

Pope Calls for Promotion of Universal Human Rights

Affirms Basis in Both Faith and Reason

VATICAN CITY, MAY 4, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is urging members of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences to defend and promote those "non-negotiable human rights" that are based in God's law.

The Pope said this today in an audience with academy members, who are gathered in the Vatican through Tuesday for their plenary session, which is focused on the theme of Catholic social doctrine and human rights.

The Pontiff underlined the Church's stance that "fundamental rights, above and beyond the different ways in which they are formulated and the different degrees of importance they may have in various cultural contexts, are to be upheld and accorded universal recognition because they are inherent in the very nature of man, who is created in the image and likeness of God."

He added, "The modern period helped shape the idea that the message of Christ -- because it proclaims that God loves every man and woman and that every human being is called to love God freely -- demonstrates that everyone, independently of his or her social and cultural condition, by nature deserves freedom."

The Holy Father affirmed the "right to life and the right to freedom of conscience and religion as being at the center of those rights that spring from human nature itself."

He noted that these human rights are not strictly "truths of faith," though they "receive further confirmation from faith."

He continued: "Yet it stands to reason that, living and acting in the physical world as spiritual beings, men and women ascertain the pervading presence of a logos which enables them to distinguish not only between true and false, but also good and evil, better and worse, and justice and injustice.

"This ability to discern -- this radical agency -- renders every person capable of grasping the 'natural law,' which is nothing other than a participation in the eternal law."

Benedict XVI explained, "Human rights, therefore, are ultimately rooted in a participation of God, who has created each human person with intelligence and freedom."

"If this solid ethical and political basis is ignored," he added, "human rights remain fragile since they are deprived of their sound foundation."

Need for God

The Pope stated that the Church's action in promoting human rights is "supported by rational reflection, in such a way that these rights can be presented to all people of good will."

Nevertheless, he continued, "human reason must undergo constant purification by faith, insofar as it is always in danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by disordered passions and sin."

As well, he said, "insofar as human rights need to be re-appropriated by every generation and by each individual, and insofar as human freedom -- which

proceeds by a succession of free choices -- is always fragile, the human person needs the unconditional hope and love that can only be found in God and that lead to participation in the justice and generosity of God towards others."

The Pontiff noted recent social problems stemming from the "flagrant contrast between the equal attribution of rights and the unequal access to the means of attaining those rights."

He continued, "For Christians who regularly ask God to 'give us this day our daily bread,' it is a shameful tragedy that one-fifth of humanity still goes hungry."

The Holy Father called on all international leaders to "collaborate in showing a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the natural law and promoting solidarity and subsidiarity with the weakest regions and peoples of the planet as the most effective strategy for eliminating social inequalities between countries and societies and for increasing global security."

Foundation

Mary Ann Glendon, president of the academy, addressed Benedict XVI, affirming, "Our central focus has always been on the dignity of the human person and the common good."

She continued, "We have been mindful of the Church's long engagement with human rights, of her own decisive contributions to the dignitarian vision of rights embodied in so many human rights instruments, including a Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and of the Holy See as a fearless champion of that vision in international settings."

Glendon thanked the Pontiff on behalf of the academy members, for his "teachings on faith, hope and charity that provide an unconditional foundation for human rights."

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On ZENIT's Web page:

Full text of Papal address: <http://zenit.org/article-25782?l=english>

Full text of Glendon's address: <http://zenit.org/article-25786?l=english>

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