

'More women needed in Vatican': Cherie Blair

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The Catholic Church would benefit from having more women in senior-level positions at the Vatican, Cherie Blair said during a conference on the church's role in defending women's rights.

"Just as diversity between and within the sexes enriches human life and strengthens our civil society, so, too, I believe would it strengthen the church if we could see more women in leadership roles within it," she said.

Blair -- a lawyer who specializes in human rights and the wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair -- spoke Dec. 12 at a conference organized by Rome's Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, also known as the Angelicum.

Titled "Women and Human Rights," the one-day conference was held to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Blair's participation had been criticized by some Web sites which said the Catholic Blair was a pro-abortion public figure who did not live out church teachings.

The Angelicum refused to cancel Blair's engagement.

After her talk, Dominican Father Bruce Williams, a professor of moral theology at the Angelicum, publicly offered an apology to Blair and said that after hearing her speech it was "crystal clear" the accusations against her were "rash and outright calumnious."

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