

## THE INFLUENCE OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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In the history of Catholic social doctrine, surely one of the most important developments has been the Church's assimilation of what Pope Benedict XVI has called the 'true conquests of the Enlightenment'.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere is that phenomenon more striking than in the extent to which Catholic social doctrine has appropriated, and even championed, human rights ideas. The influence of human rights on Catholic social thought – and on the Holy See's international advocacy – has been widely discussed and debated. What has received less attention is the reciprocal character of that relationship. Hence, my assignment at this session is to initiate some reflection by the members of the Academy on the ways in which Catholic social doctrine has influenced, and might influence in the future, the theory and practice of human rights.

In this paper, I propose to trace that influence through five phases: first, in the post-World War II human rights 'moment'; second, in the Cold War years; third, in the heady days when human rights ideas were among the forces that led to the fall of oppressive regimes in South Africa and Eastern Europe; fourth, in the contests over meaning, interpretation and implementation that intensified in the 1990s; and finally in the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI whose 2008 speech at the UN contained several pointed warnings about the future direction of the human rights movement.

### CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE IN THE POST-WORLD-WAR II HUMAN RIGHTS MOMENT

In the darkest years of World War II, the idea began to percolate that some sort of human rights provision should be included in an eventual

<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia*, December 22, 2006.

peace treaty. One of the first suggestions came from the British writer H.G. Wells in 1940.<sup>2</sup> A year later, in a radio broadcast that probably reached a wider audience, Pope Pius XII commemorated the 50th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* by deploring the disregard for the basic rights and duties that belong to all members of the human family. It was a somber message, as befitted the times. But he concluded it by saying, 'These are the principles, concepts, and norms, beloved children, with which we should wish even now to share in the future organization of that new order which the world expects and hopes will arise from the seething ferment of the present struggle'.<sup>3</sup>

The protection of human rights was not, however, among the priorities of the 'Big Three' (England, the Soviet Union and the United States) when they met to plan for the 'organization of that new order'. At the UN founding conference, it was largely due to the insistence of smaller nations, especially the Latin American group, that the UN established a Human Rights Commission, and charged it with the duty of preparing an international 'bill of rights'.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, for purposes of our present inquiry, there were striking similarities between the document that Commission produced and the language of the social encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI: the pervasive emphasis on the 'inherent dignity' and 'worth of the human person'; the affirmation that the human person is 'endowed with reason and conscience'; the right to form trade unions; the worker's right to just remuneration for himself and his family; the recognition of the family as the 'natural and fundamental group unit of society' entitled as such to 'protection by society and the state'; the prior right of parents to choose the education of their children; and a provision that motherhood and childhood are entitled to 'special care and assistance'.<sup>5</sup>

The Commission's proximate sources for those provisions, however, were completely secular: the twentieth-century constitutions of many Latin American and continental European countries, and the draft document

<sup>2</sup> H.G. Wells, *The Rights of Man, or What are We Fighting For?* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1940).

<sup>3</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Radio Address*, June 1, 1941, 27.

<sup>4</sup> The discussion of the framing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that follows is based on Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> UDHR, *Preamble and Articles* 1, 16, 22, 25 and 26.

that became the 1948 Bogotá Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man. If we ask where the Latin Americans and continental Europeans got those distinctive formulations, the answer would be that they came mainly from the programs of political parties – parties of a type that did not exist in the United States, Britain or the Soviet bloc – namely, Christian Democratic and Christian Social parties. But if we ask where the politicians got those ideas about the family, work, civil society, and the dignity of the person, the answer is that they came mainly from *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931).

And if anyone should ask where the Church got those ideas, the short answer would be that those early social encyclicals were part of the process through which the Church had begun to reflect on the Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century revolutions, socialism, and the labor question in the light of Scripture, tradition, and her own experience as an ‘expert in humanity’.<sup>6</sup>

The most articulate advocate for that whole complex of ideas among the framers of the UDHR was Charles Malik, a Lebanese philosopher of the Greek Orthodox faith. In his interventions as a member of the UDHR drafting committee, he frequently used terms like the ‘intermediate associations’ of civil society, and he insisted on the term ‘person’ rather than ‘individual’. According to Malik’s son, Dr. Habib Malik, his father had acquired that vocabulary from the heavily underlined copies of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* that were among the books his father most frequently consulted.

Ideas from Catholic social thought were also brought into the UDHR by Latin American delegates to the early UN. In the drafting process, it was they (not the Soviets, as many now suppose) who were the most zealous promoters of social and economic rights. They continued to play an active role during the UN’s general debate on the draft Declaration. In 1948, Latin American nations comprised 21 of the UN’s 58 members, and their representatives used the power of numbers to offer many amendments based on the Bogota Declaration. One observer wrote in his memoirs that their speeches ‘were laced with Roman Catholic social philosophy, and it seemed at times that the chief protagonists in the conference room were the Roman Catholics and the communists, with the latter a poor second’.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Populorum Progressio*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> John P. Humphrey, *Human Rights and the United Nations: A Great Adventure* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Transnational Publishing, 1984), pp. 65-66.

Such were the principal channels through which Catholic thought helped to shape the UDHR. Other factors that may have played a role were the presence of observers from the U.S. National Catholic Welfare Conference (forerunner of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) at practically every session of the Human Rights Commission, and the fact that two members of the UDHR's drafting committee, René Cassin and Malik, were well acquainted with Jacques Maritain, who in turn had been one of the most active members of a UNESCO committee appointed to study the theoretical foundations of human rights.

Needless to say, Catholic social doctrine was only one of many tributaries to the Universal Declaration. Nevertheless, the record shows that it is no mere coincidence that the document's implicit vision of personhood, its attention to the mediating structures of civil society, its dignitarian character, and its insistence on the links between freedom and social justice so closely resemble the social teachings of Leo XIII and Pius XI.

(Against that background, the subsequent appropriation of rights discourse by the Fathers of Vatican II and the Popes from John XXIII to Benedict XVI is less surprising than some commentators have imagined. After all, the rights tradition into which the Church has tapped was importantly influenced by the biblically informed, continental, dignitarian tradition which she herself had already done so much to shape).

*What I wish to emphasize about the influence of early Catholic social doctrine on the UDHR is that the features traceable to that influence turned out to have a broad appeal across many cultures and to resonate even with non-western traditions.* The Chinese and Indian delegates, for example, were very concerned that a universal declaration should not separate rights from duties. The Catholic formulations helped the Declaration to avoid excesses of individualism or collectivism, and thus to win consensus from a UN whose 58 members in 1948 included representatives from six Asian nations, as well as from nine countries where Islamic culture was predominant. Of that group, only Saudi Arabia abstained from approving the UDHR.

## THE COLD WAR YEARS

The Universal Declaration gradually became, in a sense, the constitution of the postwar international human rights movement. But the Cold War Years were not hospitable to human rights ideas. The ink was barely dry on the 1948 Universal Declaration when the Cold War antagonists tore it in half, so to speak. The Eisenhower State Department dismissed the

social and economic provisions as 'socialistic', while their Soviet counterparts derided the political and civil rights as 'bourgeois'. What began as political opportunism soon hardened into habit, and thus began the now nearly universal practice of reading the UDHR as though it were simply a list of rights rather than an integrated document whose parts were meant to be interdependent and mutually conditioning.

Those years also saw the emergence of many newly independent nations, and the appearance of another kind of threat to the universal human rights project. Most of these countries modeled their new constitutions in part on the Universal Declaration. However, many leaders of the new nations took the position that human rights were a luxury that had to be put on hold until stability was achieved and economic conditions improved. Some attacked the very idea of universality, arguing for various forms of cultural relativism.

Throughout the 50s, 60s, and 70s, the Holy See was a relatively lonely voice upholding the universality principle and the principle of indivisibility, according to which political and civil rights are indispensable for social and economic justice, and vice versa. But in the international political climate of those years, the Holy See's position could hardly be called influential. That was the heyday of the self-styled political realists who had always scoffed at the idea that a mere declaration of human rights could make much of a difference in world affairs. To most observers, that skepticism seemed amply justified.

#### THE 'GLORY DAYS' OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In the 1980s, however, skepticism gradually gave way to astonishment as human rights ideas became the principal rallying point for the forces that led to peaceful change in Eastern Europe and South Africa. By 1989, the world was marveling that a few simple words of truth – spoken by a few courageous people – could spark a change in the course of history. One of those people, Vaclav Havel, could hardly believe it himself. He wrote in 1989, 'I really do inhabit a world where words are capable of shaking the entire system of government, where words can be mightier than ten military divisions'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Vaclav Havel, *A Word about Words*, January 25, 1989 speech, reprinted in *New York Review of Books*, January 18, 1990.

No one appreciated the power of ‘calling good and evil by name’ more than Pope John Paul II. And no Pope had ever deployed the language of human rights so vigorously as he. Although historians will long debate the relative importance of the various forces that resulted in the overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe, there is no doubt that John Paul II played a major role.<sup>9</sup>

His encyclicals, moreover, represented an important development of Catholic social thought on several fronts. Central to writings like *Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and *Centesimus Annus* was his emphasis on the importance of an adequate concept of human personhood, and on the priority of culture over economics and politics. In *Centesimus Annus*, he taught that democratic politics and free economics can only promote human flourishing if the energies they release are tempered and directed by a vibrant public moral culture.<sup>10</sup> Where human rights are concerned, he insisted on the need for a culture that rejects freedom-as-license – a culture that fosters solidarity and the responsible exercise of freedom. He developed the Church’s social doctrine further in *Evangelium Vitae* by pointing out that abortion, euthanasia, and the questions raised by new bio-technologies are, in fact, social justice issues – and that when grave moral evils are legally defined as rights, the entire human rights project is threatened.<sup>11</sup>

In the years when the human rights movement was enjoying its greatest successes, Pope John Paul II was one of the first to see that the more the international human rights idea began to show its power, the more intense would become the struggle to capture that power for various ends, not all of which are respectful of human dignity. As a philosopher, he was also especially concerned about the need for human rights to be grounded in an adequate concept of human personhood and to rest on credible foundations. In 1989, the very year when optimism about human rights was at its height, he was already warning that the ‘Declaration does not contain the anthropological and moral bases for the human rights that it proclaims’.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Books, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, 36, 46.

<sup>11</sup> *Evangelium Vitae*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Address to the Diplomatic Corps* 1989, 7.

## CONTESTS OVER THE DIRECTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

That concern turned out to be well-founded. The close of the Cold War was followed by a surge of bloody regional and ethnic conflicts, undermining the sense of the unity of the human family. Economic and technological developments brought new risks that human beings would be treated as instruments or objects. Secular prophets were popularizing philosophies that deny the existence of truth or the ability of the human mind to grasp it. And special interest groups began clamoring to have their agenda items included in the canon of universal human rights.

By the mid-1990s, efforts to capture the prestige of the human rights project for assorted causes had become especially intense, at the municipal, national, and regional levels. In the international arena, notably at the UN's Cairo and Beijing conferences, Holy See diplomats struggled to save the Universal Declaration from being pulled apart and politicized beyond recognition, and to keep alive the connection between freedom and solidarity. It is noteworthy that the provisions of the UDHR that came under heavy attack at those conferences were precisely those that were most influenced by Catholic social thought – provisions relating to marriage, the family, parents' rights, and freedom of religion. At Beijing, there was even a movement to delete any references to 'dignity' from the conference documents.

Those contests continue today. In his April 18, 2008 Address to the United Nations, Pope Benedict XVI began, as his predecessors Paul VI and John Paul II had done in that setting, with words of praise for the Universal Declaration. He described it as the outcome of a process designed 'to place the human person at the heart of institutions, laws, and the workings of society', and he credited it with having enabled 'different cultures, juridical expressions and institutional models to converge around a fundamental nucleus of values and hence of rights'.<sup>13</sup> But what is striking about the 2008 speech is that those expressions of appreciation were followed by what may well be the most sobering cautionary discussion about human rights that has ever appeared in any papal document. Pope Benedict signaled no fewer than nine dilemmas that are clouding the future of the human rights project. They are the dilemmas posed by: (1) cultural relativism, (2) positivism, (3) philosophical relativism, (4) utilitarianism, (5) selective approaches to rights, (6) escalating demands for new rights, (7) hyper-indi-

<sup>13</sup> *Address to the United Nations*, April 18, 2008.

vidualistic interpretations of rights, (8) forgetfulness of the relation between rights and responsibilities, and (9) the threat posed to religious freedom by dogmatic forms of secularism.

Pope Benedict's treatment of these issues should not be viewed as mere critique; rather it points toward constructive approaches to thorny dilemmas that have long haunted the human rights project. In particular, the time may be right for Catholic thought to offer helpful perspectives on current threats to universality, especially those posed by cultural relativism, the threat posed by selective approaches to rights, and the persistent problem of foundations.

#### CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Consider, first, the challenge of cultural relativism. One of the greatest achievements of the human rights project was precisely to lift up the proposition that certain rights are so fundamental that they belong to everyone simply by virtue of being a member of the human family. After paying tribute to that accomplishment in his UN speech, Pope Benedict warned against the denial of universality 'in the name of different cultural, political, social and even religious outlooks', and criticized the use of 'the argument of cultural specificity to mask violations of human rights'. As everyone knows, some of the world's worst human rights violators have attempted to hide behind such arguments, claiming that human rights are 'western' or 'Judaean-Christian' inventions and that they do not apply to their local circumstances.

Those challenges cannot be dismissed simply by asserting, as does the UN's 1993 Vienna Human Rights Declaration, that the universality of these rights is 'beyond question'. The fact is that the question of how there can be universal rights in a world marked by great cultural and political diversity is one that deserves to be taken seriously.

What Catholic social thought might bring to that debate is based on the Church's long experience in the dialectic between universal principles and diverse cultures. What the Church has found is that universal principles need not entail homogeneity in their implementation. The existence of different ways of implementing principles does not necessarily entail relativism about the principles themselves.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the common understand-

<sup>14</sup> *World Day of Peace Message* 1999, 3.



ing of core principles can be enriched by the accumulation of a variety of experiences in living those principles.

Pope John Paul II, in his 1995 Address to the 50th General Assembly of the United Nations, brought that experience to bear on human rights. Universal rights and particular cultures, he said, cannot be radically opposed. After all, rights emerge from culture; rights cannot be sustained without cultural underpinnings; and rights, to be effective, must become part of each people's way of life. Different cultures, he went on, 'are but different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence'.<sup>15</sup> Thus there can be a 'legitimate pluralism' in forms of freedom, with different means of expressing and protecting basic rights, provided 'that in every case the levels set for the whole of humanity by the Universal Declaration are respected'.

To ignore the need for pluralism would be to court a risk as grave as that of giving in to cultural relativism. It would be to fall into the mindset that, regrettably, characterizes the professional culture of many international lawyers, international civil servants, and international NGOs – a mindset that is insensitive to local particularities and that insists on top-down imposition of its own dogmatic interpretations of human rights. In short, it would be to promote a kind of cultural imperialism.

As it happens, the pluralistic approach outlined by Pope John Paul II corresponds perfectly with the understanding of universality shared by the principal architects of the Universal Declaration: Mrs. Roosevelt, René Cassin, Charles Malik, and the Chinese philosopher-diplomat Peng-chun Chang. The records of their deliberations are replete with statements showing that they never intended that its common standard of achievement would or should produce completely uniform practices.<sup>16</sup>

Admittedly, it will not always be easy to distinguish between a cultural relativism that undermines universality and a legitimate pluralism that permits different means of expressing and protecting fundamental rights. But the distinction must be made if one is serious about bringing the universal principles of human rights to life under widely varying cultural conditions.

<sup>15</sup> *Address to the United Nations*, October 5, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> One of the most pointed examples occurs in Chang's speech urging the U.N. General Assembly to adopt the Declaration. The peoples of the world, he said, had had enough of the sort of uniformity that colonial powers once sought to impose on them – a standardized way of thinking and a single way of life. That sort of uniformity could only be achieved by force or at the expense of truth. It could never last. Summary Records, UN General Assembly, 182<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Session, 895.

## POSITIVISM

The problem of distinguishing cultural relativism from legitimate pluralism brings us to the Pope's criticism of positivism. By what standard, he asks, can a nation's conduct be judged if rights are viewed merely as the result of legislative enactments or other official decisions? As he correctly points out, justice is often denied when rights are considered 'purely in terms of legality...divorced from the ethical and rational dimension which is their foundation and their goal'.<sup>17</sup> As a lawyer, however, I must pause to note the obvious: that fair procedures and rules of law, while not sufficient in themselves, are extremely important to the protection of human freedom and dignity (and are recognized as such in the UDHR). Like the fundamental rights they protect, they too represent hard-won, fragile cultural achievements.

## PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIVISM

Perhaps the most complicated challenge facing the human rights project at the present time is the problem of supplying credible foundations for the practical consensus that is embodied in major human rights instruments. In today's world, understandings of rights, justice, and natural law are hotly contested. Philosophical relativism has penetrated so deeply into popular culture that good men and women increasingly feel unable to say why any values should be defended or why any conduct should be condemned, except that it's a matter of preference. But if there are no common truths to which people of different backgrounds and cultures can appeal, it is difficult to see how universal rights can be upheld.

Pope Benedict speaks to this question on the basis of the Catholic tradition which holds that human rights arise from a natural order whose laws can be discovered by reason through study and experience by believer and unbeliever alike. In the lecture that he was to have given at *La Sapienza* University last spring, the Pope issued a kind of challenge to the faculty of jurisprudence. 'How', he asked rhetorically, 'can juridical norms can be found that guarantee freedom, human dignity and human rights? That is the question that occupies us today in the democratic processes of opinion formation, and that at the same time fills us with anxiety over the future of humanity'.

<sup>17</sup> *Address to the United Nations*, April 18, 2008.

The standard response one might have expected from jurists to such a question would emphasize the problem of 'who decides' and would point out that this problem is one that the liberal democracies have found best to approach through institutional structures designed to promote wide deliberation and to prevent abuse of authority.

Anticipating some such response, Pope Benedict observed that public argumentation in contemporary democracies aims above all at attaining majorities, and that 'sensitivity to the truth is constantly overruled by sensitivity to interests', often by 'special interests that do not truly serve everyone'.

Then, having uttered the word 'truth', he was faced with Pilate's question: 'What is truth?' How can one speak of 'truth' in a world where it has become fashionable to deny that there is any such thing as a universally valid proposition about human beings or human affairs? Pope Benedict's approach is simultaneously Pauline, Augustinian, and postmodern. The search for truth, he has said, is 'one that always demands strenuous new efforts, and that is never posed and resolved definitively'.<sup>18</sup> It is a never-ending process of reflecting on experience, coming to judgments, and subjecting those judgments to continuing scrutiny in the light of reason and experience. Thus, he said, he could not offer a definitive answer, 'but only an invitation to remain on the journey with the great ones who throughout history have struggled and sought with their responses and their restlessness for the truth which continually beckons from beyond any individual answer'.<sup>19</sup> 'There are really only two options', he said on another occasion. 'Either one recognizes the priority of reason, of creative Reason that is at the beginning of all things and is the principle of all things...or [one accepts] the priority of the irrational' – which means accepting that everything on earth and in our lives, including reason itself, is only accidental. 'The great option of Christianity', he said, 'is the option for rationality and the priority of reason'.<sup>20</sup>

In such statements, one sees the depth of Pope Benedict's commitment to what he calls 'the true conquests of the Enlightenment'.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.zenit.org/article-21526?1=english>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/186421>.

### UTILITARIANISM

The problem of foundations has led many friends of human rights to defend them on the basis of what the Pope calls a 'utilitarian perspective'. Although utility has its place in many common situations, Pope Benedict points out that 'the greatest good for the greatest number' can put the weakest and most vulnerable members of society at great risk. Thus, utilitarianism can easily become a mere justification for the imposition of the will of the stronger.

### SELECTIVITY

A fifth problem mentioned by the Pope arises from the widespread tendency to treat fundamental rights like items on a menu from which one can pick and choose one's favorites, ignoring the rest. During the Cold War years threats to the interdependence of fundamental rights arose mainly from a perceived tension between political/civil rights on the one hand and social justice on the other. The 1948 Declaration, like the Catholic social doctrine which influenced it in this respect, insists on the mutual dependence of rights in those two areas. The UDHR was carefully constructed as an integrated document whose mutually conditioning parts were meant to be read in relation to each other. The idea was – as to the small core of rights deemed fundamental – that when the violation of one of them is accepted without reaction, all other rights are placed at risk. Over the years, the principle that universal rights are 'interdependent and indivisible' has been affirmed repeatedly in UN documents, yet it is conspicuously flouted in practice by nation states and interest groups alike.

One voice that has never wavered in defense of that principle has been that of the Holy See. During the Cold War, it resisted the separation of political and civil rights from social and economic rights (always recognizing that the UDHR allows more diversity in modes of implementation of the latter than the former). Today, with the provisions protecting marriage, the family, parental rights, and religious freedom under mounting assault, the Pope has had to insist again on the Declaration's unity, warning that it 'cannot be applied piecemeal, according to trends or selective choices'.

## NEW RIGHTS

Closely related to the problem of selectivity is a sixth source of concern – the pressure to expand the category of rights that are so fundamental as to be deemed universal. That category cannot be closed, for, as the Pope pointed out, ‘As history proceeds, new situations arise’. On the other hand, the more goods or desires that are recognized as rights, the more risk there is of trivializing core human values.

The problem is a concomitant of success. Now that the UDHR has been accepted as a universal standard, interest groups of all sorts have intensified their efforts to have their agenda items recognized as universal rights. No wonder, then, that the Pope felt moved to warn against pressures to ‘move away from the protection of human dignity towards the satisfaction of simple interests’. And no wonder that he called for great ‘discernment’ in dealing with demands for new rights. In that connection, his last three cautions can usefully be viewed as aids to distinguishing proposals that represent healthy developments from those that are harmful to human dignity.

## HYPER-INDIVIDUALISM

Consider, first, his warning against the tendency to adopt an excessively individualistic approach to human rights. ‘[R]ights and the resulting duties’, he said, ‘flow naturally from human interaction...They are the fruit of a commonly held sense of justice built primarily upon solidarity among the members of society’. Here, in this very condensed manner, he is evoking a large body of learning about how human rights can dissolve into scattered rights of personal autonomy, undermining the conditions for effective liberty. Useful questions to ask about any proposed new right, therefore, are: What are the human goods that it seeks to protect? What are its implicit assumptions about the human person? How does it relate to other rights?

## RESPONSIBILITIES

An equally important question to ask about a proposed new right is whether it recognizes corresponding responsibilities. As the Pope put it, ‘In the name of freedom, there has to be a correlation between rights and duties, by which every person is called to assume responsibility for his or her choices, made as a consequence of entering into relations with others’.

## DOGMATIC SECULARISM

Finally, let us note the Pope's allusion to one of his major concerns – the threat to religious freedom and human dignity posed by a dogmatic form of secularism that aims to entirely displace religion from public life. Though he mentions secularism only in passing, the reference is sufficient to evoke the recollection of extensive discussions elsewhere – by Pope Benedict, Marcello Pera, and Joseph Weiler, among others – of the dangers of ignoring the Biblical roots of the great achievements of modernity.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it appears that the elements in national and international rights instruments that were most influenced by Catholic social thought are decreasingly present in contemporary rights discourse – despite the fact that Holy See diplomats, and the Popes from John XXIII to Benedict XVI, have been among the strongest and most loyal supporters of the ideals contained in those instruments.

The most important exception, I believe, has been the successful effort of Holy See diplomats to secure the adoption in many UN documents of the phrase that the human person must be at the center of concern in development. Whatever the issue, the Church's principal focus in the public arena has been guided by the need to protect the dignity of the human person. As Pope Benedict put in an Address to the European Peoples' Party, 'As far as the Catholic Church is concerned the principal focus of her interventions in the public arena is the protection and promotion of the dignity of the person, and she is thereby consciously drawing particular attention to principles which are not negotiable'.<sup>22</sup> That means that human beings must never be regarded as mere objects or instruments, and they may not be sacrificed for political, economic, or social gain. At the same time, Pope Bene-

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Joseph Weiler, *Un'Europa Cristiana: Un saggio esplorativo* (Milan: BUR Saggi, 2003); Marcello Pera, *Perché noi dobbiamo dirci Cristiani* (Milan: Mondadori, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to the Members of the European Peoples Party*, March 30, 2006. See also, John Paul II, *The human person must be the true focus of all social, political, and economic activity*, Greeting to the U.N. Staff, 5 October 1995, No. 3.

dict has been careful to emphasize that not all moral issues have the same moral weight. For example, in 2004, as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he wrote, "There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia".<sup>23</sup>

The 'influence' of one or another factor in the immensely complex unfolding of human events will always remain largely a matter of speculation. That is why the Church wisely teaches that Christians should not trouble themselves excessively about seeing the results of their efforts. As St. Ignatius Loyola advised, 'Pray as if everything depended on God and act as if everything depended on you'. From that perspective, it is remarkable that Catholic influence on the framing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be so clearly traced. It is far more difficult to assess the effects of subsequent efforts by Church leaders and laypeople to lift up and promote those elements of the human rights project that are conducive to human flourishing, while striving to counteract trends that threaten human dignity.

It does seem worth noting, however, that *the clearest identifiable instance of influence by Catholic social doctrine on human rights took place through the efforts of well-informed lay men and women who brought those social teachings into the political processes of their own countries and into the framing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. As Church leaders have consistently emphasized, the social apostolate is the particular responsibility of the laity; it is primarily up to the laity 'to evangelize the various sectors of family, social, professional, cultural and political life'.<sup>24</sup> That message was an especially prominent theme for Pope John Paul II. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, to take just one example, he called 'both men and women...to be convinced of...each one's individual responsibility, and to implement – by the way they live as individuals and as families, by the use of their resources, by their civic activity, by contributing to economic and political decisions and by personal commitment to national and international undertakings – the measures inspired by solidarity and love of preference for the poor'.<sup>25</sup> His advice on how to do that seems as relevant to today's challenges as it was when delivered in 1995: 'Sometimes witnessing to Christ will mean drawing out of a culture the full meaning of its noblest

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Memorandum to Cardinal Theodore McCarrick*, July 2004, No. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ecclesia in America*, 44.

<sup>25</sup> *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 47.

intentions...At other times, witnessing to Christ means challenging that culture, especially when the truth about the human person is under assault'.<sup>26</sup> That wise counsel brings me back to the point I mentioned at the outset of these remarks: The Church's critical engagement with human rights is an outstanding example of her acceptance of the good gifts of the Enlightenment: the quest for freedom, respect for the dignity and worth of every human being, and – not least – the high value placed on human reason. 'Influence' in this area has always been a two-way street, for Enlightenment thinkers themselves owed a huge, if not always acknowledged, debt to the intellectual traditions and spiritual wisdom of Christianity. That dialogue between Catholic social teaching and the best of secular thought must continue, for as Pope Benedict wrote in *Spe Salvi*, 'Every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs'.<sup>27</sup>

It only remains for me to conclude by recalling that it was to create a privileged place for that dialogue that Pope John Paul II created the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Homily at Camden Yards, 1995, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Spe Salvi*, 25.