



ZE12011102 - 2012-01-11

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-34098?l=english>

Pope Stresses Education in 'State of the World' Address

Emphasizes Family as Fundamental for Individuals, States

VATICAN CITY, JAN. 11, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI's traditional address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Vatican began Monday with a particular welcome to Malaysia, which joined the community this past year.

Traditionally, the meeting between the Holy Father and members of the diplomatic corps takes place at the end of the Christmas season, a time of celebrating the birth of Christ who brought light into the world. Nevertheless, the economic, political, and social crises currently raging throughout the world signal a darkness, such as settles "wherever men and women no longer acknowledge their bond with the Creator and thereby endanger their relation to other creatures and to creation itself," the Pontiff said.

The Holy Father lamented the global economic and financial crisis and the devastating impact it has had on businesses, families, and young people. He noted the uncertainty from which the young people of North Africa and the Middle East suffer, in particular, has driven a movement of vast political and social change. The Holy Father encouraged the international community to maintain a dialogue that could help ensure that the movements taking place in these countries lead to stable societies free of violence and discrimination.

Within this context, the Holy Father also spoke of his profound concern for the violence in Syria, the Holy Land, and Iraq, conflicts that threaten the stability of the whole Middle East. "For its part," the Pope told the diplomats, "the international community must become more creative in developing initiatives which promote this peace process and are respectful of the rights of both parties."

Bringing change

Benedict XVI also spoke about the role of the youth in bringing about change, and why it is essential to ensure that they always have the right to education. "Young people thus impel us to take seriously their demand for truth, justice, and peace," he said. "Education," therefore, "is a crucial

theme for every generation, for it determines the healthy development of each person and the future of all society."

The most important setting for this education, he asserted, is the family, founded on the marriage between a man and a woman. He called those present to defend the institution of marriage, because it is "not simply a social convention, but rather the fundamental cell of every society. Consequently, policies which undermine the family threaten human dignity and the future of humanity itself; hence there is a need for policies which promote the family and aid social cohesion and dialogue."

The Holy Father also spoke out against abortion. "I am convinced," he said, "that legislative measures which not only permit but at times even promote abortion for reasons of convenience or for questionable medical motives compromise the education of young people and, as a result, the future of humanity."

Pope Benedict emphasized the need for educational institutions in cooperation with the family. "In addition to promoting the cognitive development of the individual," these institutions should also "show concern for a balanced personal growth, including openness to the Transcendent."

These educational programs must also have a respect for religious freedom, the Pontiff affirmed. He said that all too often, this right does not receive adequate protection: Many Christians have suffered as a result of religious persecution, as is seen especially by violent attacks against their homes and places of worship. In some countries, he lamented, Christians are relegated as "second-class spectators of national life. In other parts of the world, we see policies aimed at marginalizing the role of religion in the life of society, as if it were a cause of intolerance rather than a valued contribution to education in respect for human dignity, justice, and peace."

The Holy Father made special mention of Africa, which he recently visited, pointing out the importance of collaboration between governments and Christian communities in order to move the countries along the "path of justice, peace and reconciliation, where respect is shown for members of all ethnic groups and all religions."

Finally, Pope Benedict stressed that education must foster a respect for the environment. Here he referred to natural disasters which occurred in 2011, such as those which occurred in Southeast Asia. "Environmental protection and the connection between fighting poverty and fighting climate change are important areas for the promotion of integral human development."

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