

separation between them, as in lunar laser ranging. (Remember the corner reflectors placed on the moon?) Even the tides on Earth betray the curvature in Earth's corner of the solar system. (We need to be mindful that time is a dimension, just as the spatial ones are.) We would not observe these effects in Minkowski space-time, which has zero curvature.

The term 'curvature' does not refer to the extrinsic curvature of say a Euclidean sphere embedded in four-space; rather it refers to the intrinsic curvature of spacetime. It is similar in a few ways, yet is a different animal, so to speak, in non-Euclidean geometry.

Incidentally, whether the cosmos is open or closed is an important issue for General Relativity. If the cosmos is open, then General Relativity is incomplete at least as regards the origin of inertia; it would require supplementary principles or general hypotheses to yield determinate results. To be sure, if the cosmos is indeed closed, General Relativity would still be incomplete, but it would require much less supplementary principles.

For more details, see a textbook such as Misner, Thorne and Wheeler, *Gravitation*, W.H. Freeman, San Francisco, 1973. Nevertheless, I enjoy DeYoung's article.

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## Human rights verses biblical responsibility

I am writing in response to the very interesting paper in *TJ 17(3)* by Rodney Hordern on 'Human rights and biblical responsibilities'. I found the paper stimulating, although it ranged across a wide range of themes; it challenged me to think through my understanding of the issues of human rights and the development of them in their current quasi legal/ quasi political format. While I agree with the moral thrust of Hordern's argument, I feel that he failed to give sufficient weight to the effective use that codified human rights already play in the political and legal systems of nation states within the world today. I also would not have commenced my examination of human rights with the 'United Nations Declaration on Human Rights', as the concept of Human Rights being defined and codified does, I would argue, date back far earlier than that, and within the common law countries probably starts with Magna Carta. Magna Carta was created as a doctrine of rights by the barons of England in dispute with King John (the wicked King John of the Robin Hood legend). Although many of the rights are now only of historic interest, it is from Magna Carta that we get the concept of the jury trial, as the barons demanded that a man must face trial before a group of his peers rather than just before the king.

Hordern did not appear to mention the 'Constitution of the United States of America'. This document created after the USA broke away from UK rule was intended to preserve the human rights of Americans from oppression. It provides for amongst other things freedom of religion, which was important to people fleeing to America from religious persecution in Europe. The constitution of the USA was drawn up by men who included, I am given to understand, 'Bible believing' Christians. In the USA, the role of the supreme court has been to interpret the written constitution, and if necessary strike out any proposed

legislation that in their opinion is in breach of the constitution. In this way, even the President can be overruled. It seems to me, that the Christians who took a part in devising the constitution saw no conflict between the creation of universal human rights of man transcending governments, and governments being subservient to those fundamental human rights.

The backdrop to the UN declaration on human rights and the UN charter was the second world war, which had caused the deaths of millions without due process of law in concentration camps, and had led to many millions more becoming refugees, as the boundaries of nation states were redrawn by the victorious allies, and the descent of the 'iron curtain'. If one accepts that the responsibility for WWII rests with Nazi Germany, then it should be pointed out, that initially at least Hitler was democratically elected. It perhaps should also be pointed out, that long before WWII; the sovereign state of Nazi Germany was persecuting sections of its own society on religious grounds. But in a system of parliamentary sovereignty that persecution became legal under the law, as handed down from the Reichstag to the courts. The much vaunted parliamentary sovereignty argument is just that, parliament cannot bind its successors, and therefore a new parliament is free to make whatever laws it wishes, just or unjust. The impetus for the UN (and this is stated in the charter) was that never again would mankind be blighted by such evil as had been experienced in that war. The declaration was a blue print for how 'peace on earth' might be achieved and the dignity and rights of man are respected. Many countries have incorporated the UN declaration as law in their constitutions, including the 'European Charter on Human Rights' which it is submitted borrows heavily from the UN document. The problems in the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa, however, have shown the UN and the world how far away from the vision contained in the UN declaration the world today really is.

The response of the ‘World Community’ is interesting, as they are beginning it would seem, to use codified human rights as a kind of blue-print to police the world. The attempt to create an international criminal court to bring to trial those who commit crimes against humanity including genocide, is an attempt to make nation states subscribe to a way of behaving contained in UN documents such as the declaration. Although only applying to members of the UN who are signatories to the court, it seems likely that this could be extended in the end to cover the whole world. It is however interesting to note that the USA is not supporting the court, which will deprive it of much of the political muscle that it needs to be successful. It has been suggested by commentators, that the refusal of the USA to be involved stems from a fear that American citizens or even past presidents may be indicted by the court for crimes against humanity. The creation of an international criminal court may go some way towards addressing issues that have been raised by international lawyers in relation to the legality of trials conducted on defeated opponents by the victors after wars, examples being the treaty of Versailles, where the German Kaiser was indicted for war crimes and told to present himself for trial (he took political asylum in Holland instead) through the ‘Nuremburg Trials’ after WWII on the defeated Nazis and the Japanese equivalents up to the issues surrounding the investigations into war crimes in the former Yugoslavia in the Hague.

Although I disagree with Hordern, as I believe in the importance of codified bills of rights, Christians should not be frightened of debating the increasing development of international law around the issues of human rights in relation to biblical revelation.

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### Rodney Horden replies

In reply to Hammond’s letter, I acknowledge that ‘codified Human Rights’ are being extensively used at both a national and international level. In this world of conflicting beliefs and diverse religions, many see human rights as a neutral concept with some chance of universal acceptance. They hope human rights (and related laws) will be the vehicle to stem the tide of atrocities and injustices we read of in the international press. Some even believe it will lead to world peace and here I am reminded of the ‘World Peace through Law’ movement. However, in my view the use of codified human ‘rights’ will not achieve these high goals.

Indeed the very purpose of my paper ‘Human Rights versus biblical responsibility’ in *TJ* 17(3), 2003, was to illustrate the fundamental defects of a human rights system (however structured). How do you base laws on a list of conflicting amoral rights? Which rights have precedence and to what extent? If you introduce a Bill of Rights, judges are inevitably given a wide discretion to invalidate state and national laws that conflict with the codified rights—notwithstanding that such laws are based on biblical concepts or passed by democratically elected governments. These ‘rights’ are so widely drafted that conflict is inevitable. (E.g. it is hard to imagine any law that will not conflict with the right to free expression held to include almost anything we do or say). Rather than upholding the Rule of Law, a Bill of Rights can be used to destroy laws and so leave us in the hands of judges making national policy decisions.

As for mentioning the United Nations, the paper was not concerned with tracing the origins of human rights or those involved, but with the international agenda established by the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. Not everyone is aware the universal declaration discloses an agenda to introduce an international belief system that will one day affect all our lives. The signatory nations

intend that human rights be ‘the common standard of achievement for ... every individual and every organ of society’ [emphasis added]. Similarly it is not appreciated that these widely drafted ‘human rights’ include all sorts of concepts and subsidiary rights not supported by the majority of people. (E.g. rights concerning defamation, sexual perversion, and child pornography).

Surely it is not beyond the wit of high level diplomats to oppose violence, torture, false imprisonment, murder, genocide and other atrocities, without having to establish a flawed human rights system full of conflicts and discretions. In my estimation a ‘rights’ based system is unbiblical, undemocratic, and ultimately unworkable. Such a system is contrary to the biblical ideal of judges impartially administering justice (with mercy) according to laws based on God’s righteous ordinances. The Creator of heaven and earth is the God of all nations and all peoples and no alternative justice system has been ordained by Him. Despite its superficial appeal, a human rights system is very much a case of ‘mutton dressed up as lamb’!

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### Bristlecone pine growth rings

In the previous edition of this journal, John Woodmorappe concluded that bristlecone pine chronologies point, at least superficially, to a time scale that pre-dates a straightforward reading of Genesis.<sup>1</sup> Thus he looked for causes of multiple ring production within the apparent annual cycle. He mentioned that the pine trees were typically shallow-rooted but did not speculate on how the rainfall pattern might influence ring growth. One would imagine