

## Universal Declaration of Human Rights

On Monday evening I attended a lecture by Professor Francesca Klug, a distinguished human rights academic, author and broadcaster. The event was one of a number planned to mark both the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the first anniversary of York becoming the UK's first Human Rights City.

Her talk examined whether the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 was now redundant or still relevant. On one level it could be considered a failure. The impetus was the horror of the Holocaust and a determination that nothing like that would ever happen again. In fact the world is arguably not a better place. Violations of human rights are as great now as ever before, at all levels. Yet Professor Klug passionately argued that far from being made redundant the aspirations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights even more relevant and necessary in our world today.

The drafting committee that worked between 1947 and 1948 was drawn from a wide cross-section of members from different countries, cultures and faiths, and was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. Its vision too was broad, encompassing what Mrs Roosevelt called the "small places" as well as the larger issues. Their vision covered all aspects of human life and interaction.

The Declaration contains 30 articles but all are in many ways summed up in the first:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

Though by no means a religious document behind it can be seen the Biblical injunctions to love one another and not to oppress the stranger. That first article also has a clear echo of the whole of humankind being made in the image and likeness of God which we heard in our Bible reading just now (Genesis 1.26-27).

Which is why human rights should be a prime concern for Christians. For the way in which we regard and treat others lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Not that the Church has always set a good example, but that does not detract from the Gospel requirement to love others and all that that entails in practice.

Professor Klug articulated concerns which I imagine we all share about the increasing political rhetoric that seeks to divide rather than to reconcile people. It is useful for politicians to have scapegoats whom they can blame. She also highlighted the problems of democracy when populism can echo and give encouragement to those divisive voices. To challenge such voices may not be easy but cannot be avoided. May we as individual Christians and as a Church, with God's help, have the courage to proclaim the true voice of love and respect.

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