

A Catholic Perspective on Human Rights

Ms. Cherie Blair (Booth) QC

The following is a transcript of the lecture titled "Human Rights – a Catholic Perspective" delivered on the 15th of October, 2004, by Ms. Cherie Booth. The event was organized by the European Law Student's Association (ELSA Malta), in collaboration with the British High Commission and International Law Department of the University of Malta, who we thank for their hard work and for the great interest they have shown in 'Id-Dritt' over the years.

Whilst giving special thanks to Ms. Booth for her unhesitant cooperation and support, I would like to remind you that the 'Id-Dritt' Editorial Board was given special permission by her to publish this article and that she wishes the following not to be reproduced further and also, that she retains full copyright of all the material. The same applies for the other two papers in this section.

The Editor

*"I am not the evangeliser of democracy, I am the evangeliser of the Gospel. To the Gospel message, of course, belongs all the problems of human rights, and if democracy means human rights then it also belongs to the message of the Church."*²⁰²

I am delighted to speak to you today about the topic of human rights, its evolution and indeed revolution in the Catholic faith. I am conscious that I am speaking in a country with an overwhelmingly Catholic population and one whose roots in the Catholic Church go back to St Paul. Against the background of the quote from Pope John Paul, I want to look at the Church's attitude to the concept of human rights in terms of words and actions. I will look in particular at the impact of Pope John XXIII's legacy,

²⁰² Pope John Paul II quoted in Roberto Suro, "Pope, on Latin Trip, Attacks Pinochet Regime", New York Times, April 1, 1987, pp. A1 at A10.

especially the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* written more than 40 years ago. I will ask if it is still relevant today. And if so, how.

Today, the term ‘human rights’ is widely accepted. National and international leaders talk the language of rights – its importance to the state and society. They speak about their commitment to it and the importance of promoting and upholding human rights across the world. Few dissent. But speaking is easy; acting more difficult. But action is the true measure of commitment. We, like many of the leaders mentioned above, are all too quick to deplore human rights violations by others, but shamefully slow to take personal responsibility for our own actions.

We just have to look at the work of international Aid agencies like CAFOD in the developing world or international human rights organisations like Amnesty International to realise that in the 21st Century many people are still denied their basic human rights; whether civil and political rights such as the right to participate in free elections, the right not to be discriminated against and the right not to be tortured or the social and economic rights such as the right to education, housing, basic health care, etc. We take such rights for granted. But in many countries, even fundamental freedoms are compromised with people facing torture, intimidation and ethnic cleansing.

Progress has occurred in the last fifty years. Today when we speak about Human Rights, tyrants do not need a dictionary, They know what we mean. Consciences have been awakened. The discourse is alive. The establishment of the United Nations put human rights firmly at the centre of global politics. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948 was as clear a statement as one can get of peace and justice. Europe followed and in 1950 enacted the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The UK was closely involved in the drafting the Convention and was one of the first countries to ratify it. However, it was not directly enshrined into UK law until the Human Rights Act 1998 came into force on 2nd October 2000. Malta of course

signed the convention in 1967 shortly after independence and directly incorporated the Convention in 1987.

At this juncture we could step back and feel proud. We could point to the other's violations. We could seek solace in perfection. But earlier I spoke about words and actions. The former being easier; the latter more difficult. Before we settle into our smugness – cast our minds back to Bosnia and what we allowed to go on our continent – 250,000 dead and that was only nine years ago. Or Rwanda or Burundi – 700,000 dead in 90 days. Did we know or did we not want to know?

Actions not words. That's the true measure of commitment. Or closer to home, when we live in countries where children can be neglected and murdered in their own home as happened recently in the UK with the tragedy of Victoria Climbié, or where elderly people are deprived of their dignity in care homes or where there are still people whose lives are blighted by poverty. Where does our commitment to human rights and human dignity fit here?

The origins of the concept of human rights is open to debate. For some, the debate is as old as civilisation, for others it was a by-product of the Second World War. While we can debate endlessly about the historical definitions and origins of human rights, we cannot debate about who qualifies for human rights.

Human rights are the BASIC dignity of every human person. They are UNIVERSAL. They are rights held simply by virtue of being a human person. They are integral to the integrity and dignity of the human being. They are rights; not concessions. They cannot be withdrawn or undermined or watered down by any domestic or international legal system. If they are our whole system suffers. We ultimately suffer. Nor can rights depend on our status as citizens, they extend to the stranger, the other, the non-citizen, because it is they who are most at the mercy of our State. The injunction in Leviticus " Don't oppress the stranger because you were once a stranger in the land of Egypt. yourself." has particular resonance at Christmas. Human rights if they mean anything have to be for the

marginalised, the poor, the disregarded - the words of the Magnificat come to mind - *"He fills the hungry with good things, and the rich are sent empty away, He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly"*

Certain human rights are fundamental to human nature. But at the same time, the ongoing progress of human nature allows for the development of future rights. Over time, those rights can also come to be regarded as essential to living a decent human life for example the right to decent housing, the right to a decent wage, the right to basic health care, and the right to decent education irrespective of wealth.

Historically, the real threat to human rights came when individuals or groups opposed the will of the ruler, or the religion, or the morals of the community. Often when the dominant define rights, the definitions are often self-serving. In these cases the rules and norms often protect positions of strength and privilege and do little to enable and protect the weak, the different, the marginalised, and the poor. So even words about human rights, albeit more prominent in our discourse than ever before, are not enough. Human Rights must enable change. They must serve the dignity of all and not just reinforce entrenched privilege or dominant positions of power and strength. They must enable real change not disable the quest for justice.

And so what about our actions? What about our actions in the Church – the people of God? Today, few doubt the Catholic Church's commitment to human rights. Pope John Paul II highlights the importance of human rights in his Encyclicals, Apostolic letters and speeches. He emphasises that Human Rights are central to the work of the Church today.

The Church has long recognised the rights of an individual. Nearly three thousand years ago the Ten Commandments recognised that each individual had fundamental rights: the right to life, to have a family, to be told the truth and to worship God. At the Last Supper, Jesus when washing the feet of the disciples, told them 'love one

another as I have loved you' emphasising the importance of everyone being treated equally. However, the Church has not always been at the forefront of the human rights debate. Just as others have doubted the purpose and context of human rights over time, so too has the Church even though the answer to the third question of the old Catechism was "*God made me in his own image and likeness*".

Sandie Cornish, writing for the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council described the Church's thinking on Human Rights as being 'from rejection to proclamation'. And a brief historical tour illustrates just how true a description that was.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen was rejected by Pius IX. He seemed more suspicious of its origin than its content and that it was enthusiastically endorsed by the same anti-Christian, anti-religious movement which produced the Charter in 1789. For the Church, the conception of *liberty* outlined in the Charter went too far as it was seen as promoting a freedom from God, the laws of God and the requirements of social responsibility and of the common good as seen by the Church. This argument became further mired in 19th Century politics and the Church's difficulty with human rights reached its height under the Pope Gregory XVI. In *Mirari Vos* 1832 he described the separation of State and Church and freedom of opinion as 'crazed absurdity'. In the Syllabus of Errors 1864 Pope Pius IX opposed the need for the rights of free speech and freedom of religion. The Syllabus denied "*that every man is free to embrace and profess the religion he shall believe true, guided by the light of reason.*"

Historical empathy is very important here. The Church's justification for the rejection of these human rights at that time was part historical, part theological and part fear of the unknown.

Towards the end of the 19th Century, Leo XIII moved the debate on. He realised that the Church should be an advocate of the social and economic rights of the person. In Leo's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* rights entered the discourse for the first time, especially

when talking about the family, work, marriage and equal participation. Leo stated that “*Rights indeed, by whomsoever possessed, must be religiously protected.*”

Pius XI built on Leo’s work. In *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* he spoke in favour of the liberty of conscience and against fascism and in *Mit Brennender Sorge* he criticised Nazism and emphasised the right to profess one’s faith and live according to it. Pius XI rejected communism because its aim was “*to upset the social order and undermine the very foundations of Christian civilization*”.

During the Second World War, the much-criticised Pius XII did not speak out strongly enough on human rights. A Vatican diplomat by training, he preferred subtlety and discreet channels of communication to express disquiet. The circumstances of the time demanded strong and forceful language. Europe needed a strong moral voice to speak out. Diplomacy is often a good characteristic in a Pope, but during war, it can have its limitations. Some messages need to be put with great moral force and authority. They need to arrest people’s complacency – to remind them of the transcendent. Pius XII didn’t do that strongly enough – he was more of a diplomat than a Pope. John XXIII, also a Vatican diplomat, recognised that.

The gradual acceptance of human rights ideas within the Church accelerated under the pontificate of John XXIII. This was a significant turning point for the Church’s thinking on human rights. The promotion and defence of human rights now became a distinct part of the Church’s mission. John, as part of his wider reform, initiated a dialogue between the Church and the international community on human rights.

Pope John believed that the defence and promotion of human rights was necessary for peace, and without this, real peace would not be achieved. The publication of *Pacem in Terris* on Maundy Thursday in 1963 was a watershed for the Church. It was the closest thing we have to the Church’s own declaration on human rights - a stark change to previous Papal attitudes.

Unlike previous encyclicals, which were written to Catholic Bishops, *Pacem in Terris* was the first encyclical addressed to all people of goodwill, not only reaching out to the Catholic laity, but to all people of goodwill. Significantly, Pope John praised the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, which Pius XII had greeted with silence. John wrote “the genuine recognition and complete observance of all the rights and freedoms outlined in the declaration is a goal to be sought by all peoples and all nations.” John’s endorsement was not surprising. He, as Nuncio in Paris, had worked on the drafting of the Universal Declaration. The true significance of *Pacem in Terris* was its relevance. The fifty years had seen two World Wars, the rise of Nazi’s, the erection of the Berlin Wall, the continuing threat of Communism, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the nuclear arms race which threatened the world with devastation. It had been Europe’s half century of hell.

Pacem in Terris broke the Church’s rejectionist and hostile view of human rights. At the time of its publication, some on the extreme Right in the Church did not accept it. Some Catholic journals were openly critical of John’s work. They saw it as backing world government (one of Communism’s aims). Others believed John was abusing his position. Such criticism was not unexpected as his work represented a significant shift from previous thinking.

John recognised the important role and crucial contribution of the United Nations in the pursuit of peace and the need for a common universal approach. His *Pacem in Terris* encyclical is dominated by the term ‘universal’. His ideas are based on:

- (1) The equal dignity of every human being
- (2) The universal common good and
- (3) The defence and promotion of basic human rights for everyone.

John believed that good relations between humans are essential to achieve what God wanted. He set out a series of basic human rights at the beginning of *Pacem in Terris*. Rights which derive from nature. He spoke about the right to live; the right for the development of life highlighting, food, clothing, shelter, medical

care, rest, and necessary social services. The natural right to be respected, to share the benefits of culture, through general education, the right to meet and associate, freedom of movement and to participate in public life.

Most significantly, John places the right to freedom of religion at the heart of his: *'among man's rights is that of being able to worship God in accordance with the right dictates of his own conscience, and to profess his religion both in private and in public.'*

This last right was revolutionary for the Church. It was far removed from the views of Pius X, who in his letter to French Bishops in 1910 condemned French Catholics for working with non-Catholics when trying to bring reconciliation between the Church and the ideals of the Revolution.

John believed that all humans had rights to protect their natural dignity and in having such rights there were also duties. He gave the examples of *"the right to live involves the duty to preserve one's life; the right to a decent standard of living, the duty to live in a becoming fashion; the right to be free to seek out the truth, the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it."*

Each right had its respective duty and without the upholding of both, nothing would be gained. Here John seems to have been ahead of his time and it has taken us quite some time to come to terms with the Rights and Responsibilities argument. John states that *"to claim one's rights and ignore one's duties, or only half fulfil them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other."* He records that *"These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable."*

When referring to rights and duties, he is not only referring to individuals in a state, but also states in the international community. States have rights and duties towards each other. John saw the purpose of the state as ensuring that the *"inviolable rights*

of the human person are observed and that there is adequate scope for the performance of duties.”

John’s continued emphasis on the ‘universal common good’ in *Pacem in Terris* was also a significant development. Previous Popes had not defined that as being beyond those who believed in the Catholic faith. John did.

John believed that if the Church’s mission of peace and justice was to be achieved then the Papacy had an international role; one that could not be isolated from the United Nations. He was not advocating a one world government. He believed that peace could only be achieved through a ‘world-wide community of nations’ that reached beyond the boundaries of Christianity as he said *“involving extensive co-operation between Catholics and those Christians who are separated from this Apostolic See... cooperation of Catholics with men who may not be Christians but nevertheless are reasonable men, and men of natural moral integrity.”*

Achieving this could only be done through an international body, established by consensus with the objective of *“recognition, respect, safeguarding and promotion of the rights of the human person.”*

Previous Pontiffs had often claimed that in times of disorder that this could be resolved by obedience to the Church. However, John saw the observance of human rights as paramount for peace and justice, bringing together different cultures and religions.

An important theme in John’s publication is that all are equal in natural dignity. This is linked to his belief in the universal common good and for there to be peace, the primary objective should be the binding together of individuals, states and the world-wide community toward a common goal. Linked to equality of natural dignity he also paid particular attention to the increasing role played by women in domestic and public life. As well as speaking out against any form of racial discrimination, he highlighted the

rights of refugees, saying that they cannot lose their rights purely because they are deprived of citizenship of their own States.

John's commitment to human rights has continued with Pope John Paul II. In his Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace on 1 January 1998, he specifically endorsed the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the following terms:

“Fifty years ago, after a war characterized by the denial for certain peoples of the right even to exist, the General Assembly of the United Nations promulgated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That was a solemn act, arrived at after the sad experience of war, and motivated by the desire formally to recognize that the same rights belong to every individual and to all peoples. ... That document must be observed integrally in both its spirit and its letter.”

And in his Address in October 1995 to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, Pope John Paul emphasised the natural law and fundamental moral status of human rights when he observed as follows:

“It is a matter for serious concern that some people today deny the universality of human rights, just as they deny that there is a human nature shared by everyone. To be sure, there is no single model for organizing the politics and economics of human freedom; different cultures and different historical experiences give rise to different institutional forms of public life in a free and responsible society. But it is one thing to affirm a legitimate plurality of ‘forms of freedom’ and another to deny any universality or intelligibility to the nature of man or to the human experience.”

It is significant that it is the development of human rights after World War II that has received the specific endorsement of the Church. But at the outset, we talked about words and actions. Now I want to return to this by addressing the question what does this commitment to human rights mean in the Church today?

It comes back to words and actions. Despite the progress there are still many challenges that we face. Challenges that are different from the time of *Pacem in Terris*, but challenges that are relevant to John's encyclical.

Today's disorder does not stem from the Cold War, but the threat of international terrorism its consequences and causes. The tragic events of September 11th, the subsequent attacks in Saudi Arabia, Bali, Istanbul and Iraq illustrate one facet of the challenge. One other is posed by the states, which sponsor terrorism or spread nuclear, chemical and biological weapons across the world. Other faces can be found in poverty and hardship and the great inequalities of wealth (at home and abroad) that have come to dominate our modern way of life. From the world and also from a society that allows the unfettered pursuit of material gain at the expense of the less fortunate, the defenceless and the environment.

We could speak at length about the challenges ahead and that might not leave us with much hope for the future. If these challenges are to be overcome, the Church is the forum where we have to find hope. Albeit a hope founded in the reality in which we find ourselves. That is part of our faith and our social mission, and our desire to live our lives according to the Gospel values. So where do we find hope in today's world?

In the UK we can look on our doorstep. In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement is based on the mutual respect for different traditions. A respect that has led to the longest period of sustained peace in many decades. And at times, though it looks fraught, we cannot give up hope. Hope and the search for that elusive peace cannot be tireless, like all our efforts it might end in failure, but trying and failing is far better than never trying. Equally in Europe, with the historic enlargement this May when Malta along with nine other states, all but two of them from the states behind the Iron Curtain just a few decades ago. Who would have predicted that the old power realities would be replaced with a new found hope? If we had we would have been dismissed by the professional pundits as 'barmy'. If we had said that peace could

one day come to Northern Ireland, we too would have had our sanity questioned. But hope did triumph over realpolitik. Reality was changed for the better.

And whatever one's views of the legality of the recent events in Iraq it is surely a remarkable fact that here we have a former leader of his people not killed but rather preparing for trial for the crimes against humanity he has committed when in office.

Equally, John's vision for peace is not utopian or barmy. It is a challenge. True the world is very different from the time of John. 1963 is a long time ago and for some of too long ago. However, *Pacem in Terris*. John's insistence that peace requires a multi-dimensional effort remains as valid today as it was the day it was printed. *Pacem in Terris* reflected the obstacles to peace facing the world in 1963, he wrote about the need for disarmament, human rights, economic development and sensitivity to the dignity of weaker nations. Forty years on, these still need to be acted on. Writing today, John might expand his list to include concerns about poverty, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the environment.

In 1963, Pope John insisted on having a universal public authority, the United Nations, to strengthen peace between nations by promoting the universal common good. After this past year that call is as urgent and valid today as ever. It needs to be reheard, embraced and lived by each generation. We should not need a devastating World War in each generation to convince us of the case for international law and order.

In 1963, John XXIII saw the United Nations as the world-wide public authority. Today we face questions about the UN's legitimacy. Some of them from within the Catholic family. Catholics, before criticising the UN and decrying its international order, should examine John's reasoning. John XXIII believed that the UN's authority was built on two foundations:

1) Legitimacy through the virtual universal consensus of national states for the powers it holds

2) And the necessary efficacy in the pursuit of its objectives. In this sense *Pacem in Terris* could not be more relevant today.

Now the challenge. How can we, those who have inherited *Pacem in Terris*, apply it today? What is our generational response? I advocate four areas that are still wanting in our age.

1) We have a responsibility to reaffirm and renew the role of the United Nations. We don't need War and slaughter to convince us over and over again of the UN's relevance and necessity in the world. The world needs a single entity such as the UN rather than the alternative tangled web of inter-governmental bodies and coalitions based on different values and rights. But the UN is far from perfect. Recent events have exposed its weaknesses. There needs to be a new debate about what we mean by international law in the 21st century. When the UN was first established classic international law was based on the idea of sovereign states. The state was defined in terms that were simply a function of power – control, *by whatever means*, over a population within a territory. Today, international lawyers largely accept that legitimacy affects sovereignty, and that increasingly governments are expected to be democratic if they are legitimately to exercise sovereign power.

We need to go further than that and assert that the international community is entitled to demand that sovereign states also respect human rights and the rule of law. The right to democratic governance should not be allowed to obscure the substantive moral content of a truly democratic political regime, one which is required to protect and proclaim the value of human life, and to provide the conditions for each individual's flourishing, even in the case where a majority of the electorate may favour the deprivation or attenuation of rights for unpopular minorities – whether that be present day asylum seekers in the more developed countries of the world or Jews in the Germany of the early 1930s. It is the duty of the State authorities therefore – and this is *especially* the case in

democratic systems - to stand up for and protect fundamental rights, often against majority opinion.

In trying times, such as those currently faced by governments post-September 11 where States face a threat to their internal security, that duty demands that a proper balance be struck between a response to terrorism and continued respect for civil liberties. As Pope John Paul II noted in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, ‘a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly-disguised totalitarianism’.²⁰³

2) The culture of death. John said that “man has the right to live”. For the Church the right to live is the foundational right and all other human rights stem from that right. Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights explicitly asserts the Right to Life. Many countries today maintain the death penalty. Pope John Paul II in 1999, called on world leaders to “reach an international consensus on the abolition of the death penalty”. However, today 83 countries still retain it. According to Amnesty International, in 2002, at least 1,526 prisoners were executed in 31 countries and 3,248 people were sentenced to death in 67 countries. 81% of all known executions took place in China, Iran and the USA. In the Philippines, a predominantly Catholic country, at least 7 child offenders are currently under sentence of death.

The United Kingdom, having ratified Protocol 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights in 1998, has agreed to abolish the death penalty in peacetime. Malta too abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes in 1971 and for all crimes in 2000. However, it is worrying that a recent opinion poll found that 62% of people favoured the re-introduction of the death penalty in Britain. The late Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago said that human rights are a seamless robe – meaning people cannot pick and choose.

²⁰³ His Holiness Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus* (1991) , 46.

3) Development. *Pacem in Terris*, written at the time when many African countries were gaining independence, pays particular attention to the needs and rights of less developed countries and the duties upon wealthier states. John talks of the importance of those living in less developed countries being able to live in conditions to maintain their human dignity. He called on advanced nations “to make a greater contribution to the common cause of social progress”. This theme also sits unresolved today. The extent of poverty in the developing world is a blemish on the entire international community, but particularly for us in the West. Many people – especially children - are still denied basic human rights.

A quarter of the world’s population, 1.3 billion people, live in severe poverty – managing on less than \$1 a day. 800 million people do not get enough food. 840 million adults are illiterate - 540 million of them women – and 1.2 billion people live without access to safe drinking water.

Shamefully, over the last 20 years many developed countries have reduced their aid contributions to the developing world. We haven’t and for that we can be proud. Public pressure such as the Jubilee 2000 campaign has increased pressure for action. People power was also instrumental in persuading policy makers both at home and abroad to eliminate the crippling debt on developing world states. I am proud that the British presidency of the G8 is highlighting the issue of Africa.

The Church also makes its own direct contribution to assisting in the development of less advanced countries through organisations such as CAFOD working to give people the basic rights of dignity and respect. Just as Pope John highlighted the duty to assist less economically advanced countries, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed this call in his Millennium address when he appealed to national policy makers to address the debt burden that the poorest countries faced - urging a substantial reduction or the outright cancellation of external debt of certain countries.

4) Racism. *Pacem in Terris* also raised another area that was politically hot in the early 60s – race. Today we could sit back and thank God that apartheid is dead in South Africa. But John’s writing did not speak about the macro alone; he also spoke about the micro. It was a call for the outright rejection of racial discrimination.

Whilst John’s statement may not hold the same impact today, this does not mean that we have realised John’s call for an ‘outright rejection of racial discrimination’ regardless of race. There is widespread condemnation of racism, but one only has to look at the recent growth in popularity of extreme right wing political parties across Europe, not to mention the British National Party in the United Kingdom to see that it has not gone away. Tackling racism requires our constant vigilance. After all it was only ten years ago that a talented young British man was attacked and killed on our streets for no reason other than his colour, the lessons of the tragic death of Stephen Lawrence remain valid today.

Equality matters to everyone –it is not a minority concern. Most of the articles of the ECHR begin with the word “everyone” and are inherently based upon the notion of the equal worth and dignity of every individual, in a society, which strongly respects diversity. True human rights are not about imposing uniformity. Instead they requires us to accept diversity and to enable all members of all groups to participate positively in, and benefit equally from, our society.

The Church

But John’s message is also a message to the Church. Forty years on can we really say that the Church has lived up to his ideals of equality and respect for all? Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that human rights begin “in small places, close to home” and that “*Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning*”

anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world”.

I would suggest that there is still a way to go before the Church lives up to these ideals particularly in relation to the role of women in the Church. In 1988 Pope John Paul II set out a new perspective on the role of women in the Church in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitate*. In his Letter to Women in 1995 he apologised for those members of the Church who had contributed to the marginalisation of women and talked about the importance of achieving ‘*real equality* in every area’ and the ‘universal recognition of the dignity of women’.

Progress has been made in opening the doors to greater female participation and we are now seeing more women taking roles in the Church not just as Eucharistic ministers, readers or servers, but as religious Chancellors and Canon Lawyers. However, there is still much work to be done. The Vatican Curia needs to learn from the many Diocesan Curias throughout the world and open its doors to female participation. I welcome the recent announcement that Mary Ann Glendon, who teaches law at Harvard University has become the first female president of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, and thus the highest ranking lay women in the Vatican. There is little reason why half of all Vatican curial positions could not be filled by women. It should be a main priority of the Church at all levels to breakdown the barriers to female participation. Throughout the Church women must be thought of as ‘thinkers’ as well as ‘workers’. And whilst I welcome the Vatican’s recent recognition in its letter “On the Collaboration of Men and Women” of 31st July this year, that men and women are both different and equal, it does not provide any answers for one of the most pressing questions today which is how to respond to women’s legitimate aspirations for full participation in social and political life, without harm to families, children and the common good.

It comes back to Pope John’s rights and duties. How can we expect others to fulfil their duties or responsibilities if we are not clearly

seen to be meeting our own? What value is our word if we say one thing and do another? There are signs of hope however, and I predict that in this area we will see greater progress as the 21st century proceeds.

Progress Made.

Tonight as we muse on what John XXIII meant some forty years on, let's not forget one central thing the quest for peace cannot be divorced from respect for human dignity and human rights. Let us think about words and actions because respect for human rights comes from living them. Living the Rights on a daily basis. That is the hard part. Intellectual acceptance is easy. Rights are ours, but they cannot be divorced from the responsibilities that are placed upon us. We are quite far, some forty years on, from realising our responsibilities towards our fellow humanity.

John XXIII called *Pacem in Terris* an 'immense' task. That it is and let's hope that those of us that might be back here for the 80th Anniversary of *Pacem in Terris* can say that we have taken it further. That we have further realised the goals set for us in 1963. *Pacem in Terris* was our call to action. It is a timeless call to help realise the Kingdom of God on Earth. We as Christians are asked to try, just try. We are not promised success. And sometimes our efforts might end in failure. But the real test is to get up and start over and over again: start again with Pope John's requirements of peace – truth, justice, love and freedom.

John left us *Pacem in Terris* in the year that he died. It is one of the most topical and revolutionary Papal Encyclicals ever published. John XXIII has left us an immense legacy and a great task. Being faithful to that task is not easy, but auditing our progress some forty years on is both a sobering and frightening experience. To steal a phrase; 'much has been done – there is much left to do.

Cherie Blair
October 2004