

Benedict XVI: Religion No Threat to Nation's Unity

Addresses Vietnamese Bishops on Church-State Relations

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 28, 2009 (Zenit.org).- Benedict XVI affirmed to the bishops of Vietnam that religion is not a threat to national unity, and that Church-state relations can be carried out in a spirit of cooperation.

The Pope made these points Saturday upon receiving in audience members of Vietnam's episcopal conference, who were in Rome for their five-yearly visit.

"A healthy cooperation between the Church and the political community is possible," the Holy Father said. He also noted that "religions do not represent a threat to the unity of the nation."

The Church "invites all her members," he continued, "to commit themselves loyally to the building of a just, solidary and equitable society."

The Pontiff insisted that the Church "absolutely does not wish to replace government authorities," but wants merely "to be able to play a just part, in a spirit of dialogue and respectful cooperation, in the life of the nation, at the service of the whole people."

In this, Benedict XVI explained, the Christian laity must play a special role and "demonstrate with their life based on charity, honesty and love for the common good, that a good Catholic is also a good citizen."

He said it is desirable that "every Catholic family, teaching their children to live according to a right conscience, in loyalty and truth, become a hearth of values and human virtues, a school of faith and love toward God."

"The Church," the Pope added, "can never be exempt from the exercise of charity."

Citing his encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est," the Holy Father observed that "there will never be a situation in which charity of every Christian is not needed, because man, beyond justice, will always need love" (No. 29).

Benedict XVI also emphasized that in order to respond to the numerous challenges of contemporary society, "a closer cooperation is necessary between the different dioceses, between the dioceses and the religious congregations, and also between the religious congregations themselves."

The Pontiff then made explicit reference to the young people who live in the country's rural areas and who are fascinated by the cities, where they go for higher education and to find work. He said these young people must be the object of a specific form of cooperation between the dioceses to assure they receive adequate pastoral care.

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