

ASIAN

HORIZONS

Vol. 5, No. 2, June 2011

Pages: 321-333

HUMAN RIGHTS, THE CHURCH'S MISSION AND INCULTURATION

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Since Vatican II, and especially because of the pontificate of John Paul II, support for human rights, both locally and globally, has become a key aspect of the life and mission of the Church. It is now clearly part of the mission of the Church to communicate a concern and demonstrate practical support for human rights. Yet, in order to be effective and truly evangelizing, this concern for human rights must be communicated by and through local churches in ways that are relevant to the communities they serve, their national and cultural contexts. In keeping with the focus of this issue of *Asian Horizons*, this essay will focus on the question of inculturation in relation to the Church's proclamation of and support for human rights. The purpose of this essay is to consider some aspects of the inculturation of the Church's mission on behalf of human rights, in particular to consider how reflection on the inculturation process can reveal some of the features of this mission and make them more explicit. Its focus will be on my own Australian context, as a particular example of inculturation, but it will also draw some more general conclusions about the task of inculturation. Reference will be made to Australian sources for particular points of context, but also to more general works on human rights, in order to make connections with more general concerns in the interpretation and inculturation of human rights.

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The essay will firstly briefly consider the historical background to the inclusion of a witness to human rights in the mission of the Church, and the most general features of the nature and challenge of this mission. It will then consider the Australian social and cultural context and the implications of this context for both the content of the Church's proclamation of human rights and the mode of this proclamation. It will conclude by noting a number of questions and criteria, arising from the discussion of the Australian situation, for the task of enculturating the proclamation of human rights that is faced by all local churches.

Historical Background

Clearly a profound concern for the worth of the human person, for human dignity, is central to the Gospel. This was first developed into a form of human rights language in medieval Catholic thought.¹ Although the origin of the idea of human rights in Western culture may be found in these medieval Catholic sources, it is well known that there was, for complex reasons, great tension between the papacy and movements proclaiming human rights in the nineteenth century, especially the right to religious freedom – expressed most particularly in the condemnation of Lamennais and his followers by Pope Gregory XVI (in the encyclicals *Mirari Vos*, 1832, and *Singulari Nos*, 1834) and in Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864).² However, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, the relationship between the Catholic magisterium and the articulation and proclamation of human rights was transformed into wholehearted support, so much so that the Catholic church – both through the Papacy and the myriad commitments of local churches – is now perhaps the single most significant defender of human rights on a global scale. Key steps in this transformation were John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963), Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) and John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* (1979). This last document, indeed, sums up the Gospel itself in terms of 'amazement' at human dignity and sees it as determining the Church's mission in the

¹In her *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law*, Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans, 2005, drawing on Brian Tierney's *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law and Church Law*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997, Jean Porter notes that we owe "the first explicit claims for the existence of subjective natural rights to medieval canon lawyers" (344).

²In his *Christ and Human Rights: The Transformative Engagement*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, George Newlands emphasizes "the extremely ambiguous record of Christianity in relation to human rights throughout the centuries" (11). Newlands notes that the relationship of Christology to human rights has varied in the tradition according to the influence of different images of Christ, for example, the contrast between Christ as implacable judge and as fellow sufferer (63).

modern world. This expression of the Gospel in terms of reverence for human dignity, and support for its expression in human rights, was to be fundamental to John Paul's papal ministry.

In reality, the name for that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News. It is also called Christianity. This amazement determines the Church's mission in the world and, perhaps even more so, "in the modern world." This amazement, which is also a conviction and a certitude – at its deepest root it is the certainty of faith, but in a hidden and mysterious way it vivifies every aspect of authentic humanism – is closely connected with Christ. It also fixes Christ's place – so to speak, his particular right of citizenship - in the history of man and mankind.³

There has also been a far-reaching historical development in the proclamation of human rights in the international community itself. Prior to World War II, although there were classical statements of human rights such as the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* of the French revolutionary national assembly and the *Declaration of Independence* of the United States of America, there was no statement of human rights as a global obligation and part of international law. Such a statement was only developed after and in response to the appalling desecration of human dignity in World War II, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations Organization in 1948.⁴

³John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis_en.html. (Except where otherwise noted, all citations from Vatican documents are from the Vatican website English edition.)

⁴As Michael Perry notes in his *Toward a Theory of Human Rights: Religion, Law, Courts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, "The morality of human rights is not new; in one or another version, the morality is very old. But the emergence of the morality in international law, in the period since the end of World War II, is a profoundly important development: 'Until World War II, most legal scholars and governments affirmed the general proposition, albeit not in so many words, that international law did not impede the natural right of each equal sovereign to be monstrous to his or her subjects.'" (4). Perry quotes here Tom J. Farer and Felice Gaer, "The UN and Human Rights: At the End of the Beginning," in Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, ed., *United Nations, Divided World*, Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 1993, 240. John Paul's II affirmation of the United Nations Organization and especially of its statement of human rights is also made clear in *Redemptor Hominis*, 17: "In any case, we cannot fail to recall at this point, with esteem and profound hope for the future, the magnificent effort made to give life to the United Nations Organization, an effort conducive to the definition and establishment of man's objective and inviolable rights, with the member States obliging each other to observe them rigorously. This commitment has been accepted and ratified by almost all present-day States, and this should constitute a guarantee

General Features of the Church's Proclamation of Human Rights

Through the influence of these developments, it is now clear that the proclamation⁵ of human rights is part of the life and mission of the Church, since it is such an important means of affirming and protecting human dignity. This is true not only of the defence of human rights as such, but specifically their defence on a global scale, through which the universal Church witnesses to the unity of the human family and does all it can to intensify the bonds of concern and regard between all the nations and cultures of the world. This global commitment of the Catholic Church to human rights is expressed through the Papacy itself, and the various Vatican organizations which are devoted to this mission, but most of all through the extraordinarily varied and often heroic work of the members of local churches.

This proclamation and commitment can be summed up in terms of both witness and service. As *witness*, the Church's proclamation of human rights must be inspired by and be part and parcel of its witness to Jesus Christ.⁶ Its defence of human rights is based in

that human rights will become throughout the world a fundamental principle of work for man's welfare. There is no need for the Church to confirm how closely this problem is linked with her mission in the modern world. Indeed it is at the very basis of social and international peace, as has been declared by John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, and later Paul VI, in detailed documents."

⁵It is significant that the Church can be said to 'proclaim' human rights, a specifically kerygmatic word, since they are now an important part of the social teaching of the Church and 'with her social teaching the Church seeks to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations.' *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, 62.

⁶A witness made clear in the union of Christology and anthropology in the key section 22 of *Gaudium et Spes*: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown." http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html. In his *Macht in der Ohnmacht: Eine Theologie der Menschenrechte*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, Quaestiones Disputatae, 1999, Hans-Joachim Sander develops a powerful argument for the bond between human rights and Christian faith on the basis that both are grounded in the experience of powerlessness. For Sander, human rights are a language through which powerlessness resists power, thereby giving human powerlessness a distinctive power of its own, a word that resists destruction by power. Since Christian faith is based in the powerlessness of the crucified Christ, there are profound affinities between the language of human rights and Christian theology. In

human dignity and specifically in the worth every human being has through union with Christ, and indeed through Christ's anonymous presence within him or her.⁷ Its defence of suffering humanity is inspired most of all by Christ's identification with human suffering, and its unconquerable hope for every human being is rooted in Christ's proclamation of the Kingdom and his resurrection from the dead. Complementing these Christological themes, the Church's proclamation of human rights is also founded in its faith in the goodness of the Creator, who made the human person in his own image, and who wills that each human person may flourish and develop his or her God-given capacities to the full.

The Church's witness also includes a recognition of the inspiration that a commitment to human rights can receive from other faiths and sources of wisdom, a recognition of the Spirit's power to instruct all humanity and of God's gift of himself through the Spirit within particular religious and philosophical expressions of human transcendence.⁸ This witness to the Spirit's work within human culture implies a commitment to inter-faith dialogue and an openness to the truths contained in the philosophical reasoning that is so important in the history of human rights.

As *service*, the Church's proclamation of human rights must also willingly respect the secular dimensions of human rights language and advocacy. The language of human rights can be seen as one modern expression of the classical tradition of natural law, and as such can be perceived and supported by 'all people of good will'. Part of the Church's respect for the secular character of democratic institutions is to recognize that many citizens can share a respect for human rights, while having varying spiritual or personal sources for that respect – that their commitment, both emotional and practical, to human rights is shared with the Church's commitment, although

this sense human rights "are a locus theologicus at the end of this century of violence" (166).

⁷*Gaudium et Spes*, 93: "Now, the Father wills that in all men we recognize Christ our brother and love Him effectively, in word and in deed." http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

⁸Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men." http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html

their reasons for this commitment may be very different.⁹ In its service to humanity as an advocate for human rights, the Church recognizes that there are contexts where explicit Christian witness is appropriate, and others where the urgent need for service prevails.¹⁰

What are the key contextual features in Australia?

The Australian religio-social context is more similar to Western Europe than to the United States, although it naturally has its own particular features. Charles Taylor's analysis in his recent *A Secular Age*¹¹ is as illuminating in relation to Australia as it is to most Western countries. Taylor argues that the social history of Christianity between the French Revolution and 1960, as a watershed date, can be summed up as an 'Age of Mobilization,' in which the Church played a 'Neo-Durkheimian' role as 'a bulwark of civilizational order.'¹² In this 'Age of Mobilization' the four strands of 'spirituality, discipline, political identity, and an image of civilizational order' were woven together in a mass phenomenon that became a mutually strengthening whole.¹³ Since the 1960s, in what Taylor calls the 'Age of Authenticity,' religion is much more involved with the search for personal authenticity than with institutional allegiance. Australian religious history does display these fundamental features: strong institutional allegiance up to the 1960s, with an increasing emphasis on individual expression, with much more flexible institutional

⁹As Richard Amesbury argues in R. Amesbury and G. Newlands, *Faith and Human Rights: Christianity and the Global Struggle for Human Dignity*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, Christian advocacy of human rights is grounded in a 'situated universalism', in the sense that it is based in a particular revealed tradition which warrants belief in universal and objective rights. Other communities of faith and conviction will share this belief on different grounds (66-67).

¹⁰As Benedict XVI emphasizes in *Deus Caritas Est*, 31: "Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8) and that God's presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love." http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html

¹¹Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2007.

¹²Taylor, 470. Australia had only a very brief 'ancient régime' or 'palaeo-Durkheimian' period, in Taylor's terms, since the first Australian colony of New South Wales was founded in 1788, and the Anglican Church lost its established status already in 1836, with freedom of religious worship being granted to non-Anglicans before that date.

¹³Taylor, 472.

allegiances, since that time.¹⁴ During the 'Age of Mobilization' Australian Christianity was characterized by often intense sectarianism (although not leading to violence or civil unrest) and also strong secularist movements, especially various strands of rationalism and utilitarianism, as well as a significant influence of Marxism in ideological struggles during the Cold War period.

At the 2001 Census, 69% of Australians identified themselves as Christian. The Catholic Church is now the largest Christian denomination, in terms of membership, in Australia.¹⁵ Australia has had an influential, although relatively small, Jewish community from the beginning of its colonial history. The numbers of Australians belonging to other world faiths is also relatively small, although they are a significant presence in some Australian cities: there are Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'ite, from a number of countries, including Lebanon, Turkey, Iran and Iraq, and Buddhists from South-East Asia, in particular Vietnamese and Cambodians, made up especially of refugees from the war in Indo-China and their families.

In general terms, then, the Australian audience for the Church's proclamation of human rights can be said to be a post-Christendom audience, although this does not necessarily mean post-Christian. The Christian churches continue to be influential, although there are strong secularist currents.¹⁶ An important aspect of the Australian religious context are the many social forces and voices encouraging and advocating the privatization of religion. Freedom of religion is very well-established in Australia, but there is considerable resistance in many quarters to giving religion a voice in public debates. This has two key forms: one is to deny religious leaders any competence in speaking on socio-economic matters, especially when they are critical

¹⁴The major history of the Catholic Church in Australia is (the late) Patrick O'Farrell's *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History* (Kensington, NSW: University of NSW Press, 1992, 3rd. Revised ed.). Edmund Campion's *Australian Catholics*, Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1987, gives an excellent account of the 'texture' of Australian Catholic life in historical perspective.

¹⁵The Australian Bureau of Statistics website states: "In response to the 2001 Census of Population and Housing question, stated religious affiliations were: 27% Catholic; 21% Anglican; 21% other Christian denominations; and 5% non-Christian religions. Just over a quarter of all persons either stated they had no religion, or did not adequately respond to the question to enable classification of their religion." <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/46d1bc47ac9d0c7bca256c470025ff87/bfd1ca506d6cfaca2570de0014496e!OpenDocument> (accessed 18.3.2011).

¹⁶I use the term 'secularist' to refer to groups and ideas that are explicitly critical of religion and its role in public life, in contrast to 'secular', which refers simply to the fact that there is no established Church in Australia and that religious freedom is guaranteed in the constitution.

of 'free market' economics; the second, sometimes from a different quarter, to deny or minimize their right and competence to contribute to public discussion on sexual and life ethics. In the latter case, of course, the recent clerical sexual abuse crisis has made it even more difficult for the Church to affirm its right to make a contribution to public debate.

Content and Emphases of Human Rights Proclamation

The Australian Catholic Church has had a strong and publicly expressed commitment to the proclamation and defence of socio-economic rights since the late nineteenth century. Beginning in 1940, Social Justice Sunday, with its accompanying Social Justice Statement, has been a feature of the Australian Catholic Church year.¹⁷ It has also, more recently, produced two documents related to human rights employing the model of wide public consultation used by the American Catholic Bishops for their pastoral statements on nuclear disarmament and economic justice: the first of these Australian statements was the document *Common Wealth for the Common Good: A Statement on the Distribution of Wealth in Australia* (1992)¹⁸ and the second, admittedly more directed to the Church's internal life but having great relevance to the rights of women, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*.¹⁹ Although these various statements are not usually given much prominence in mainstream media, they have played an important role in the development of a sense of social justice in the formation of Catholics, especially through parishes and the very extensive Australian Catholic school system and its two recently-founded Catholic Universities (Australian Catholic University and the University of Notre Dame Australia). The Australian Catholic Church has also been actively engaged in defending the rights of indigenous Australians: a high point of this was the speech given by John Paul II at Alice Springs (central Australia) in 1986.²⁰

In more recent decades, there has been a relatively peaceful consensus in the Australian Catholic Church about socio-economic

¹⁷O' Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, 392. Cf. The website of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, including the 2010 Social Justice statement, at <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/>

¹⁸Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, Blackburn, Victoria: Collins Dove, 1992.

¹⁹*Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus. Report on the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia*. East Melbourne: Harper Collins Religious, 1999. Cf. The website of the Australian Catholic Bishops' National Office for the Participation of Women, <http://www.cacw.catholic.org.au/index.php>.

²⁰http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia_en.html

rights, although the attention they receive varies markedly among different groups in the Church. In the decades after World War II, however, this was sometimes a bitterly fought battleground. Prior to the 1960s most Australian Catholics were members of the working class and supported the Australian Labour Party. However, during the 1950s the Labour Party split over the question of how to come to terms with Communism, causing long-term and deeply-felt divisions in the labour movement and in the Catholic community that were only left (largely) in the past in the 1980s.

Like many Western societies, Australia is marked by a strong culture of individualism. One expression of this is that ethical debate tends to be at its most intense, and attract most media attention, in relation to matters of life ethics and sexual ethics. Both because much of the media pays scant attention to the Church's social teaching and because of the intensity of these debates, public attention is much more directed to what the Church has to say – or what it is thought to be saying – on life ethics and sexual ethics. Some Australian church leaders have been willing to accept this marking out of the terrain, and to engage in public debate most intensely in these matters, rather than on socio-economic questions. The disadvantage of this is that it tends to mirror rather than challenge a view of ethics as being essentially about individual behaviour, rather than embracing wider social and economic issues. These tendencies have been reinforced by more conservative currents in the Australian Catholic Church, which focus their attention on devotional life, with an emphasis on hierarchical authority, rather than on the Church's mission of service to the world.

Australia has no bill of rights in its constitution, although it is a signatory to the United Nations' International Bill of Rights. There have been a number of attempts to promote acceptance of a Bill of Rights, either as part of the Constitution or as an Act of the Commonwealth Parliament. The Australian Catholic Church does not display any consensus about these attempts. For many Australian Catholics, some form of a Bill of Rights would be highly desirable to protect certain freedoms, especially when the Common Law does not effectively do so. For others, however, including a number of influential bishops, a Bill of Rights is viewed as a means by which social voices affirming individual autonomy could threaten the freedom of Catholics in relation to bio-ethical and medical issues and also undermine the identity of Catholic institutions, especially Catholic schools, by abolishing all exemptions of these institutions from anti-discrimination legislation. Without attempting a detailed judgement of these questions, from the perspective of a reflection on

inculturation what this demonstrates is that the language of rights is often a field of tension between those affirming particular interpretations of individual autonomy as the basis of claimed rights, and institutions, such as the Catholic Church, seeking to defend particular teachings or institutional arrangements in the public sphere.²¹

The Mode of Communication

The Australian socio-cultural context favours a “two audiences” approach to the communication of human rights.²² Although most Australians consider themselves to be Christian, the generally secular tenor of Australian public communication, both through the media and in the political forum, means that the best hope of communicating the Church’s concern for human rights is through secular language, that is, through the language of human rights documents themselves and through an evocation of human rights needs and concerns in secular terms. Within the Catholic community itself, such as in the social justice statements referred to above, the Church naturally uses both specifically Christian language as well as

²¹These tensions emphasize the need for wide-ranging civil discourse about the scope of human rights, including their identification, justification and social force. As the Indian philosopher and economist Amartya Sen notes in his *The Idea of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2009, “advocates of the recognition of a wider class of human rights will tend, of course, to press for more, and the pursuit of human rights is understandably a continuing and interactive process.” For Sen, “it is extremely important to understand this connection between human rights and public reasoning...it can be reasonably argued that any general plausibility that these ethical claims – or their rejection – have is dependent on their survival when they encounter unobstructed discussion and scrutiny, along with adequately wide informational availability” (386-7). For a recent study of a number of official church interventions in legal debates in Australia, see Frank Brennan, *Acting on Conscience: How Can We Responsibly Mix Law, Religion and Politics?*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2007.

²²An important statement of this “two audiences” conception is in the US Catholic Bishops’ document *The Challenge of Peace*, Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983, the pastoral statement on nuclear disarmament. It is the express intention of this document to address two distinct but overlapping audiences that require two complementary but distinct styles of teaching. In essential continuity with more traditional conceptions of natural law, this pastoral letter employs the distinction between “the premises of the Gospel” and “a conscience based on reason” as the principal means of identifying the two different (albeit “overlapping” audiences) of Catholics and the “wider civil community, a more pluralistic audience”(11). A somewhat different conception of the “two audiences” is presented in the later pastoral *Economic Justice for All* (1986), which displays a greater emphasis on the role of tradition as the formative source of ethical insights and the influence of Christian traditions beyond their “home” religious community.

the language of human rights. There are also a range of ecumenical and inter-faith bodies to which the Australian Catholic Church is committed for which both specifically Christian and human rights language are important.

Clearly, the state of the Church's energy and resources is critical to the question of communication. Again, as in many Western countries, the numbers of priests and religious in Australia are in marked decline, as is the rate of church attendance, especially of the young.²³ As noted, Australia has a very extensive Catholic school system, which plays a key role in the dissemination of the Church's teaching on human rights. It also has a very extensive health care and welfare system (including the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and a range of other initiatives and ministries) which give practical expression to the Church's commitment to human rights. It is also true that engagement with the cause of human dignity and human rights can be profoundly energizing for the Church, and bring fresh inspiration to its pastoral life and theological reflection.

The Australian Situation – Conclusion

The relationship of the Australian Catholic Church to human rights displays strong and sustained commitment in a number of areas, as well as a great deal of tension in others. An understanding of Australian history sheds light on the reasons for this varying success. Because of Australia's strong democratic institutions, the 'liberal' rights enjoy strong consensus in Australian society, so that the Church has understandably felt little need to engage in distinctive advocacy in this regard, although there is never justification for complacency in this sphere of rights, especially when individual freedom is in tension with matters of state security.

With the important exception of the tensions over coming to terms with Communism, the Church's commitment to social justice was readily accepted by broad sections of the Australian public, and was and is substantially in accord with similar commitments by a number of influential secular groupings, especially the labour movement. However, because this is not seen as distinctively or uniquely Catholic, because it is given little weight by advocates of free market economics, and because many Catholics themselves have little knowledge of or formation in the Church's social teaching, it does not have a high public profile.

²³In his *The Catholic Community in Australia*, Adelaide: Open Book Publishers, 2005, Robert Dixon reports that only "six to seven per cent of Catholics in their twenties" attend Mass on a typical Sunday (96).

In the fields of life ethics and sexual ethics, Catholic teaching has a much higher profile, because its teachings in this area are perceived to be “specifically Catholic” and because they concern choices about individual life. This has been a very important witness by the Australian Catholic Church on behalf of the unborn, the elderly and the dying, as well as on behalf of marriage and a Christian understanding of sexuality. However, as noted, one danger in this situation is that the Church will focus an undue amount of its energy and resources on these areas – and define itself in terms of these issues – thereby making concessions to a widespread understanding of ethics as pre-eminently concerned with choices about individual life.

Inculturation and the Proclamation of Human Rights – Some General Conclusions

The Australian ‘case study’ demonstrates some of the challenges for local churches in inculturating the Church’s proclamation of human rights.²⁴ Some of the key questions and criteria that emerge are:

- What are the social and cultural forces that will encourage a relatively ready acceptance of aspects of the Church’s proclamation of human rights?
- What is the Church’s locus in a particular culture, e.g. post-Christendom or a minority Church in an inter-faith context?
- Are there aspects of a local culture which can lead the Church to focus on a particular ‘terrain’ or field of debate, and thereby reflect rather than criticize distortions or imbalances in a local culture?

²⁴Although I have cherished memories of a six week railway journey around India in my student days, I am unfortunately not competent to make a well-informed comparison of the differences between the Indian and Australian context in this regard – and let us note that there are elements of a shared history also, apart from a fiercely competitive relationship on the cricket field! These common features include the English language and parliamentary institutions influenced by Australia’s and India’s shared history as parts of the British Empire in earlier times and their continuing membership of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Some key differences that might be suggested are the much greater importance of interfaith dialogue, with Hinduism and Islam; the Church’s position as a minority faith community; and a much stronger presence of social and religious tradition in Indian life. However, in relation to this last feature, there are also more recent de-traditionalizing influences as Shaji George Kochuthara notes in his “Sexuality, Love, Marital Life: The Indian Scenario Today – Changing Perspectives and Ethical Challenges”: “The ideals of the Sexual Revolution have been influencing Indian society for a long time. This was limited for a long time, not only due to the influence of religions, but more perhaps due to the restrictions on the media, the market, etc. In the last one-and-a-half decades, since the economic policy changed and since India welcomed the globalization process, changes are visible in the sexual mores of Indian society.” *Asian Horizons*, volume 4, no. 1, June 2010, 87.

- What language is appropriate? Should a local culture be understood in terms of the 'two audiences'? Does the character of a local culture encourage the use of religious language to a broader audience, as well as to Church members themselves?
- The importance of critical debate about human rights claims, including the role of philosophy and the social sciences.
- Who are the key religious partners in the grounding and communication of human rights, both ecumenically and from an inter-faith perspective?
- Who are the key partners in the practice of human rights, whether religious or secular?
- What energy and resources does the Church have and how can they best be deployed, (including reflection on the balance between the Church's internal life and its external engagement)?
- How can the local Church renew itself spiritually and theologically by committing itself to the defence of human rights?

Perhaps the key imperative in the inculturation of human rights by a local church is to strive to communicate human rights in all their dimensions – the 'liberal' rights, socio-economic rights, rights pertaining to sexual and life ethics – so that the Church affirms the dignity of the human person in a comprehensive and authentic way. This task of inculturation can draw, in some of its work, on social forces that are receptive to the affirmation of some rights: in these areas, for that reason, the Church's voice will seem to be less "distinctive", but this, as they say, "has nothing to do with the price of fish".²⁵ What is less "distinctively Catholic" may nevertheless be prophetic in particular contexts. In other areas, the Church may be making very important stances on particular issues, but needs to be vigilant that it does not accept a one-sided designation, made by other groups, of what has overriding importance, reflecting the biases of a local culture. In human rights, as in other areas, inculturation is a demanding process of critical discernment, without which the Church cannot hope to speak to the true needs of humanity in local cultures.

²⁵As Nigel Biggar argues in his *Behaving in Public: How to Do Christian Ethics*, Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans, 2011, "the recent concern for the theological integrity of Christian ethics is perfectly proper. Integrity, however, is not the same as distinctiveness. One is a virtue; the other is an accident of history...Whether or not what the Christian ethicist has to say is distinctive depends on the happenstance of whom he is talking with and what he is talking about; it is a matter of historical accident. Distinctiveness is no measure of integrity" (8).