

GUDINA TUMSA'S APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND CHRISTOLOGY

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Abstract: In the following, I shall present Rev. Gudina's approach to the crucial issue of human rights. The historical parameters in which Rev. Gudina ministered as a church leader and theologian will particularly be focused on. Put rightly, the very phenomenon that marks that particular period in Ethiopian history was the Marxist [-Leninist] ideology. As we shall see later, Marxism emphasized social and economic issues more than anything to the extent of seeing human beings but in terms of this internal logic.

PREAMBLE

The history of the world has revealed that there were individuals who have unreservedly and sacrificially committed their lives for the common good of humanity. These great women and men contributed to a lot, to the point of death, to the development of human life and the advancement of civilization. In the context of religion, historical accounts of, say, the world's largest religions, recorded stories of religious founders and leaders who set great inspiration to their followers or those whom they preside over. To this, one may add Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Germany), Martin Luther King, Jr. (USA), Archbishop Oscar Romero (El Salvador), and, not least, Rev. Gudina Tumsa (Ethiopia). These notable church leaders demonstrated in their lives Christ's ideal of discipleship with all its cost. These three examples have a number of things in common. They were church leaders having lived for the gospel of Jesus Christ; they stood for the people of periphery; and ultimately gave away their lives. On top of that, they starkly and boldly spoke against all the dehumanizing activities in their respective countries. Humanity was the focus and ideal of their ministry.

When it comes to the topic of this paper, Rev. Gudina Tumsa (1929-1979), General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), was perhaps the only leader of the Church who was able to combine both Christian and social concerns – what is known as political theology. He understood his role as a Christian fellow, church leader, and a citizen. Of more interest is that he never exhibited a one-sided approach to the Church's ministry. The only bias one could possibly spot is that he was utterly Christ-oriented (or, theologically speaking, Christological). That is, one can confidently say that at the heart of his theological thought lies Jesus Christ.

Knowing the dangers of this socio-economic view of human beings, Rev. Gudina developed an approach to understanding of human nature from an informed [theological] anthropological perspective. Based on his theological-anthropological analysis of human nature he developed a stance on human rights. But theological anthropology was not the only starting point of Rev. Gudina's perspective on human rights. In this paper, I shall discuss that Rev. Gudina's approach to human rights was the result of his creative holding of a dialog between theological anthropology and Christology.

Needless to say, the history of the church as well as theology is a rather rich and complex sum, demonstrating experiences of conflicts, tensions and, indeed, resolutions. More fully, it is this dynamic of experience that constitutes the Christian historical and theological heritage. So to say, it could be contended that God has providentially kept the church going, if not without problems, as it passed through times of turmoil and uncertainties. In a formation of a certain theological thought, thus, it is highly instructive and informative to look into the background (be it social, historical, political, or religious) out of or against which that thought developed. In the case of this paper,

Gudina's theological understanding about human nature and human rights developed primarily as a criticism of Marxist understanding of human nature, which had enormous impact on certain unfortunate circumstances that led the *Dergue* to seriously undermine and violate human rights.

MARXIST ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE ENIGMA OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Although Marxist philosophy was at certain instances critical - exhibiting departure - of Hegelian philosophy, the latter played an enormous role in the development of the former. Particularly, the Marxist version of materialism, namely, dialectical materialism, could well be understood as a critical synthesis of Hegel's and Feuerbach's philosophies. In the following, I shall briefly present the influences of these notable philosophers of the Enlightenment on the Marxist doctrine of humanity.

INFLUENCES OF HEGEL AND FEUERBACH: THE FORMATION OF MARXIST DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) belongs to, and perhaps the chief proponent of, German idealism. He was preceded by other notable idealist thinkers, such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854). Kant was the mastermind of German idealism. For him, the human mind had the capacity of creative activity, and thus had the capacity to know what is real (in the sense of visibility and concreteness). What is real for Kant was what he referred to as the "thing-in-itself." Fichte departed from Kant's objectification of reality and suppressed the notion of the "thing-in-itself" entirely to the activity of the Subject (individual human mind). But this position did not amount to solipsism (belief in one reality). Sumner clarifies Fichte's point:

[He] thought that the material world is formed for the finite ego (with a view to action, moral activity), through, and in a real sense by, the individual ego, but ultimately by the Pure or Transcendental Ego or Subject, from which proceed finite subjects and - *via* the finite subjects (idealism) - finite objects. He thus constructed a system of Subjective Transcendental Idealism.¹

Schelling countered Fichte's one-sided subjectivism and affirmed that nature itself is no less than mind a manifestation of the Absolute. As a matter of fact, both are real manifestations of the Absolute, although both belong ontologically to the Absolute.

The idea of the Absolute was substantially advanced by Hegel later. For Hegel the Absolute is a self-thinking, self-realizing, and self-manifesting Being that actualizes itself in the dialectical and historical process. Schelling suggested that, say, nature and mind are manifestations of the Absolute, albeit he does not seem to have a detailed analysis of *how* the two elements manifest the Absolute. In Hegel's presentation, however, we encounter a rather detailed explanation, though hard to understand, of the process. He attributes the Absolute as the subject of the process. It is not nature and mind that manifest the Absolute, but the Absolute itself "who" manifests itself in nature and mind. Nevertheless, Hegel emphasizes the human mind as the agency of accommodation for the Absolute. Absolute is a self-thinking Thought, an Idea, finding an ultimate embodiment in human rational mind. In the words of Sumner, "Being comes to exist as Spirit and thus to manifest its essence adequately only in and through the human spirit."²

At this juncture, one may ask a typical question: where does the place of humanity? Hegel's answer is that although nature is the necessary condition for the self-realization of the Absolute, human spirit or mind is the arena of the process. Sumner observes: "The world moves by some inner necessity towards the goal of self-knowledge in and through man. This inner necessity is that of the

¹ Claude Sumner, *The Philosophy of Man*, volume II: From Kant to the Situation in 1963 (Addis Ababa: AAU Press, 1974) 31.

² Sumner, *Philosophy of Man*, 34.

Absolute itself. The Absolute is a process of self-reflection: reality comes to know itself. And it does so in and through human spirit."³

What then is Hegel's view of human nature? The answer lies in the overall rubric of his thought on the relation of the Absolute (the Idea) and the human mind. What is real is the Idea and nature is its manifestation. The human mind, which has affinity both with nature and the Idea, comes to be real insofar as it is part and parcel of the process (in which history is realized) of the Absolute's self-realization. Conversely, the essence of human nature lies in the mediatory role played by the human mind. As the human mind unveils the true essence of humanity in the process of the Absolute's self-actualization, it moves from particularity (awareness of one's self-consciousness) to universality (awareness of self-consciousness in others). One may wonder which phenomenon could substantially address this transference. Hegel's suggestion is twofold: society and religion. The beginning phases of individual's recognition of self-consciousness are ushered in by society, but the entrance into the universal mind is religion. This latter point is well-expressive of the growing perception of the universality of religion, which is marked by encounter with and dependence on the holy, as a universal phenomenon. This was the very point Marx starkly opposed in Hegel's philosophy.

Hegel's thought on the organic conception of society, the evolutionary and ongoing view of history, and growth whose process results from the dialectic of repelling forces and elements, altogether influenced Marx and his friend Friedrich Engels. Marxism, as it was developed and propounded by Marx and Engels, adopted Hegelian dialectics in approaching philosophy. However, the materialism and thereby critique of religion came from Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72). Feuerbach was strict adherent of what is known as left-wing Hegelianism that "saw in Christian religion only a product of human conscience."⁴ According to Hans-Lutz Poetsch, Feuerbach "taught that the adoration of God, revelation, and faith are not realities outside man but products created by him, and projections of his longings and unrealizable wishes; namely, they were illusions."⁵ This perspective constitutes his analysis of Christianity in his magnum opus *The Essence of Christianity*. In this writing Feuerbach extensively argues that religion proceeds from human consciousness making it a boundary marker against that of animals. Thus the idea of God is mere human mental projection - not a reality. Whatever humans think of or portray about God is actually humanity itself. It follows from this that God is a sort of ensemble of attributes that essentially belong to human beings. In the words of Feuerbach: "*In religion man has in view himself alone, or, in regarding himself as the object of God, as the end of the divine activity, he is an object to himself, his own end and aim.* The mystery of incarnation is the mystery of the love of God to man, and the mystery of the love of God to man is [actually] the love of man to himself."⁶ God, thus for Feuerbach, remains human beings' mental projection of their own highest being.⁷

Having been considerably influenced by Hegel's dialectics and Feuerbach's materialism, Marx arrived at understanding that religion, which was once regarded by Hegel as the apex of the mind's self-realization in a universal capacity, as mere illusion to be done away with when "social

³ Sumner, *Philosophy of Man*, 36.

⁴ Sumner, *Philosophy of Man*, 58. Together with was David F. Strauss (1808-74), a biblical scholar who did a lot of work on the history of Jesus of Nazareth and who wrote two notorious books *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* and *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*. He and another historian Hermann S. Reimarus (1694-1768) are known for ridiculing the stories of the Gospels as no more than an Ancient Near East fiction.

⁵ Hans-Lutz Poetsch, *Marxism and Christianity*, Contemporary Theology Series (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1973) 21.

⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, E.T. by George Eliot (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957) 289.

⁷ See also Feuerbach, *Essence*, 281-282. Another atheist Friedrich Nietzsche was also in the same vein who thought, as Miroslav Volf noted, that God "is nothing but an image fashioned out of human ideals; human beings are the creators and God is both their creature and the stuff out of which they ought to recreate themselves." Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996) 168-169.

relations of mankind are transformed."⁸ The essence of humanity was thus perceived in terms of materiality which leaves human beings susceptible to objectify their *species/being*. This objectification is realized through labor. In this way nature comes to be their work and their reality. That is, the true nature of humanity lies in the fact that human beings are working beings; and this distinguishes them from animal kingdom. Hodgkiss rightly observes: "Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity."⁹ This is not achievable individually but through associating oneself with a given society. In other words, it is membership of a given society that bestows humanity upon human beings. Human development is achievable through labor. Therefore, human beings are but machinery beings. One's presumed right is maintained as long as she complies with the ideology that governs a given society. The state cannot guarantee to respect the rights of an individual who stands in opposition to the majority's ideological system. This was the force behind human slaughtering of the so-called "the Red Terror" in Ethiopia in late 1970s.

Marxist view of the constitutional nature of human beings was purely materialistic. Any notion of an immaterial element was denied. This was deeply enriched by the fruits of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Evolutionary theory, in its classical version, attributed the origin of life a simple form of life out of which complex forms of life, including human beings, emerge. No place for the human soul or human spirit. Human beings were no longer regarded as personal beings - for which Marxists could not find a point of reference¹⁰ - but working machines.

GUDINA TUMSA'S ANALYSIS OF MARXIST ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Rev. Gudina heavily criticized Marxism in two aspects: its atheism and its view of human nature.¹¹ As regards the former, God was relegated but to mere product of human mind. Concerning the latter, Gudina rightly maintained that Marxism's materialistic view of human nature had quite negative effects. Since human beings were regarded as purely material beings and working machines, many Marxists fell into the trap of human rights abuses to the extent of mass killings. Some notable examples were the heinous acts of the secret police of Stalin's regime in USSR, and the Killing Fields of Cambodia, and the Red Terror in Ethiopia. Tens of millions lost their lives and hundreds of millions had to experience the dehumanizing acts of Communists. The Romanian church leader, Richard Wurmbrand, once made a stunning remark, in his famous testimonial inscribed under the title *Tortured for Christ*, that the brutality he suffered as a result of communist persecution by far outweighed what he had experienced in Nazi concentration camps.

As Gudina points out in his treatise *Unbelief*, at the heart of the brutality committed by adherents of Marxism was "the denial of human nature and human dignity."¹² In other words, the issue of human dignity is the foundation of human rights; without establishing the dignity of humans one cannot talk about human rights. M. Douglas Meeks, in his introduction to Jürgen Moltmann's *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, states that human dignity "requires *human rights* for its embodiment, protection, and full flowering. Human rights are the concrete, indefeasible claim of human dignity. Without human rights, the human dignity cannot be historically realized in action."¹³

⁸ Philip Hodgkiss, *The Making of the Modern Mind: The Surfacing of Consciousness in Social Thought* (London: Athlone Press, 2001) 45.

⁹ Hodgkiss, *Modern Mind*, 47. See also David Lyon, "Evaluating Marxism: Some Christian Reflections," in Alan Scarfe and Patrick Sookhdeo (eds.), *Christianity and Marxism* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1982) 131-132.

¹⁰ In Christian tradition this point of reference is God, who is the ground of personality and who himself is a person or personal being.

¹¹ Gudina Tumsa, "Unbelief," in *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 25-33.

¹² "Unbelief," 30.

¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, E.T and Introduction by M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984) xi. See also Matthijs de Blois, "The Foundation of Human Rights: A Christian Perspective," in Paul R. Beaumont (ed.), *Christian Perspectives on Human Rights and Legal Philosophy* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998) 14-18.

In Christian discourse of humanity, the dignity is based on the image of God. According to biblical testimony, it is the image of God stamped on humanity which declares the dignity of human beings. Interestingly, this counter claim was already current in Gudina's thought, where he said: "Our response to unbelief should be based on a clear and full testimony to the nature of God, the world and man from the Biblical perspective."¹⁴

Human beings are not purely material beings, as many Marxists underscore; they are personal and holistic beings, having both material and immaterial aspects within their constitutional nature.¹⁵ Gudina notices that as very ancient as the fifth century before Christ, the Greek philosopher Democritus suggested that reality is to be understood in terms of matter. Democritus is commonly known as the "father of materialism," a belief that matter is the only and final reality. For materialism, human beings are to be viewed but in terms of matter.¹⁶ Gudina's critique does not only target Marxist ideology but also the materialism that undergirds Western concept of development where "[the] standard of human life and that of society is normally evaluated in terms of economic growth and material wealth, or in technology and production."¹⁷

Regarding his challenge to the partners of the Church, Gudina maintained that integral human development cannot be attained without a holistic view of humanity. On the paper entitled "On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development" (1972), one finds an emphasis that human beings are holistic beings with holistic needs - physical and spiritual - to be met.¹⁸ In the "Pastoral Letter," we find a firm perspective on this holistic view of humanity that the primary task of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the continuing task of the church is "the full liberation of the whole man."¹⁹ This holistic view of man also recurs in Gudina's "Report at the Ethiopia Consultation" (1973), where he, on behalf of the Church, explains away the matter: "For us it is very difficult to dissect human life into various parts, ministering to one aspect while neglecting the other. *Man is created by God as a totality.* What we confess on Sundays as the resurrection of the body should be practiced during the week and must be in conformity with the Biblical understanding of man."²⁰ As a natural upshot to this perspective of humanity comes the declaration: "We aspire for justice, *respect for human rights* and the rule of law."²¹

The above references indicate that at first Gudina approached the issue of human rights from anthropology, taking a view of human nature as a starting point of human rights discourse. However, anthropology was not the only element in Gudina's approach to human rights, but Christology, too, had an enormous role in the discourse. As I have hinted at the beginning of this paper, Gudina's approach to the issue of human rights was the result of the dialogue between his creative perspectives on theological anthropology and Christology. What precipitated this outlook? The answer is twofold - the failure of Marxist view of human progress and theological metamorphosis.

Marxism, highly influenced by Darwinian evolutionary theory, envisioned that human beings grow both essentially and technologically with the march of time. However, this humanistic

¹⁴ "Unbelief," 31. In this penetrating treatise, Gudina does not merely focus on atheism, as the title "Unbelief" may mistakenly be read, but to any act and belief that is contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the ideal of the Kingdom of God. For his explication of the nature of unbelief, see "Unbelief," 25-26.

¹⁵ In Christian theological tradition there are three rivaling understandings of the constitutional nature of human beings: monism (only one element), dichotomism (body and soul/spirit), and trichotomism (body, soul and spirit).

¹⁶ "Unbelief," 27.

¹⁷ "On the Interrelation between Proclamation of the Gospel and Human Development," in *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 84.

¹⁸ The writing is found in *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 81-94.

¹⁹ "Pastoral Letter," in *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 78.

²⁰ "Report at Ethiopia Consultation," in *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 107. See also Gerd Decke's insightful analysis Gudina's critical engagement with Marxism in Gerd Decke, "The Role of Gudina Tumsa in a Critical Dialogue between Marxism/Socialism and Christianity," in *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 101-128.

²¹ "Pastoral Letter," 79. Emphasis added.

optimism shattered with the two World Wars which claimed hundreds of millions of lives. In the main, the fact of the Holocaust revealed the potential human beings have to lapse into heinousness. From the perspective of the Christian view of humanity, this failure is a demonstration *par excellence* of human depravity. The Bible speaks that human beings, although created in the image of God, are sinners. Because of their sinfulness they are deprived of right relationship with God, themselves and the rest of the created order. St. Paul in Romans affirms this universal human predicament: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). Justification is the only way out, which constitutes getting reconciled with God, oneself, and fellow human beings and nature.

Paul’s affirmation of the universal predicament of depravity is not, however, the denial of the dignity of human beings. Despite all this, “[man] is still seen as the most noble of all creatures, with a power within him to be guided by his higher intellect.”²² No matter how far human beings advanced intellectually, economically, and technologically, they are always accompanied by dehumanizing atrocities. Gudina rightly points out the *basic necessity* of humankind: Though certain flagrant allures of justice have been removed from the affairs of man, unjust practices like racism, oppression and corruption continue whenever man is found. Thus, man’s basic need is not simply to be informed of what is good and right. Man’s primary need is to be set free from his own self-centered greed. Here is where the Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ comes in as the liberating power.²³

With the perspective conceived in these words, Gudina joins the thought-world of the American civil rights activist, Martin Luther King, Jr. King was highly critical of Communism’s atheistic materialism. For him the Christian alternative was theistic idealism. In his own words: “Reality cannot be explained by matter in motion or the push and pull of economic forces.... Man cannot save himself, for man is not the measure of all things and humanity is not God. Bound by the chains of his own sin and finiteness, man needs a Savior.”²⁴

The conception of salvation was also dominant in some theologians who lived towards the end of the nineteenth century, such as Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and the proponent of the social gospel movement, Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918). For these thinkers, human life is characterized primarily in terms of selfishness, the ultimate vice that alienates human beings from God. Salvation is thus to turn from one-self to God and humanity.²⁵

Several things can be noted briefly about justification. First, *justification* refers to a legal declaration by God that our sins—past, present, and future—are forgiven through Christ and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. Second, it is a once-for-all decision to declare (*not make*) us righteous in his sight so that there remains no longer any legal recourse or accusation against us. This is the meaning Paul intends when he asks in Romans 8:33: “Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.”

Third, since justification involves forgiveness of sin and dealing with actual condemnation, it ultimately settles the question of our guilt; we are no longer in a state of guilt. Fourth, we possess, in God’s sight, the righteousness of Christ, and since God views it this way, this is indeed reality. Our standing has been forever changed and we are no longer guilty; the law no longer has recourse against us. Lastly, justification comes through faith and not by works as Paul makes clear in Romans 3:26-28; 4:4-5. We do not earn this standing, but rather it is credited to our account through faith in Christ.

²² “Gospel and Human Development,” 86.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The quotation comes from a collection of King’s sermons that was published posthumously. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981) 98. For a quick rationale of the connection between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gudina Tumsa, see Øyvind Eide, “Integral Human Development: Rev. Gudina Tumsa’s Theology, With Special Reference to His Critique of Dominant Trends in Missiology and the Question of Human Rights,” in *The Life and Ministry of Rev. Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 41-42.

²⁵ For further interest, the two theologians expounded their understanding of human nature, sinfulness and reconciliation - Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1874) and Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917).

The other reason for the two-dimensional theological outlook in Gudina's approach to the question of human rights was his own theological metamorphosis. We see a major embrace of Christology. In the later writings such as "The Role of a Christian in a Given Society" (1979) and "Pastoral Letter" (1975), this shift becomes visible. Jesus Christ is depicted as the center and meaning of Christian existence and service.²⁶ What is underlined in these writings is that without a personal acquaintance with Jesus Christ, one cannot understand her true humanity and may not truly talk about human dignity and human rights.²⁷ The gospel is the key to discovering one's true humanity. In Gudina's own words: "The Gospel is the power of God working in the human heart with a view to transforming man and thereby putting him in a right relationship with God, who is the source and goal of his life, regardless of the stage in the process of historical development at which man finds himself."²⁸ Regarding Christian service the last paragraph of the "Pastoral Letter" has a higher Christological end:

The people of God have been called to discipleship, pilgrimage, even suffering in this world, because true life is found only through suffering and death. The Church is challenged to find itself by giving itself for the true liberation of the whole man. In this, its witness to the Gospel of Christ and its service to man, it teaches that salvation as wrought by Christ must be experienced in this life, but that fullness of life is to be realized at the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior.²⁹

Having established the reasons for the development of Rev. Gudina's view of human rights out of the interplay between anthropology to Christology, I shall now briefly present how the doctrine of justification serves as epistemological factor in recognizing one's Christian existence and role in a given society.

JUSTIFICATION: THE HEART OF HUMAN EXISTENCE AND THE LOGIC OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT

The 16th-century Protestant Reformation brought about turning points in the areas of hermeneutics, ecclesiology and soteriology. Especially, as regards the latter, the Reformation's teachings of salvation by grace through faith [alone] almost shook the soteriological foundations of the late medieval Catholic Church. In the medieval Catholic Church salvation was regarded as solely constituted in the church; and it was out of this perspective that the dictum "there is no salvation outside the [institutional] church" arose. This theological turning point became one of the steering forces of the Protestant spirit. I think we also share something of it, although the degree of application may vary from denomination to denomination.

IMPLICATIONS OF JUSTIFICATION

In the doctrine of justification, human beings are justified by faith apart from works. It has soteriological, ecclesiological and existential implications:

- Soteriologically, faith in the provision of God's grace is the "gateway" to the kingdom of God, which is at hand. Human contribution is downplayed in that it does no longer have crucial role in matters pertaining to entering into a redemptive relationship with God.

²⁶ Here comes a clear indication of the influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the formation of Gudina's theological thought. The centrality of Jesus in Christian existence is well described by Bonhoeffer in his book entitled *Christ the Center*.

²⁷ In the West, the issue of human rights has unfortunately been coupled with [moral] relativism thereby making the whole notion of human rights as an excuse to unnatural and ungodly [!] predispositions.

²⁸ "The Role of a Christian in a Given Society," in *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 9.

²⁹ "Pastoral Letter," 80.

- Ecclesiologically, justification – entering into a right relationship with God – concerns an individual. In the context of the Reformation, the church no longer was regarded as the guarantor of salvation. In the words of Alister McGrath: “The doctrine of justification came to be seen as dealing with the question of what an individual had to do in order to be saved...the question of how human beings, as individuals, could enter into a relationship with God.”³⁰
- Existentially, it points to the fact that at the heart of human existence is found God’s justice. Hans G. Ulrich rightly hits the point: “We are not delivered to any living conditions we have produced, but invited to live together with God in those times and places God has prepared for us. Here we experience God’s care and justice in places of a *sufficiently “good” human life.*”³¹

It is the existential implication of justification that finds much expression in Christian ethics. For ethics or moral philosophy, in general, and Christian ethics, in particular, the primary concern is the promotion of “good” human life. The ethos of the Bible upon which Christian ethics is founded has something to say. For example, in Psalm 127:1, it reads: “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.” Psalm 23:1-3 indicate that life that is marked by a right relationship with God has a heavenly touch: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.” The doctrine of justification reminds us that it is to this kind of life that we have been invited and it is the same life that we are called to witness and communicate.

At the heart of justification lies the Incarnation (and its sequel, the cross), the historical grandeur in which God and human beings met essentially or ontologically. Such an ontological divine-human intersection was not a one-time movement. Although inaugurated at the moment of the Incarnation, it has found a continuation in the meaning of justification. And this is clearly indicated in one of very sensitive statements of the New Testament: “Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may *become participants in the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4, emphasis added).³² Therefore, justification, in its advanced sense, could mean an entrance into coexistence between God and humanity; and those who are privileged with it are also called to witness and communicate what coexistence is about to others.

When we understand justification in the context of moral (ethical) life it plays a kind of “checklist” role by asking whether we are in the right track and context of living with God, always alert

³⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford, UK.: Blackwell, 1998) 185.

³¹ Hans G. Ulrich, “On the Grammar of Lutheran Ethics,” in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Lutheran Ethics at the Intersections of God’s One World*, Lutheran Studies 02/2005 (Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, 2005) 29. Emphasis added.

³² In the Eastern [Orthodox] tradition, salvation is understood in terms of “deification.” The concept revolves around the theological refrain: “God became human, in order that humans might become God.” From this statement we can observe that there is a close affinity between the doctrine of salvation and the incarnation. Of the early church fathers, Athanasius underscored that salvation is constituted in the human participation in the being of God. The moment of incarnation whereby the Logos became flesh indicated that the divine Logos is now imparted to humanity. Put rightly, at the incarnation, the divine Logos did not merely assume the specific human existence of Jesus of Nazareth, but that of human nature in general. As a result, all human beings are able to partake in the deification process. The concept of salvation for this tradition is the point where redemption and deification meet. The Russian Orthodox theologian, Vladimir Lossky, affirms of this concept: “The descent (*katabasis*) of the divine person of Christ makes human persons capable of an ascent (*anabasis*) in the Holy Spirit.... Thus the redeeming work of Christ – or rather, more generally speaking, the Incarnation of the Word – is seen to be directly related to the ultimate goal of creatures: to know and union with God.” Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974) 97-98.

of one's constant need of God's grace - his help and consolation.³³ Perhaps, Ulrich is right in summarizing the existential implication of justification on Christian ethics:

The logic of justification is the central rule in...ethics. It asks if we have lost the context of living with God, attending to God's help and consolation. Ethical reflection reminds us of this context of living. It is not a universal morality we have to communicate, but this reality which is the common focus for social and political coexistence. It is reflected in the spheres of human living which bear God's promises: to govern with justice for the political sphere, *politia*, to care about the needs of God's creatures for the sphere of economics, *oconomia*, and to communicate God's Word to our hearts and minds in the sphere of communal life, *ecclesia*. It is [thus] in those spheres to live together with God and to respond to God's promises and acting, to God's creative Word and work.³⁴

That the doctrine of justification has certain moral implications on Christian moral life is reflected in Romans 6:1-14. Paul explains his view that believers are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, which has a close tie with baptism. For Paul, baptism is God's act and it is "the sign and seal and pledge that the benefits of Christ's death for all men really do apply"³⁵ to the person who undergoes the rite. The fact that they died and were raised with Christ, in the sight of God, is intended by God that they have to make sure that they find a continuation of that moment in their life; that is, to use Paul's metaphor, they have to die to sin in their daily living.³⁶ For Paul, justification is a once-for-all moment in the process of salvation yet its implications are continual, it is "a past event with present implications."³⁷

What then is the compelling force behind justification? According to Paul, the cross of Christ, in which God's saving love was *ultimately* revealed, serves as the paradigm for those who are justified. It was the righteousness of God which was demonstrated on the cross. It is this righteousness of God revealed in Jesus Christ that justifies men and women, inviting them into the new life (which is in Christ). Gudina also has a theologically matured perspective, which is Trinitarian in flavor, on this fact:

A Christian is a transformed person by believing the Gospel of Christ (justification), and is in constant process of being transformed (sanctification) by the power of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the Christian. God has counted the believer as righteous without any contribution on his/her part, with the exception of accepting the gracious gift of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.³⁸

One may ask on what ground this new existence stands. P. Stuhlmacher is perhaps right in suggesting that this imputed righteousness is the "ground and power" of this new life in Christ.³⁹ Christians are saved by the grace of God, which they are also called to radiate it in their lives, lest it will degenerate into "cheap grace" (Bonhoeffer). They are to "lead a life worthy of God, who calls [them] into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12). When we collate Paul's idea of justification with the idea we earlier raised (human entrance into coexistence with God), what the psalmist says in Psalm 8:4 becomes more and more meaningful: "what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals you care for them?"⁴⁰ Conversely, such a remark reflects God's care and loyalty, as he

³³ Ulrich, "On the Grammar," 29.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *On Romans and Other New Testament Essays* (Edinburgh, UK.: T & T Clark, 1998)

26. Cranfield synthesizes three other senses, besides the moral one, of Paul's metaphor of "dying and being raised" – juridical, baptismal and eschatological senses.

³⁶ Cranfield, *On Romans*, 27.

³⁷ McGrath, "Justification," in Gerald F. Hawthorne et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL./Leicester, UK.: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 518.

³⁸ "Role of a Christian," 5.

³⁹ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, E.T. by Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 88-97.

⁴⁰ The quotation comes from NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). The context of the quoting of this verse in Hebrews 2:6-8 prompted some biblical scholars to consider this psalm as messianic psalm, thereby critiquing any attempt of

cooperates with them in all spheres of human life. Ulrich maintains: “God’s promise shapes the logic of Christian political, economic and communicative practices. The promise is that God will govern the world in opposition to presumptions of absolute human power, that God will care for human beings in opposition to poverty, and that God will be loyal to them in opposition to their resignation”⁴¹; hence, the moral summoning of justification to cooperate with God in the spheres of daily life. Put rightly, by engaging themselves in their respective society, Christians have to present that human beings are not alone in their day-to-day struggles for survival. It is in this way that Christians are said to live out their justification which set them free from egoistic self-interest and self-preservation. In this we “no longer present [our] members to sin as instruments of wickedness, present [ourselves] to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present [our] members to God as instruments of righteousness” (Rom 6:13).

HUMAN RIGHTS TODAY AND THE CHURCH’S CALL TO ACTION

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION GLOBALLY

20th century was perhaps of striking polarities of life on earth. In as much as human beings enjoyed technological, education, and economical advancements, they had also been traumatized by the unspeakable human-made atrocities against the dignity of humankind – ranging from the World Wars and the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Many people towards the end of the previous century had a mixed feeling whether history would repeat itself or a new century of peace and prosperity would come. I presume that the former was right, for the twenty-first century has so far seen human brutality – the terrorist attacks on 9/11 claiming more than 3,000 lives “in the name of God,” the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, under the disguise of “war on terror” that did cost nearly a million lives, the Darfur humanitarian crisis, and, not least, the still-ongoing violence on election frauds in Kenya (so far about 850 people have been brutally killed, mainly by machetes).

Let me give some figures from Amnesty International’s 2007 report. 2 million people are trafficked each year – the majority being women and girls, mostly from Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, West Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. At least 1 in 3 women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. 70% of the casualties in recent conflicts have been non-combatants – most of them are women and children. Tens of thousands of women and girls have been subjected to rape and other sexual violence since the crisis erupted in Darfur in 2003. 0 people are known by Amnesty International to have been convicted in Darfur for these atrocities.⁴²

In all these dehumanizing atrocities, no one or no institution seems to seriously act in order to alleviate the problem. In Rwanda genocide of 1994 the world kept silent and simply watched more than 800,000 people were slaughtered in just 100 days. Those countries that are said very developed and civilized – mainly, USA, UK and EU – have always been accused by human rights organizations of prioritizing political expediency over decisively acting against tyrannical regimes. Electoral frauds are often time deliberately cooled down, simply for the sake of political convenience; and that is all.

using inclusive-language rendering in some theologically sensitive and fluid biblical passages. But the context of Hebrews 2:6-8 suggests that in quoting Psalm 8:4, the writer of the Epistle might have been pointing to the *human* Jesus. For an excellent study of the debates centering on the use of inclusive language in Bible translations, see D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1998).

⁴¹ Ulrich, “On the Grammar,” 31.

⁴² “Amnesty International Report 2007.” Website: <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Facts-and-Figures>.

THE INDISPENSABILITY OF FREEDOM AND JUSTICE IN HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

Human rights are one of the signposts to democracy which are recognized and protected by society and no government should have the right to abolish them. Human dignity, upon which the whole notion of human rights rests, is not bestowed upon human beings by any social, political, or, even, religious institution. Instead, it is a given fact – part and parcel of human nature. In more Christian way, it was naturally endowed by God when he created human beings in his image (Gen 1:26-27). As such, if human rights are undermined democracy itself is undermined. In connection to the role of human rights in the process of democracy or democratization comes the indispensability and inseparability of freedom and justice.

The kind of freedom in view is in no way a kind of "animalistic" freedom – I recall Dr. Johnny Bakke once said, "freedom without limitation is slavery." Rather, it is freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and the right to equality. The classic and most popular definition of justice is "giving every person her due." The well-known American situational ethicist, Joseph Fletcher, defines justice as "love distributed." It follows, then, from this that since love implies a human relationship in freedom, justice cannot be realized apart from justice.

Another reason why freedom and justice remain inseparable comes from the meaning of the opposite of justice – injustice. Injustice means forcing upon another person an event which in freedom she would reject, and she is thus being *unfree*. And to make someone *unfree* is to deprive her of what is due as a human being, is therefore unjust. Injustice and *unfreedom* cannot thus be separated. For Marxists/Communists, the individuals are expected to be at the service of the state; and they are not concerned with freedom and justice.

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANS AND CHURCH IN MAINTAINING HUMAN RIGHTS

Gudina was visionary in outlining the need of a wholistic theology for the church in order to be an agent of transformation. He writes on the essence of this genre of theology:

Wholistic Theology is an effort in rediscovering total human life. A political life is not worthy of existence, involvement is a denial of the goodness of creation and of the reality of incarnation. We are not interested in creating medieval monasteries, in setting up ghettos (modern monasteries), but in being involved in the complex social life of our people as we find it daily, with full knowledge of our Christian responsibility.⁴³

In another instance, Gudina also presents that the church's healing ministry "has to do with the restoration of man to liberty and wholeness."⁴⁴

How does a church put into practice this ideal of its ministerial existence? It begins with self-examination and self-criticism. In Socrates' famous words, "unexamined life is not worth living." If the church is not in a position to critically examine her ministerial ideas and practices, it cannot boldly say that it is living out its Lord's commission. Gudina's call is for the church to be political, in the strict etymological sense of the word "politics." It means to be engaged with the affairs of the people.

Whenever the church stands for and speaks on behalf of the people it becomes political. If the church cloister itself from the outside world, by labeling itself as sacred and the outside as profane put her, there is a failure a failure in following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

In order to proclaim justice one has to begin to exercise justice. The big question is: Do we find justice and freedom *abundantly* exercised in the church? Can a person criticize some faulty

⁴³ Gudina Tumsa, "Memorandum," in *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 69.

⁴⁴ "Serving the Whole Man: A Responsible Church Ministry and a Flexible International Aid Relationship," in *Witness and Discipleship: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa* (Addis Ababa: Gudina Tumsa Foundation, 2003) 117.

practices in the church and remain embraced? Are elections held in a godly and genuine way – or the whole process is full of lobbying and orchestration?

How far professionally sensitive are the employment practices in different units of the church? If the answer for these questions is "yes," then, the church is not justified for having kept silent when complaints about human rights abuse and undemocratic practices were instigated at times. At this point, perhaps, one may be justified in declaring that there has been a *complete discontinuity* between Gudina Tumsa and the church leaders who succeeded him to date. The elements of the discontinuity are:

- "Blind" allegiance to the lordship of Jesus Christ, no matter what the cost it may incur.
- Being cognizant of one's theological tradition and being able to theologically reflect on situations, ideologies or systems that are current in a given period of time.
- Willingness and readiness to suffer, even to the point of death, for the eternal cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"The church is the community existence of Jesus Christ," once said Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In Pauline writings, we find also a metaphorical expression of the church as "the body of Christ." And whenever the church celebrates the eucharist, it commemorates the body of Christ that was given for the salvation of humanity. Whenever one thinks of the church's sacramental nature in terms of the body of Christ, it appears that the church's existence is not one of hegemony – as the late medieval Catholic Church mistakenly appropriated, but one of rejection and suffering. It is not to say the church is the arena of despair and anxiety, but peace, freedom, justice and reconciliation are the results of the church's identification with and participation in the rejection and suffering of Jesus Christ. To concur with Martin Luther's theology of the cross, just as God's power and true being were revealed in the weakness and rejection of his Son on the cross, the church's impacting triumph takes place in keeping its safety but in undergoing suffering for the safety and well-being of the society. Only then is Gudina's actually be preserved in life.

NOT-A-CONCLUSION

We have seen above how Gudina's approach to the issue of human rights developed out of the dialog between his theological anthropology and his Christology. The presentation by no means intends to claim that theological anthropology had lost its significance in Gudina's perspective on the issue of human rights. The change may well be described in terms of the medieval Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation on the Eucharist. In this doctrine, upon consecration the bread and the wine will be changed to the real body and blood of Christ. This may at face value look nebulous but the whole concept was drawn from Aristotle's dualistic conception of physical reality, which sees in every physical object two qualities - accident (appearance) and substance (essence). When it applies to the case of this presentation, the shift is accidental (from anthropology to Christology), which is expressive of Gudina's deep-seated concern for humanity, which in turn constitutes the substance of his ministry.

Øyvind Eide concludes his appraisal of Gudina's contribution to integral human development with these words: "Qes Gudina was not given the opportunity to develop a *Confessio Africana*,⁴⁵ given the circumstances that led to his brutal murder. To this I would also add that he, nevertheless, had laid a foundation for *Confessio Aethiopica*." In a country which was full of brutality and strife, violence and abuses, where the so-called "Red Terror" was sweeping away the then youthful generation, Gudina as a true church leader could not keep silent. To the contrary, he raised his voice, on behalf of the voiceless, against all the dehumanizing atrocities that marked the early days of the *Dergue* regime. But this courage did cost him his life, but to the glory of his Lord.

⁴⁵ "Integral Human Development," 73.

The fact that this section is not meant to be a "conclusion" is in line with the overall purpose of the paper. It is not meant to arrive at mere appreciation of Gudina's contribution to the Church, and the society at large. Rather, it is meant to set forth a challenge to each one of us - a challenge to examine ourselves and a challenge to responsibly continue his legacy, in thought and deed. As long as it exists, the church has the greatest responsibility of maintaining and safeguarding the dignity of humanity, for it takes hold of the truth about humanity, whether anthropologically or *Christologically*.

Silenced by death? No way!

Gudina's legacy is alive.

And his thought still smells fresh.

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