Essay Title: Right the Rights

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Atrocities plant haunting questions in the minds of people. “Why did this happen?”

“Could this happen… again?” After World War II, the United Nations looked at the horrors of the Holocaust, what they deemed “barbarous acts,” and they began to form “a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations” (UN, 2023, p. 1; UN, 2023, “History”). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was finalized in 1948. It promotes freedom, equality, and basic human dignity to all. Indeed, it states that this is the “foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world” (UN, 2023, p. 1). Not only does it protect property and physical well-being, it also protects emotional well-being. The declaration, while global, has trickled down to impact the United States and call my own community to a higher standard.

**Recent Impact in the United States**

The United States has seen a push for equal rights across communities. More recently, in 2022, the country rejoined the United Nations Human Rights Council (White House, 2021). According to a statement from the White House, our nation strives to be “leading not by the example of our power but by the power of our example.” In 2021, for National Rights Day and National Rights week, commemorating the UDHR, the president called on people to acknowledge and work through the challenges and atrocities of the past. This includes discrimination, harm, and violence done because of differences in socio-economic status, race, and gender. The president’s statement ended with these profound words from Dr. King: “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

**Impact in My Community**

With the push for rights around the world and in the United States, it trickles down into each facet of society. For this essay, I decided to focus on the community section as a means to
wear my heart on my sleeve and put language to my experience. This writing is an invitation to see just a glimpse of how I’m learning to see myself as equal to others in my community.

For me, community has always been centered around faith. It’s quite the dichotomy that the UDHR supports faith, yet sometimes faith is the very issue that can hinder equality. According to the document, “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (UN, 2023, p. 5). My community is currently facing what is coined or termed “deconstruction,” which is defined as “the process of questioning one’s own beliefs that were once considered unquestionable” (Dallas Morning News, 2022). Some see this as a movement away from the faith, and some see it as creating new understanding in their beliefs. I believe that people are leaving their faith because of the deep hurt and atrocities that were caused not by an enemy, but by community members and leaders that did not understand equality and human dignity. The answers to the “deconstruction” phenomenon my community is facing could be found from embracing and implementing the UDHR.

One common teaching in my faith puts women in a less-than-equal status, which in turn silences them. In leadership, many believe women cannot be pastors. At one friend’s church, it was even said, “We want to love women well – and that means the men will lead” (personal communication, 2021). I’ve experienced this discrimination myself when I assisted with leading a religious study. I had asked a friend if they would be attending our next meeting. He asked if I was leading. When I told him I was not leading for the event, he responded, “Good, because I don’t believe in women preachers.” Furthermore, I even heard that some people decided to leave our group over this issue. Of course, this lens of inequality leads to women being underrepresented in leadership roles in my faith. According to Duke University (2015), only 11% of American congregations were led by women. In general, BYU Magazine (2013) also reported
that when women were outnumbered, they “spoke as much as 75% less than men.” When the scenario was flipped, there was no “participatory deficit.” Women’s leadership or personal perspectives have not always been considered in my faith. These power dynamics are directly opposite from Jesus’s words, which say, “… their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Bible, Matthew 20:25-26).

In an interesting contrast, the UDHR also demonstrated a “faith.” Faith in a foundation of equality. According to the document, “the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (UN, 2023, p. 1). As I read through the declaration, I was profoundly moved. It was sacred. That nations could come together and agree on fundamental human dignity and ways to treat people was astounding. Something deep inside them – call it conscious, call it morals, or call it God – called out for dignity and equality.

But there is hope for my community. The UDHR is creating waves of equality among groups, and my faith is not excluded. As my community is going through deconstruction, they will begin to embrace, push for, and create more communities that provide and foster equality. For example, I recently attended a conference for a new denomination. I encountered waves of emotion when they stated their stance in being “decidedly egalitarian” (ECO, 2023). What struck me the most wasn’t that others had devalued me – it was the realization that I had bought in and devalued myself. Many times, my community talks about and longs for what they call “revival,” an awakening of a generation to the faith in a more devout way. I now have a different idea of revival. I now long to see the next era of “revival” as one that goes back to a heart posture of serving others. One that believes in basic human dignity. One that sees people as equal.
References


BYU. (2020). *When women don’t speak.* BYU. [https://magazine.byu.edu/article/when-women-dont-speak/](https://magazine.byu.edu/article/when-women-dont-speak/)


