

Pontiff Stresses Urgent Need for Religious Freedom

Decries Extremes of Secularism, Fundamentalism

VATICAN CITY, JAN. 1, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is stressing the need for religious freedom throughout the world as the way of building peace.

The Pope stated this today before praying the midday Angelus with the pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square. He recalled in particular today's celebration of the World Day of Peace as well as the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God.

"I invite all of you to join in heartfelt prayer to Christ the Prince of Peace for an end to violence and conflict wherever they are found," the Pontiff said.

He continued: "Yes, Jesus is our peace.

"He brought to the world the seed of love and peace, stronger than the seed of hatred and violence; stronger because the name of Jesus is superior to any other name, containing all the dominion of God."

This World Day of Peace, the Holy Father noted, is an "opportunity to reflect together on the great challenges facing humankind in our time."

"One of these, dramatically urgent today, is that of religious freedom," he added.

Benedict XVI acknowledged, "Today we see two opposite trends, both negative extremes: on one side secularism, which often in hidden ways marginalizes religion to confine it to the private sphere; on the other side fundamentalism, which in turn would like to impose itself on all by force."

"Religious freedom is the privileged way to build peace," he said.

The Pope affirmed that "peace is the work of consciences that open themselves to truth and love."

He concluded, "May God help us progress in this way in the new year that he has given us to live."

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