May I begin by acknowledging with gratitude the invitation to participate in this Pruit Memorial Symposium? May I also greet the Baylor community on behalf of the Baptist World Alliance and commend you for the fine work you are doing in forming thousands of persons for responsible citizenship and for inspiring leadership in both church and world? The BWA is proud of your association with us.

Allow me to pay tribute to Lev and Ella Wall Prichard III who originally endowed the Pruit Memorial Symposium and to Baylor University for its stewardship in arranging these annual events over the years. Undoubtedly, these symposia have served Baylor’s aspiration to be, to use your own words, “a locus for a world view that is distinctly Protestant, Christian, and true to the best thought in Baptist traditions.”

I wish to address the subject of human rights and the Baptist World Alliance, locating our discussion within the context of the development of concern for human rights within both secular humanism and representative faith traditions of world Christianity.

**Introductory Notes**

Thirty years ago, in an address before the American Section of the International Association for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy, Iredell Jenkins credibly argued for the emergence of the idea of human rights from a process beginning with natural rights, leading to the conception of legal rights and later yielding the notion of human rights. Natural rights, such as the right to self-preservation, are the conditions and protections regarded as necessary for persons to function as persons. Legal rights are the norms identified as a mechanism for defending natural rights; they are procedures necessary for the enforcement of natural rights. Human rights are entitlements to participate in the life of one’s society and immunities from unwarranted coercion or interference from others. Human rights are believed to have their grounding in what may be considered a realm prior to, and beyond, legal rights.

Especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, social contractarians elaborated, as the basis of social existence, the idea of a contract entered into by members of society and also between people and their rulers. To achieve this, they adduced the existence of human rights from differing conceptions of a *status naturalis*, that is, intuitive ideas about the first principles people would agree on under certain conditions.

Different conceptions of how to order society to secure the welfare of the people have been proposed by social contractarians, such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean...
Jacques Rousseau⁵ and distinguished American philosopher John Rawls,⁶ by utilitarians such as David Hume,⁷ Henry Sidgwick⁸ and John Stuart Mill,⁹ and by others representing the Marxian¹⁰ and Kantian¹¹ perspectives.

However, it is social contractarians who have had the most significant effect on the political philosophical developments in the West. This is evidenced in, for example, the American Declaration of Independence (1776)¹² and the Declaration on the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) that emerged from the French Revolution,¹³ affecting as they do the formative principles of western democracies.

**United Nations**

Liberal democratic values have also impacted the United Nations, where one may find expressed a conception of the basis and identity of human rights. In this tradition, the understanding of rights reflects both the idea of human rights as individual rights, emphatically affirmed in the liberal democratic tradition and also the idea of human rights as rights belonging to people as social animals – the hallmark of the human rights tradition in Marxian perspective.¹⁴ These rights are set out clearly, especially in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was affirmed in 1948, and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted in 1966. These, together with the other agreements in the International Bill of Rights and also various subsequent declarations and conventions on human rights, provide an extensive source for the understanding of human rights in the international community. But what of the concern for human rights in the church?

**Human Rights and the Church**

Concern for human rights did not develop primarily in the secular state. There is a growing appreciation for the ways in which ecclesial communities have drawn implications for human rights from the theological anthropologies reflected in the long history of the church.

In their rich corpus of encyclicals and declarations, especially since Vatican II, Roman Catholics affirm the existence of human rights, which they predicate on several premises. On the one hand, human rights are grounded in natural law whereby it is posited that each person possesses reason and freedom giving them rationality and transcendence over nature. On this basis, Roman Catholics assert that each person has a proper claim on the respect of others. On the other hand, human rights are grounded in the theological claim that each human being is created *in imago dei*. Human rights are regarded as “conditions for the realization of human worth in action” and they are classified as personal, social and instrumental. As personal rights, they aim at protecting “the dignity of human existence in its bodiliness.” As social rights, they are “conditions for the preservation of the well being of the person [as an interdependent being].” As instrumental rights, they identify conditions which need to be present in society if respect for human dignity is to be preserved.¹⁵
A careful examination of several papal encyclicals as well as documents emerging from Vatican II, notably *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), together with a number of other significant Roman Catholic texts evidence the course of development of human rights theory in the Roman Catholic Church, ending with the most recent encyclical issued by Pope Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate* (2009).

Within the Protestant movement, concern for human rights has emerged as a postulate of the theological affirmations characterizing various expressions of the related religious traditions. As leaders in the movement addressed the living out of the Christian life in the world, it has been necessary for them to offer a vision of life in community which has to contend with conflicting claims and how these may be adjudicated. There is much to commend the opinion of John Witte Jr. and others who argue that:

> The Protestant Reformation was, at its core, a fight for freedom – freedom of the individual conscience from intrusive canon laws and clerical controls, freedom of political officials from central papal rule and oppressive princely controls.\(^{16}\)

This may be illustrated with reference to Luther, and the movement that bears his name, and Calvin and the Reformed Church. Among these were understandings of human rights which found expression in various ways.

In regard to Martin Luther, it seems to me that the Troeltschian interpretation of the social teachings of this great church reformer has done much to distract attention from Luther’s contribution to the development of human rights consciousness.\(^{17}\) Luther’s insistence on the doctrines of justification by faith and the priesthood of the believers led him to an understanding of Christian freedom in which a Christian is considered “a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none” and “a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” However, Luther seemed not to have discerned fully how this freedom, applicable among Christians, would express itself where people wanted to revolt against rulers whom the people believed disrespected their dignity and denied their freedom.\(^{18}\)

Within the Lutheran community, concern for human rights continues to find expression. Within the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the discourse on human rights has been strongly influenced especially by the contributions of Heinz Tödt and Wolfgang Huber. The LWF 1977 declaration, with its basic elements (*Sachmomente*) of freedom, equality and participation proposes rather a delineation of the ideal-typical method of conceptualizing human rights than an attempt to isolate and spell out an extensive list of rights.\(^{19}\) Locating human rights in the triadic concepts of liberty, equality and participation, the Lutheran Church of America (LCA), for example, argues for human rights as freedom from arbitrary use of power, and entitlement to participate in institutions and decisions affecting one’s personal liberty.\(^{20}\)

The great reformer, John Calvin, has suffered at the hands of those who have formed their view of his social teachings primarily through the lens of his acquiescence in the
execution of Michael Servetus. Against the stringent criticism of Ernst Troeltsch, George Sabine, Stefan Zweig and Roland Bainton, for example, I join Charles Borgeaud, Emile Doumergue and Walter Köhler, to agree that Calvin did make a positive contribution to the human rights tradition. Recently, Timothy George called attention to the fact that Calvin “should have known better” than to assent to the execution of Servetus. However, as George notes, Calvin did also assert the existence of the “rights of our common human nature” that are due all persons made in God’s image. As George has said, “Calvin set forth a complex theory of Christian liberty that helped provide a basis for legal protections of freedom of conscience and the free exercise of religion.” John Witte, Jr. conclusions are along lines similar to Timothy George’s.

Operating from within the tradition whose genesis Calvin inspired, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) achieves clarity on human rights on the basis of the contribution of Jurgen Moltmann who, together with other theologians in WARC, grounds human rights in “God’s right to – that is – His claim on – human beings, their human dignity, their fellowship, their rule over the earth, and their future.”

In the final paper on human rights emerging from a study process the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) commissioned in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1970, the following appears:

... in God’s liberating and redeeming action the original destiny of human beings is both experienced and fulfilled. In the “image of God” concept, the divine claim on human beings is expressed. Human rights to life, freedom, community, and self-determination mirror God’s claim on persons, because in all their relationships in life – human beings with each other and creatures with the creation – they are destined to reflect the image of God.

Human rights mirror the claim of the coming God and of his future upon human beings.

WARC established a department on Church renewal, justice and partnership with a view to “supporting member churches in promoting human rights.”

Of course, theological discourse on human rights takes place not only in the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed ecclesial communities. Time could usefully be spent mining the other ecclesial traditions for their perspectives on human rights. It may be asserted that concern for human rights is now expressed in virtually all ecclesial traditions. It should come as no surprise then, that the Faith and Order program on theological anthropology, carried out in response to a request from the Harare Assembly of the World Council of Churches, provides an example of the effort to “articulate what the churches can say together about what it means to be a human being” especially in the light of the Gospel.

What might one say about human rights understanding in the Baptist movement?
Human Rights and the Baptist movement

When England was “gasping under the despotism of intolerance,” the appetite for fierce persecution of persons, regarded as traitors to the national cause, created a dangerous situation for anyone accused of disloyalty to the Church of England or to the state. Movements that did not conform to standards defined by the dominant church and state apparatus were regarded as hostile to the welfare of the general populace. In such circumstances, not surprisingly, some British people became convinced that their future security was inextricably linked to departure from their homeland. In order freely to practice the religion they knew and believed, they saw exile as their only option. An exodus was to follow this awakening consciousness.

As oppressed peoples who were denied the opportunity to follow their religious convictions in their own homeland, the English exiles, who started the historic Baptist movement in the Netherlands four hundred years ago, could hardly survive without a social theory that had, at its core, a strong notion of personal and communal rights.

It is not surprising then that, from very early on, the persecuted believers in the emerging Baptist community recognized that something is wrong when a set of leaders, together with their collaborators from whatever quarters, unite to impose their beliefs on people who disagree with them.

It may be said that the Baptists’ exposure to the Mennonites and their beliefs, rooted in the Anabaptist tradition, provided nourishment for the incipient ideas which were to come to full flower and to find lasting and historic expression in future Baptist life.

The Anabaptists did have a long history of protest against an ordering of society that deprives human beings of their God-given right to religious freedom – even if in their works, the idea of human rights was not particularly employed. For example, the Anabaptists did protest their entitlement to hold religious beliefs and practice religious convictions whether these were or were not in keeping with prevailing beliefs of the dominant religious or political authorities. In his treatise, Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them (1524), Anabaptist theologian, Balthasar Hübmaier, argued that the state should have no jurisdiction in religious affairs; he also advocated that even atheists are entitled to follow their conscience in religious matters. So far as he was concerned:

> It is well and good that the secular authority puts to death the criminals who do physical harm to the defenseless, Romans 13. But no one may injure the atheist who wishes nothing for himself other than to forsake the gospel.  

William Estep called the Anabaptist heritage “the prized possession of every advanced civilization of the twentieth century world,” explaining that, where people “believe in the freedom of religion, supported by a guarantee of separation of church and state, they have entered into that heritage.”
The leader of the emerging Baptist group, John Smythe, clearly articulated the right to freedom of conscience in matters of religion:

“We believe ... that the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force and compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions... injuries and wrongs of men against man, in murther, Adulterie, theft, etc. for Christ onely is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience.”

Upon his return to Britain, Thomas Helwys famously wrote, in his historic address to king:

For mens religion to God is betwixt God and themselves; the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judge betwene God and man. Let them be heretikes, Turks, Jewes, or whatsoever, it apperteynes not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.

For his efforts, Helwys died a martyr in Newgate prison in England. However, the claim he so powerfully advanced has given a sharp edge to Baptists' historic commitment to the defense of human rights generally and of religious liberty in particular. Some Baptists have claimed for their tradition the provision of the first tract in English cogently arguing in defense of religious liberty. According to Ian Randall, Helwys' Declaration “gave religious toleration the finest defence which it had received in England.”

The course of development within the Baptist context of the idea of freedom of conscience, with its implications for the rights of individuals, has been discussed in various places. The same is the case for the notion of the autonomy of the local Baptist church with its implications for communal rights within the religious context. Since the emergence of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) as an instrument of worldwide Baptist “essential oneness,” how might one characterize the BWA’s attitude to human rights?

**Human Rights and the Baptist World Alliance**

Throughout its 104-year history, the BWA has maintained constant vigilance in the area of human rights. During this period, the nineteen BWA congresses reflect how the focus on human rights emerged around three major foci, namely war, racism, and religious freedom. BWA’s vigilance is reflected in the addresses, statements, manifestos and resolutions of the Congresses and also in the resolutions passed at the General Council meetings held annually since 1975.

**War**

The BWA has paid much attention to the subject of war. Addressing “the sinfulness of war” with its “wholesale destruction of human life,” the BWA called upon Baptists to

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be instant in protestations against warfare... and to be urgent in praying and working for world peace.” In addition, the BWA has maintained prophetic witness against the accelerating arms race. The BWA has repeatedly affirmed its opposition to war - especially wars of aggression. The case for the moral indefensibility of war may be summarized as follows:

1) Because God has made human beings in God’s divine image, upon each and every person is conferred an incalculable worth;

2) Because God created human beings to live in community, marked by fellowship and love, people should refuse to allow any barrier to separate them.

3) War is morally indefensible since it “is the demonic destroyer of human lives ... and property;” it “undermines all Christian values” and it constitutes a “violation of human rights.”

Racism

The BWA has also spent considerable time reflecting on the subject of racism. The historical origins of concern about racism in the BWA lie in the following factors:

1) the gradual internationalization of the world Baptist movement,
2) concern for major developments in world history marked by the stain of racism together with the struggle for recognition of the injustice meted out to people on the basis of ethnicity or race, and
3) the problem of race relations within Baptist churches.

The BWA has opposed racism and racial discrimination, calling on its members to support all attempts to eradicate overt and covert expressions of it. The argument against racism has emphatically asserted the following claims:

1. Jesus taught the “supreme value of the individual soul.” After J. C. Carlisle made this claim at the third congress, where he also praised the passage of an act to abolish slavery, congress participants called on all Baptist to help governments “cleanse the educational books of all nations of all racial and national antagonisms, especially in the writing of history.”

2. “The biological facts of race are not evil. They are natural, and we must reverently accept and acclaim them as having been ordained of God the Father of all mankind... The biological facts of race being in themselves good, have to be honoured and consecrated to the service of the whole family of mankind.”

3. Christians have a responsibility to teach the young “concerning racial integrity and self-respect along with respect for the integrity and human rights of other races.”
4. Racism is “a violation of the law of God the Heavenly Father.” Gathered in Atlanta in 1939, the congress opposed “all racial animosity and every form of oppression or unfair discrimination towards the Jews, toward coloured, or toward subject races in any part of the world.”

The 1985 Los Angeles Congress sums up the BWA attitude to racism by declaring, in one of its resolutions denouncing apartheid, that “race and the Christian Gospel are incompatible.” Racism is “a crime against humanity and a sin against God.” The Congress based these views on “the doctrine of creation whereby every human person is given dignity as made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27)”; “the doctrine of redemption whereby we proclaim salvation in Christ, crucified and risen, for people of all races and colors (Colossians 3:11),” and “the eternal purpose of God to unite all creation in Him (Ephesians 1 and 2).”

Religious Liberty

BWA has opposed racism as often as it has praised religious liberty. The very identity of the Baptist movement is inextricably bound up with the issue of religious freedom. From the earliest years of the movement, concern for religious liberty was a major preoccupation of the Baptists. Their ecclesiology and their experience of persecution have led Baptists to maintain a strong advocacy for religious liberty. As time passed, the ongoing experience of religious persecution especially in Romania and the Soviet Union prompted Baptists to reiterate, again and again, their strident defense of religious freedom and their demand for the right of religious liberty to be respected.

In England, divergent understandings of how to relate religion and the state contended against each other in the nascent years of the Baptist movement led by English exiles in Amsterdam. The dominant understanding of the relation of church and state implied that the two entities were virtually inseparable. As Nigel Wright has pointed out, since Henry VIII assumed the title of Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1534:

church and state were seen in England as one entwined entity rather than two distinct realms. Those who would threaten uniformity either by attempting to return to Roman Catholicism or by moving towards radical Puritanism were severely dealt with therefore as both political and religious dissidents. The Church became the primary means by which the authority of the monarch was imposed and maintained. Failure to conform to the practices of the Church of England and non-attendance at or departure from its liturgies, were penalised.

The English exiles in Amsterdam trumpeted the call for religious liberty and nearly 300 years later, at the inaugural congress in 1905, signs appeared heralding the priority of religious liberty on the list of BWA concerns. Addressing the congress on “The Place of Baptists in the Christian Church,” J. D. Freeman declared:
In our postulate of soul liberty, we affirm the right of every human being to exemption in matters of faith and conscience from all coercion or intimidation by any earthly authority whatsoever. Our demand has been not simply for religious toleration, but religious liberty; not sufferance merely, but freedom; and that not for ourselves alone, but for all men. We did not stumble upon that doctrine. It inheres in the very essence of our belief. Christ is the Lord of all.  

The basis of this right of religious liberty has been variously described in the congresses and councils of the BWA:

**Soul Liberty**

Religious liberty has firm foundations, Baptists claim, in soul liberty. Addressing the 1911 Philadelphia Congress, J. H. Rushbrooke explained Baptists’ historical “witness to the freedom and dignity of the separate human person” adding that the “doctrine of soul liberty is but the assertion on behalf of all his fellowmen of a right that is unspeakably precious to himself.” J. T. Forbes echoed Rushbrooke’s claim when, addressing the same congress, he asserted that each person “is God’s child” and has a “regality hidden or manifest.”

As the BWA stated in its “Message … to the Baptist Brotherhood, to other Christian Brethren, and to the World” at the 1923 Stockholm Congress:

> Religious liberty is an inherent and inalienable human right. It arises out of the direct relation of the soul to God. Man is constituted in God’s image. He is a free personality. Moral responsibility is based upon this freedom. This is a fundamental axiom of ethics as well as of religion.

The claim concerning “a direct relation of each individual to God, and … the right of every one to choose for himself in all matters of faith” has been repeated again and again over the years. For example, the 1939 Atlanta Congress affirmed the right of religious liberty for “every man of every faith and of no faith” on the basis of the claim that:

> Worthy religion rests on the conviction that the individual soul is competent to deal directly with God, and has the right and the need of this direct dealing. To deny any soul the full exercise of this privilege is to deprive the individual of his inherent and most sacred right and to violate his dignity and worth as a human being.

Religious liberty is also grounded in an understanding of creation, redemption and covenant.
Creation, redemption and covenant

In an address delivered at the 1923 Stockholm Congress, E Y Mullins described religious liberty as “the mother of all other forms of liberty” and asserted that:

Religious liberty rests upon man’s original creation in God’s image... Man as a person created in God’s image, free and spiritual, competent to deal directly with God..., man endowed with a conscience ringing in the soul like an alarm bell against wrongdoing; ... man self-willed and sinful and then penitent and believing, redeemed by the power of Jesus Christ...; man, recreated in the Divine image, ... this is the being and these the endowments which demand that great boon of religious liberty.”

The right of religious liberty includes the freedom each person has to reject any particular religious affiliation, to change his or her religion or belief and the freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his/her religion or belief in teaching, practices, worship and observance. As John D. Hughey explained “biblical teaching concerning redemption sheds light on religious liberty.” By “an action of sovereign grace” God established Christian freedom, but human liberation becomes effective in a person’s life only after that person accepts what Christ has done. This occurs voluntarily; it is not a decision extracted by external coercion. It was left for James Leo Garrett, Jr. to identify as one aspect of biblical anthropology the notion of human beings as persons in relationship with God. God is “a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God” who placed obligations on “covenant-people” on the basis of “divine recognition of the responsible nature” of human beings. Culbert Rutenber also pointed to the justice and mercy of the “faithful God who keeps ... covenant” as integral to the righteousness of the covenant-making God.

Religious liberty is grounded in an understanding of creation, redemption and covenant. In the context of the affirmation of the broader covenant between the creator and the creation, Thorwald Lorenzen has claimed that human rights are “part of God’s providential working in history to make and to keep human life human.”

Of course, at the back of the argument in defense of religious liberty is very strong confidence in biblical teaching. Whether it is the so-called “Mid-Century Call to Religious Freedom,” issued by the 1950 Cleveland Congress, or the 1955 “Golden Jubilee Declaration on Religious Liberty” or the “Manifesto on Religious Liberty” issued by the Rio de Janeiro Congress in 1960, the BWA has emphatically asserted that the principle of religious liberty is derived from the word of God.

Other Rights

The BWA has not affirmed the rights implied by God’s creation of human beings only in the areas of war, race and religious liberty. Social, economic and political rights are also
affirmed which, unfortunately, have not received the extensive treatment given to the three subjects we have discussed. We make brief mention of some of these rights which received only limited attention at the congresses.

First, children’s rights:

The BWA has supported the idea of the entitlement of children to the social right of primary education.\textsuperscript{83} It praised the parliamentary action to regulate the labor of children and young persons in the mills and factories of the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{84} It has also condemned the violation of children’s rights in the sex trade.\textsuperscript{85}

Second, women’s rights:

The BWA has opposed unfair employment practices and affirmed women’s right to equal payment for equal work.\textsuperscript{86} It has also canvassed against domestic violence, rape and incest as revealing “the sickness of the soul.”\textsuperscript{87}

Third, social and economic rights.

In his address on “The Attitude of the Baptists to the Working Classes”, J. T. Forbes laid the foundation for the BWA’s attitude to social and economic rights. He called on delegates attending the inaugural BWA Congress not to separate human service from “the love that serves the neighbour. And in the attitude we adopt to the working classes,” he noted, “we must be true to this principle.”\textsuperscript{88} He added that: “We must be true to our own principles of liberty, equality and fraternity... The genuine worker ... must be dealt with, not as a member of a class, but on the broad ground of his manhood. Even when fallen, he is one ‘who once was a man.’”\textsuperscript{89}

The 1975 Stockholm Congress asserted “the right of all segments of society, including women, youth, the ageing, minorities, and the poor, to participate in church and community decision making [including] the rights to self-determination and economic and social justice.\textsuperscript{90} In addition, concern for the right to participate in their community that disabled persons should enjoy emerged at the 1981 General Council meeting in San Juan.\textsuperscript{91} In a resolution passed at the congress, congress participants affirmed:

the rights of all persons to have access to life, liberty, food, clothing, shelter, health, education, the right to work, and the pursuit of happiness including a quality of life that allows for adequate development of human potentialities.”\textsuperscript{92}

At the 1980 Toronto Congress, Chairman William Pinson Jr., on behalf of the BWA Commission on Freedom, Justice and Peace, presented a “Declaration on Human Rights”\textsuperscript{93} which emphasized the social and economic rights of all persons. These rights include the following: “the right to belong or not to belong to social groupings, including familial, religious, economic, and political [ones] ... the right to the fruits of labor, including adequate food, clothing, shelter, and health care... the right to cultural identity ...the right to a nationality, to freedom of movement and residence within the borders
of one’s nation state, ... the right to travel from one’s country and return... and the right to an education.”

The BWA has also supported the right to maintain cultural identity, the right of children, the aging, and the sick to “care and dignity, and the rejection of torture and inhumane conditions in places of confinement such as prisons and institutions for the mentally disturbed.”

Arguing for human rights

Turning to the way in which the argument for human rights has been made within the BWA, one may refer to the contributions at BWA congresses of John David Hughey, James Leo Garrett, Jr., James E. Wood, Jr., and Thorwald Lorenzen.

Hughey interpreted the creation of human beings in the image of God as a reference to human nature as rational, moral and spiritual. On this basis, he asserted people’s freedom to think for themselves and to choose good or evil, together with responsibility to God for the use of their intellect and the choices they make. He also explained how, paradoxically, the exercise of the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Christ in allowing human beings free will reveals the importance of the right of religious liberty.

Garrett identified biblical motifs informing BWA discourse on religious liberty, as including:

- human beings created by God with a free will and with covenant-making possibility with God, not by coercion, but by persuasion;
- the church’s nature and mission as a reconciled and reconciling community;
- the state as an entity having limitations, and
- the lordship of Jesus requiring first loyalty of all followers.

Wood identified biblical/theological and historical claims underlying human rights language within the BWA, including:

- God’s nature and dealings with human beings;
- The sacredness of human personality and the inalienable right to respond freely to God’s revelation;
- The inviolable sacredness of the human conscience;
- The sinful nature of human beings which affects human institutions, thereby proscribing the absolutizing of human authority - religious or political, and
- Civil authority having no jurisdiction over matters of religious belief and practice.
Wood also advanced the biblical teaching on love of neighbor and “the inclusiveness of God’s love for all humanity – male and female, all races, and all nations – all of whom are created equally in the divine image and are equally inviolable as persons” as part of the basis for human rights.  

Lorenzen identified, as a basis of human rights, God’s concern for the poor and oppressed manifested, for example, in God’s liberating activity in ancient Hebrew history, in Jesus’ concern for human liberation, and in Jesus’ presence in the hungry, the stranger, the naked and the prisoner.” Although he based human rights on the creation of human beings in the image of God, Lorenzen’s explication draws extensively from the lexicon of secular humanism.

Influenced no doubt by the discourse on human rights within the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Baptists attending the 1980 Toronto Congress, argued that human rights were “derived from God – from his nature, his creation, and his commands.” Human rights are “rooted in the nature of God [who is] just, merciful and loving.” They are also “intrinsic in the nature of the world as created by God.” By their constitution as persons created by God as spiritual, moral, psycho-physical and social beings, human beings have God-given rights and responsibilities which must be respected.

**Freedom and Justice Division**

We may conclude that, within the Baptist World Alliance, the discourse on human rights has been marked by the positive estimate of human worth affirmed in secular humanism and also the high evaluation of creation in imago dei in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The BWA discourse has mined the treasures of the sacred Scriptures and of mature theological reflection to evince, with fellow Christians from other ecclesial traditions, how the notions of creation, redemption, and covenant also serve to ground the defensibility of human rights within the Christian tradition.

Put differently, the BWA understanding of human rights fits well into, and is continuous with, the general human rights theory advanced within the wider ecclesial community, although it has its characteristic peculiarities, namely:

- its assertion of the priority of religious liberty, such that other human rights may be said to be implied by the right of religious liberty;
- its biblically inspired vision, in which creation, redemption and covenant as dimensions of God’s dealings with humankind are highly significant for human rights understanding, and
- its affirmation of rights within the context of a raft of obligations that are believed to be required by neighbor-love, so that an endless list identifying human rights can be subjected to adjudication.

Nor is the BWA understanding of human rights inconsistent with the rights theory of the international community as represented in the United Nations except that, insofar as
the BWA understanding is predicated on explicitly religious affirmations, it may be said to imply the existence of boundaries to the identification of rights, which must be consistent with a biblically-inspired moral vision.

The tradition of honoring outstanding Baptists with the Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award annually, and with the Congress Human Rights Award every five years, is meant to encourage Baptists to maintain constant advocacy for human rights. This tradition also exemplifies the belief of the worldwide Baptist community that faithful defense of human rights is worthy of honor.\textsuperscript{109}

The main lack in the BWA discussion on human rights may be the limited success achieved, in the face of expanding claims concerning what constitutes human rights, in identifying clearly and in explicating fully criteria for what it may deem the proper use of rights language. This task is necessary if one is to deal with the danger of the notion of rights being so elastic that very idea of human rights is itself discredited. As Don Browning has said:

“A new critical grounding for human rights is required if the entire [human rights] tradition is not to explode into scores of conflicting subjective wants that have no real authority and, in reality can never be implemented.”\textsuperscript{110}

A similar concern has been expressed by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical, \textit{Caritas in Veritate}. Benedict states that “rights presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere licence... [I]ndividual rights, when detached from a framework of duties which grants them their full meaning, can run wild, leading to an escalation of demands which is effectively unlimited and indiscriminate. Duties set a limit on rights because they point to the anthropological and ethical framework of which rights are a part, in this way ensuring that they do not become licence.”\textsuperscript{111}

We do well to remember what John Witte Jr. has said, namely that “without religion, many rights are cut from their roots... without religion, the regime of human rights becomes infinitely expandable ... [and] without religion, the state is given an exaggerated role to play as the guarantor of human rights.”\textsuperscript{112} In this claim is perhaps the beginning of an answer to Browning’s warning.

That Baptists associated within the BWA have not forgotten, and indeed are prepared to maintain their characteristic advocacy for human rights, is well illustrated by the decision, taken in Prague, Czech Republic in 2008, to establish within BWA’s formal structures a division on freedom and justice. This led to the appointment of a director for the division at the recently concluded General Council meeting in Ede, Netherlands in July, 2009. It is clear that human rights will remain an issue of major concern to the Baptist World Alliance.

2 Whether it is still defensible to assign the earliest manifestation in the West of a notion of rights to the writings of the Aristotel (See, for example, *Nicomachean Ethics* §189) and the Epicureans (See, for example, Jack Mahoney, *The Challenge of Human Rights: Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), it was Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) who brought the language of human rights into the literature of philosophy. On the basis of a conception of natural law, Grotius (See especially his *De Jure Praedae Commentarius* (Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950 and his *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace).London, 1814) proposed a possible grounding for rights in other than divinity.

3 Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) developed a construct of the state of nature as a state of war and argued that this requires, if social harmony is to be facilitated, the creation of a social contract. This contract agrees the abandonment of certain rights to a sovereign who is strong enough to calm social antagonism and enable civic concord, but also capable of being overthrown in cases where reasonable bounds are exceeded and the rights of individuals denied. In my unpublished paper, *Thomas Hobbes and the Natural Law Tradition*, Harvard Divinity School, 1980, I argued, on the basis of an examination of Hobbes’ *De Cive, De Corpore Politico*, and *Leviathan*, that contradictions litter Hobbes’ writings on natural law, including the relation of natural law, positive law and divine law. Adopting a position between the Taylor-Warrender understanding on the one hand and the perspectives from Brown and Plamenatz on the other, I argued that Hobbes “attempted to enlist the service of the traditional idea of natural law which he clothed in such unworthy garb as to ruin its essence and drive it into infamy.”

4 Especially in his treatises on Government, John Locke (1632-1704) argued for the notion of an “original compact” which respects the fact that individuals have God-given natural rights to life, liberty and property and provides the basis for human social arrangements. These arrangements grant authority to the state to serve the interests of the participants in the social contract. The role of the state is to secure respect for the rights of individuals within it. (Vide John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*. Peter Laslett, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).


8 See, for example, his *Methods of Ethics*. London & New York: Macmillan & Co. 1893.


12 The American *Declaration of Independence* (1776) claims both reason (the Laws of Nature) and God (Nature’s God) as the origin of human rights which are capable of being recognized and proclaimed, but not created nor granted, by nation states and political organizations. It declares as “self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, [and] that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” See, for example, http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/index.htm

13 In the *Declaration on the Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789) that emerged from the French Revolution, a comparable basis appears to be adduced for claims similar to, but not identical with, those made in the American Declaration of Independence. This Declaration on the Rights of Man and Citizen states that
human beings are “born and remain free and equal in rights” and, “under the auspices of the Supreme Being.” It identifies “liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression” as “natural and imprescriptible rights”. See, for example, [http://www.hrcr.org/docs/frenchdec.html](http://www.hrcr.org/docs/frenchdec.html)


17 I argued, in an unpublished essay, Lex Naturae and Luther’s Dualistic Ethic: A Critical Evaluation of the Troeltschian Analysis of Luther’s Social Ethics, Harvard Divinity School, 1979, that Troeltsch failed in his attempt to establish the claim that Luther proposed a bifurcated morality by relegating religion to the inner life. I argue that Troeltsch attributes to Luther a conception of relative natural law, a notion that does not appear in Luther’s extensive and diverse literary corpus, on the basis of a failure to comprehend Luther’s interpretation of the Decalogue in the perspective of the command to love. Second, I maintain that Troeltsch misinterprets Luther’s understanding of vocation regarding it referring merely to a sphere with a legitimate secular ethics, rather than a channel of God’s self-revelation and government of the world – a view that also appears in Luther’s works. The problem which Luther failed to overcome was how to adhere to own social theory within a framework in which the corpus Christianum concept is maintained.


19 See, for example, On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics. Jürgen Moltmann, tr. M. Douglas Meeks, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 7ff. Today, publications emanating from the Lutheran World community offer strong support for human rights. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has declared its commitment to creating awareness of, and fostering respect for, human rights, in the following words: “Lutheran churches see the protection of human rights as a basic Christian concern. The LWF monitors human rights abuses around the world and, in consultation with its member churches, makes representations in relation to crucial issues... The Federation also supports the human rights ministries of member churches with training, financial and other support.” On this, see [http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/LWF-What_We_do.html](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/LWF-What_We_do.html) In establishing an office for International Affairs and Human Rights, the LWF has signaled its seriousness in tackling human rights issues.

20 See the LCA 1979 pamphlet, Human Rights: Responsible Freedom in the Quest for Justice.


22 ibid., p. 31.

23 in his book, The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, John Witte Jr. has argued credibly for two great periods in the ministry of Calvin – the early years, when Calvin supported the call for “liberty of individual conscience from canon laws and clerical controls, liberty of political officials from ecclesiastical power and privilege, liberty of the local clergy from central papal rule, liberty of the young Protestant churches from oppression by church and state alike.” According to Witte, Calvin argued “for natural rights, especially natural religious rights: freedom of conscience, freedom of exercise, freedom of the church.” Meanwhile, in later years, although hostile to moral discipline and religious dissent within his community, Calvin still
called for “the common rights of mankind” to be protected. Witte concludes that Calvin’s “theory of Christian conscience provided the cornerstone for the constitutional protections of liberty of conscience and free exercise of religion advocated later in France, the Netherlands, England, Scotland and America.”


- 32 See the Preamble to the BWA Constitution and Bylaws, Ede, Netherlands, July 2009.

- 33 In the earlier years of the movement, the BWA congress program featured a number of commissions addressing selected issues. In some cases, these commissions started working prior to the congress and produced, by the end of the congress, statements and manifestos representing a distillation of opinion on the subject matter and constituting a witness of the BWA. In other instances, persons attending a congress adopted resolutions giving expression to the BWA’s stance on a particular matter.

It is noteworthy that Ohrn also explained that “those who built the [congress] programme naturally tried to enlist speakers who were likely to express the mind of Baptists in general.” [See his“Preface” in Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., Tenth Baptist World Congress, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 26- July 3, 1960: Official Report. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1961, p. 7]. In Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., Eighth Baptist World Congress. p. vi. Ohrn states that the resolutions adopted by the Congress are “indicative of the trends of thought among Baptists around the world.”

The absence of documented sources challenging the status of General Council resolutions as official statements of the BWA may lead one to conclude that these resolutions enjoy a similar status to the declarations of BWA congresses. To the extent that sermons and addresses delivered at the congresses and Councils of the BWA influenced the outcome of these meetings, appropriate, but limited, reference to these help elucidate the declarations from the meetings.

Because of the makeup of the Baptist groups attending especially the first six congresses and, because of striking world events that provided the context for these meetings, it is not surprising that the BWA had so much to say about war. See, for example, Thorwald Lorenzen, “Freedom and Justice” American Baptist Quarterly, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, March, 2005, pp 41-52. See also his Baptists and Human Rights: Freedom of Religion as a Human Right. McLean, Va.: BWA, 1999.


ibid., p. 248.


Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., Tenth Baptist World Congress. p. 302.

ibid.
If delegates attending the first BWA world congress came from 26 countries, with the passage of time, the number gradually increased to 115 countries in the most recent congress in 2005. The result is that the issue of race could not be ignored by anyone taking even a cursory glance at the racial composition of congress participants. The number of countries represented at the BWA congresses is as follows: 26 in 1905, 41 in 1911, 38 in 1923, 46 in 1928, 38 in 1934, 43 in 1939, 38 in 1947, 41 in 1950, 49 in 1955, 73 in 1960, 79 in 1966, 75 in 1970, 95 in 1975, 93 in 1980, 93 in 1985, 90 in 1990, 102 in 1995, 90 in 2000, and 115 in 2005.

The association of congress venues with issues of ethnicity and race positively influenced persons attending BWA congresses. Whether it was the case of Jews under Nazism, blacks and colored under apartheid or blacks or Latinos living in the south of the USA, congress participants at Berlin (1934), Atlanta (1939), Miami Beach (1965) and Los Angeles (1985), for example, knew there was an urgent matter that needed their attention. Quite understandably, these congresses made declarations against racism.

Baptist churches have been among those manifesting racist tendencies and policies over the years. If the worldwide movement did not regard racism as a sin to be confessed and an issue on which to urge the churches’ faithfulness to the Gospel, this would have been a serious sign of failure in discipleship within the Baptist community. Not surprisingly, the 1950 Cleveland Congress boldly admitted that “Baptists are not free from prejudice and discriminatory practices against racial and cultural groups in [their] worship and communities.” See Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., Golden Jubilee Congress. p. 340. The 1955 London Congress also called upon Baptists to “do all in their power not only within their fellowship, but in the wider communities and in the world to make real the highest meaning of human brotherhood.” See ibid., p. 370.

That at least eight separate congresses – Berlin (1934), Atlanta (1939), Copenhagen (1947), Cleveland (1950), London (1955), Rio de Janeiro (1960), Miami Beach (1965), Tokyo (1970) produced statements and resolutions against racism proves the consistency with which the BWA has opposed “racial discrimination and its parent, racism.”

W. T. Whitely, ed., Third Baptist World Congress. p. 64.

ibid., p. xx.


op. cit., p. 41.


ibid.

Reinhold Kerstan and Ruby Burke, eds., op. cit., p. 218.

See, for example, the resolution adopted at the 1939 Atlanta Congress. Vide op. cit., pp. 14-15.

For example, the 1934 Berlin Congress passed a resolution registering its “strong protest against the increasingly severe repression of religion in Russia.” J. H. Rushbrooke, ed., Fifth Baptist World Congress, p. 13.


The Baptist World Congress, London, July 11-19, 1905. p. 23. Freeman praised the work of Roger Williams as “the first person in modern Christendom to establish civil government on the doctrine of the liberty of conscience, the equality of opinions before the law.” (pp. 25-26). He also praised the work of a number of persons including Baptist minister, William Knibb, whom he described as “the apostle of Jamaica” regarding them as “that galaxy of British liberty-lovers [who] blew up the whole abominable institution of slavery” (p. 26).


ibid., p. 327.


ibid., p. 67.

70 ibid., p. 13.
71 ibid., p. 67.
72 ibid., pp. 67-68.
73 Cf. See the “Mid-Century Call to Religious Freedom” in Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., *Eighth Baptist World Congress, Cleveland, Ohio*, p. 337.
75 Importantly, Hughey explains that this is not the same as religious liberty guaranteed by the state (p. 260.)
76 Josef Nordenhaug, ed., op. cit., p. 284.
77 ibid., p. 305.
79 Reinhold Kersten and Ruby Burke, eds., op. cit., p. 166.
80 The delegates declared the BWA’s commitment “from the beginning to the principles of religious liberty as derived from the word of God” and pledged to “seek for all men the right of free and unhindered access to God and the right to form and propagate opinion in the sphere of religion without interference by civil and religious powers.” Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., *Eighth Baptist World Congress*, p. 327.
81 The Declaration sums up the understanding of religious liberty agreed at the ninth BWA congress. The congress declared:

That the right to be free is a gift from God to all men of whatever race.
That a man’s right to choose or change his faith must be preserved, as well as his liberty to dissent or to make objection because of conscience’s sake.
That toleration is not enough; that freedom of worship is not enough. As Baptists we seek not to be tolerated, but to be accepted everywhere as equals in Christ, with all the privileges and responsibilities as citizens. What we desire for ourselves we would secure for others, both for Christian believers and non-believers. (Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., *Golden Jubilee Congress*, p. 369).
82 In this Manifesto, the Congress made it clear that “Baptist commitment to religious liberty arises out of God’s revelation of himself and of His ways of dealing with men. It comes also out of our understanding of the nature of man and his role in the universe, of true religion as personal and voluntary, and of the Christian church as a fellowship of believers.” (Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., *Tenth Baptist World Congress*, p. 297).
83 No less a person than the distinguished General Secretary, and later President of the BWA, John Clifford praised the work of William Edward Forster for introducing in England “a national system of elementary education” that “gave a school place to every child in the land as a matter of right and not of charity.” See *The Baptist World Congress, London, July 11-19, 1905*. pp. 45-46. At its General Council meeting in Seville in 2002, the BWA resolved to oppose abuse of children’s rights in relation to slavery, hunger, education, and the sex trade. See *Minutes*, Seville Meeting, July 8-13, 2002. Cf. *Minutes* of 1989 Zagreb General Council Meeting where a similar resolution was passed.
84 See J. C. Carlisle’s contribution at the 1911 Congress in *The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress*. p. 64.
At the 1911 Philadelphia Congress, Frank Goodchild delivered a paper on “The Church and Working Woman” in which he lamented that there was “no land on earth in which [a] woman has as yet come to her full rights.” “There are” he said, “more women at work for wages to-day than ever before in the history of the world... But among women workers wages have not reached the level of subsistence.” (See The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress. Philadelphia, Pa.: Harper & Brother Company, 1911, p. 366). The 1947 Copenhagen Congress passed a resolution referring to “unfair employment practices, and denial of political rights [as] contrary to the principles of Christianity.” (Walter O. Lewis, ed., Seventh Baptist World Congress, Copenhagen, Denmark, July 29- August 3, 1947: Official Report. London: Baptist World Alliance, 1948. p. 99). Concern for gender equality also resulted in a resolution at the BWA 1984 General Council meeting in Berlin. See Minutes of the meeting.

At the 1980 Toronto Congress, women’s rights were acknowledged as “very much the concern of the church family.” (Cyril Bryant and Ruby Burke, eds., op. cit, p. 176).


See Minutes of the meeting.

Cyril Bryant & Debbie Stewart, eds., New People for a new World, p. 256. At the 1993 Harare General Council Meeting, a resolution as passed calling on the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to ameliorate the disadvantages caused by the structural adjustment mechanisms in their loan programs. See Minutes of the meeting. Similarly, in the General Council meetings in Dresden, 1999, and Prince Edward Island 2001, the BWA agreed a resolution supporting the 2000 Jubilee Campaign.


Cyril Bryant & Ruby Burke, eds. Celebrating Christ’s Presence Through the Spirit, pp. 247-249. The 1982 Nairobi General Council Meeting passed a resolution supporting the “Health for All by the Year 2000” campaign. See Minutes of the meeting.


Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., Tenth Baptist World Congress. pp. 258-263.


Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., Tenth Baptist World Congress. pp. 262 f.


See his *Baptists and Human Rights: The Rights of the Child*. McLean, Va.: BWA, 1998 and *Baptists and Human Rights: Freedom of Religion as a Human Right*. McLean, Va.: BWA, 1999. It is interesting to note that J. H. Rushbrooke did in fact claim that individual rights are restricted by the rights of others. He argued that “religion does not end with the individual. It has its social aspects and out of these grow innumerable relationships and corresponding duties. These relationships and duties must limit in a practical way the privileges and even the rights of the individual. Entrance upon any social compact involves the surrender of individual liberty to a greater or less degree.” See his address on “The Spirit of Brotherhood in the Church” in *The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress*. p. 313.

Cyril Bryant and Ruby Burke, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 246-247.

Some of the persons honored to date are former US President, Jimmy Carter, Rev. Saw Simon of Myanmar, Lauran Bethell, Gustavo Parajon, Joao and Nora Matawana, Dennis Datta and Leena Levanya.


§43, pp. 83-84.