

Conference Clarifies Church's View on Human Rights

Cardinal Antonelli Stresses Rights to Life, Family

By Genevieve Pollock

NAPLES, Florida, APRIL 1, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The discussion on human rights has become muddled as various groups claim a "right" to abortion or same-sex marriage. Thus, a recent conference clarified the Catholic understanding of these rights.

Robert Fastiggi, one of the conference organizers, affirmed to ZENIT that "the Catholic Church has had a long and abiding interest in human rights."

"Unfortunately, the term 'rights' today has been usurped by many special interest groups claiming, for example, a right to abortion or a right to marriage for same-sex couples," explained Fastiggi, a theology professor at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit.

He continued, "We, therefore, thought it important to organize a conference that could explore the Catholic contributions to the foundations of human rights grounded in the natural law, the common good and a sound anthropology."

The March 3-4 conference on "The Foundation of Human Rights: Catholic Contributions" took place at Ave Maria University in Naples. It was cosponsored by the university, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, and Ave Maria School of Law.

Some of the presentations examined "the historical development and application of human rights from ancient to modern times, highlighting the Catholic contribution of thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas, Francisco de Vitoria, Francisco Suárez, Blessed Antonio Rosmini and recent popes," Fastiggi reported.

He added that other speakers focused on "international law and issues of human rights in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia," or "topics such as religious freedom, abortion and gender."

Common good

Cardinal Ennio Antonelli, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, sent a DVD message to the conference participants in which he affirmed that "there is no common good without respect for fundamental human rights, beginning with the rights connected to life, the family, the freedom of conscience and religion."

Bishop Frank Dewane of Venice, Florida, noted in the opening Mass that "human rights are grounded in the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God."

Other speakers included: Russell Hittinger, the William K. Warren Chair of Catholic Studies at the University of Tulsa; Legionary of Christ Father Thomas Williams, professor at Rome's Regina Apostolorum university; Wolfgang Waldstein, professor at the University of Salzburg and member of the Pontifical Academy for Life; and Jesuit Father Robert Araujo, professor at Loyola University in Chicago. The other organizers included Jane Adolphe of Ave Maria School of Law and Maria Fedoryka of Ave Maria University.

Fastiggi noted that one important theme, highlighted by Waldstein, was "the intimate connection between human rights and the natural law."

He added that the conference also highlighted "the specific Catholic contribution to the development of international law."

Fastiggi stated that "the conference also underscored the importance of the Catholic view of human rights for religious freedom and the protection of children and the family."

He concluded that "the conference in many ways was a testimony to the deep concern of the Catholic Church for human rights, a concern expressed in numerous papal documents and interventions of the Holy See upholding the dignity of the human person from conception until natural death."

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