

Verklaring Rechten van de Mens weerspiegelt nieuwe visie op waardigheid

Cardinal Bertone Affirms Its Worth After 60 Years



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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is more than a proclamation; it is an example of the international community giving human dignity a new consideration and placement, says Benedict XVI's secretary of state. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone affirmed this when he considered the importance of the declaration at an event Wednesday marking its 60th anniversary.

When it was signed in 1948, the cardinal said, the declaration intended to "defend the person from the idolatry of the state, which totalitarianisms had in fact divinized, proposing an ulterior way to build the 'city of men,' basing it on the conviction that 'recognition of the inherent dignity of all the members of the human family, and of their equal and inalienable rights, constitutes the foundation of liberty, of justice and of peace.'" "We are not just faced with a proclamation, but rather with a new consideration and placement of human dignity by the international community and the various political communities that animate it, up to now little inclined to admit the person as protagonist," he continued.

The cardinal said that the Church sees the declaration as a "sign of the times" — "an act able to synthesize the meaning of human liberty by reconciling present-day needs with immutable principles, capable of offering guidelines founded anthropologically and juridically so as to respond to the most profound human needs." Today, he said, these same human rights are still universal, in the face of the global dimension that characterizes modern times, given that they are based on the universality of the person.

Religious liberty

Cardinal Bertone noted that the Church gives special emphasis to the cause of religious liberty, guaranteed as well by the declaration. "It is an altogether evident fact that the religious event has a direct influence on the unfolding of the internal life of states and of the international community," he said. "This notwithstanding, perceived ever more are indications and tendencies that seem to want to exclude religion and rights from the possibility to contribute to the construction of the social order, also in full respect of the pluralism that marks contemporary society. "Religious freedom risks being confused only with freedom of worship or in any case interpreted as an element belonging to the private sphere and increasingly replaced by an imprecise 'right to tolerance.'"

Real rights

The Vatican official went on to say that an analysis of the exact nature of the rights guaranteed by the declaration is useful. "To defend fundamental rights means, in fact, not to confuse them with simple and often limiting contingent needs," he said. "To be able to go back to the original position of the declaration including the new situations is possible and could be a path to follow to give renewed vigor to man's cause." But even with a clear understanding of rights and their foundation, they are "always in need of being defended," the cardinal said.

He explained: "They are in need of fidelity on our part, because they can be lost from view, reinterpreted in a



restrictive way or actually denied. The pedagogy to which we owe their formulation is the same with which they need to be preserved. The Holy Father often reminds us that humanity's moral progress always needs to be undertaken again. Not being a material fact, it cannot happen by accumulation. This is also true for human rights, which every day need to be confirmed, refounded in our consciousness and relived."

But to respect rights, the cardinal said, they must be linked to natural law, so as to avoid "that degradation that in so many of our societies is interested in questioning the ethics of life and of procreation, of marriage and family life, as well as of education and the formation of the young generations, introducing only an individualistic vision on which to arbitrarily construct new rights that are not more precise in content and juridical logic."

Rights are violated and become inefficacious when they are not linked to values, he contended. They cannot be "containers that, according to the historical, cultural and political moments, are full of different meanings and elements. [...] The natural law, instead, allows all to find a common root, also in face of positions that, although having a different ethical foundation, are not prepared to yield in face of the abandonment of that truth that is common to the human species.

"Only a weak vision of human rights can hold that the human being is the result of his rights, not recognizing that the rights remain an instrument created by man to give full realization to his innate dignity."

One for all

Cardinal Bertone concluded his reflection by affirming that the set of human rights are indivisible. "Each one of them reflects all the others and refers to them as complementary and irreplaceable elements of itself," he said. "All the rights of mankind are upheld together, [...] but even in their violation, unfortunately, they are upheld together," the secretary of state affirmed. "The principle of indivisibility is true whether in good or in evil." There cannot be divisions among human rights, he added, or a selective selection of one or the other based on ideologies or political connotations.

Cardinal Bertone ended his address affirming that our "common hope" — for believers and for all those who "put their faith in human dignity" — is for justice. He said that "the full tutelage of rights cannot but coincide with a model of life and of social order in which the expectation is realized of that new heaven and new earth in which justice finds a stable dwelling."