western Europe, Islam may be secularism’s true rival, the new religion that threatens to block its advance. Perhaps the cases Moyn discusses do not represent an atavistic Christian fear as much as a secularist one.

Similarly, Moyn’s reflections about whether contemporary human rights can improve upon Christianity as a moral movement, with which he ends the book, are misguided. Christianity offers human rights important lessons, he says. Institutionally, the religion has been a great success. But spiritually it has been a failure: it has not improved the souls of people who call themselves Christians. As a result of this failure, he says, Christianity has been forced to retreat into “opacity and mysticism” (180). Human rights must do better. It must, according to Moyn, actually change things in this world, or else it will be just another futile faith.

These remarks are rather dismissive of Christianity. More important, they reflect a fundamental misunderstanding – a category error. Christianity is not a moral movement in the way human rights is. It does not promise people a more perfect world; it offers them salvation. That has been the essence of its appeal across millennia and its appeal today – no longer in Europe, perhaps, but across the global South, where Christianity is experiencing explosive growth. Human rights, which is a political program, can never expect to have Christianity’s place in people’s lives. I am reminded of Talleyrand’s famous answer to an earnest revolutionary who asked him for advice on how to start a new, enlightened religion to replace Christianity: ‘I recommend that you be crucified and rise again on the third day.’

Moyn’s closing observations are unfortunate, but they do not detract from his central claim, and on the history he certainly seems correct. This collection is a helpful contribution to the history of human rights and should be read by anyone with an interest in the subject.

## Author's Response by Samuel Moyn, Harvard University

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I am grateful to Michael Barnett, David Hollinger, and Mark Movsesian for so carefully reading and thoughtfully responding to my recent book. I so thoroughly agree with their views that I am left with little to say – including when it comes to their main criticisms. But I will focus on those.

Barnett is right: it ought to be unsurprising that the context of religion in general and Christianity in particular is helpful for thinking about the inception of human rights in the 1940s. After all, a full-three quarters of the states that voted in favor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948 had majority Christian populations. Now obviously there were an enormous range of Christians in each of those countries, and it is not obvious that human rights emerged with a specifically Christian content. For that reason, I focused on the religious *uses* of concepts like rights, especially since the latter in modern European history had historically been correlated with the French Revolution's secular legacy. And as Barnett reports, I emerged with the finding that a surprising number of those uses in the 1940s, whether morally, politically, or legally, can be linked to identifiably Christian commitments, and often politically conservative ones.

Barnett contends that religion is either the source of political commitments or is used opportunistically to justify them. I doubt there is a clean historical case for either proposition. Every religion has resources that resist its enlistment in political causes that the faith is then used to justify – starting with the attempt to take God's sovereignty as described in theological sources as a template for political concepts or institutions. But an opportunistic account does not work either. Not only are there too many true believers convinced of the implications of their religion for specific political outcomes but even opportunists, who start out with the assumption that they can stand apart from the religious concepts they mobilize, normally find themselves meaningfully transformed by their ruses. Human dignity was not deeply rooted in Christianity – too many people have died and suffered in the name of Christian values to make that claim plausible – but neither was dignity just a song from the religious songbook that Christian Democrats chose to sing as they took power across Western Europe. Dignity and rights may have been mobilized to save political Christianity from past mistakes at a critical juncture, but they permanently transformed what it meant to subscribe to it. Religious uses of rights have to be studied both as religious and as uses alike, not as either one on its own.

Barnett plausibly worries that I may have scanted some reformist Christian actors in my zeal to recall the conservative projects that were often sponsored in terms of human rights in the age. David Hollinger, reading my book from his own perspective of American history, takes this criticism far further, and I am sure he is accurate all the way along. I also take seriously his call for empathy. I would never for an instant trivialize the diversity of Christians or think history does well by indicting the limitations of our ancestors from the presentist baseline of our superior knowledge.

Surely Hollinger is right to provide more attention to those he credits as the 'good guys' of American history, certainly compared to their evangelical foes. And it is entirely possible – as diverse episodes across the globe have shown – for religion in general and Christianity in particular to serve the left rather than the right part of the conventional political spectrum. All I can say is that I chose to focus on European conservatives, along with those Americans whom Hollinger agrees became their fierce anticommunist allies, because their commitment to human rights in the 1940s was connected to the most tangible political results, starting with the reign of Christian Democracy and the inception of the Cold War. For Europeans this was disastrous because both Christian Democracy and America's Cold War were deployed, not against some utopian

baseline of my own devising, but against an existing political project that, to date, American history has not featured: a secular project of social or even socialist democracy. Hollinger wants more emphasis on tension among Protestants and among Christians, and fair enough; but the reign of Christian Democracy and the inception of the Cold War suggest that it is legitimate to focus on unprecedented Christian unity after centuries of strife.

And while I would never trivialize the contributions of diverse sorts of Christians then or now, it does not seem to me that the brief commitment of American mainline Protestant liberals to human rights – after a genuine high point both absolutely and comparatively in wartime – made a linear, meaningful, or direct contribution to the trajectory of that idea in the long run, certainly after the Universal Declaration. Hollinger is definitely correct that Protestant liberals and their post-Protestant heirs made major contributions to the civil-rights struggle and helped oppose various wars, but it was rarely in terms of the human rights principles of world order they had once led in introducing. In this sense, my book (if successful at all) is concerned with the history of human rights first and foremost, and not political Christianity generally – since there have been, are today, and will remain many versions of the latter. As Barnett observes, it seemed useful to further elaborate on the often underemphasized significance of Christianity in human rights studies, without claiming to offer a fair history of Christianity even in Europe, let alone transatlantically.

From a Christian perspective, Mark Movsesian goes very far in welcoming this project, and not at all self-servingly -- since he is ready to agree that many Christians embraced human rights more recently than some would today like to believe. I would only comment that he may have misread my epilogue, which is not at all intended to be critical of Christianity as a faith, though I recognize that temptation as an outsider. Rather, my point was that the deepest Christians have always known that Christianity itself demands constant public reflection on its own failure -- a practice in which even the best human rights activists may have learned to engage far too slowly. Further, it is out of respect for Christianity as ultimately a faith movement – a faith, as Movsesian points out, based on belief in Jesus Christ's resurrection to begin with – that I distinguish human rights as a movement that has to be held to different standards. Unlike Christians, that is, these believers have to face failures and limitations without relying on the expectation that human rights work in mysterious ways. Yet these differences hardly imply that Christianity and human rights are entirely disanalogous either. Whatever else Christianity was and is, it is a moral vision, and – as both Barnett and Hollinger agree -- the methods of its partisans in inculcating that vision seem to me profoundly relevant to any other moral agenda. Beyond whatever strictly historical contributions to rethinking the 1930 and 1940s birth of human rights it makes, my book, I hope, reminds secular progressives that Christianity remains the social movement to beat.