

ZE10091713 - 2010-09-17

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-30387?l=english>

BENEDICT XVI STRESSES ETHICS IN POLITICS

Says Lack of Moral Principles Threatens Democracy

LONDON, SEPT. 17, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is underlining the need to base political decisions in ethical foundations and objective moral principles, without which democracy is threatened.

Today in London, the Pope addressed representatives of civil society, the academic, cultural and entrepreneurial world, the diplomatic corps and religious leaders at Westminster Hall. The meeting took place on the second day of the Pontiff's four-day state visit to the United Kingdom.

The Holy Father affirmed, "There is widespread agreement that the lack of a solid ethical foundation for economic activity has contributed to the grave difficulties now being experienced by millions of people throughout the world."

"So too in the political field," he added, "the ethical dimension of policy has far-reaching consequences that no government can afford to ignore."

Benedict XVI stated that the central question at issue, then, is this: where is the ethical foundation for political choices to be found?"

The Pope highlighted the example of St. Thomas More, "the great English scholar and statesman, who is admired by believers and non-believers alike for the integrity with which he followed his conscience, even at the cost of displeasing the sovereign whose 'good servant' he was, because he chose to serve God first."

The Pontiff continued, "The dilemma which faced More in those difficult times, the perennial question of the relationship between what is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God, allows me the opportunity to reflect with you briefly on the proper place of religious belief within the political process."

"Britain has emerged as a pluralist democracy which places great value on freedom of speech, freedom of

political affiliation and respect for the rule of law, with a strong sense of the individual's rights and duties, and of the equality of all citizens before the law," he observed.

Common good

"Catholic social teaching has much in common with this approach," the Holy Father noted, "in its overriding concern to safeguard the unique dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God, and in its emphasis on the duty of civil authority to foster the common good."

He continued: "Each generation, as it seeks to advance the common good, must ask anew: what are the requirements that governments may reasonably impose upon citizens, and how far do they extend?"

"By appeal to what authority can moral dilemmas be resolved?"

"These questions take us directly to the ethical foundations of civil discourse," Benedict XVI stated.

"If the moral principles underpinning the democratic process are themselves determined by nothing more solid than social consensus, then the fragility of the process becomes all too evident," he said. "Herein lies the real challenge for democracy."

"The Catholic tradition maintains that the objective norms governing right action are accessible to reason, prescinding from the content of revelation," the Pope affirmed.

"According to this understanding," he continued, "the role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers -- still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion -- but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles."

The Pontiff said, "This is why I would suggest that the world of reason and the world of faith -- the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief -- need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization."

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