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PONTIFF VOICES CONCERN OVER MARGINALIZED RELIGION

Notes Paradox of Anti-Discrimination, Anti-Christian Agenda

LONDON, SEPT. 17, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is voicing concern over the marginalization of Christianity in "tolerant," societies, and is urging civil leaders to see religion as a "vital contributor" on a national level.

In an address to representatives of civil society, the academic, cultural and entrepreneurial worlds, the diplomatic corps and religious leaders today at Westminster Hall, the Pope said that religion "is not a problem for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national conversation." Today is the second day of the Pontiff's four-day state visit to the United Kingdom.

"In this light," he said, "I cannot but voice my concern at the increasing marginalization of religion, particularly of Christianity, that is taking place in some quarters, even in nations which place a great emphasis on tolerance."

"There are those who would advocate that the voice of religion be silenced, or at least relegated to the purely private sphere," the Holy Father observed.

He continued: "There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none.

"And there are those who argue -- paradoxically with the intention of eliminating discrimination -- that Christians in public roles should be required at times to act against their conscience."

Benedict XVI asserted, "These are worrying signs of a failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square."

He continued, "I would invite all of you, therefore, within your respective spheres of influence, to seek ways

of promoting and encouraging dialogue between faith and reason at every level of national life."

"Your readiness to do so is already implied in the unprecedented invitation extended to me today," the Pope observed. "And it finds expression in the fields of concern in which your government has been engaged with the Holy See."

Shedding light

The role of religion in political debate is "to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles," he said.

"This 'corrective' role of religion vis-à-vis reason is not always welcomed," the Pontiff acknowledged, "though, partly because distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, can be seen to create serious social problems themselves."

"And in their turn" he added, "these distortions of religion arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion. It is a two-way process."

The Holy Father said: "Without the corrective supplied by religion, though, reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person.

"Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century."

"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," he added.

Benedict XVI emphasized recent cooperative endeavors between the United Kingdom and the Holy See and the progress made "in promoting throughout the world the many core values that we share."

He stated, "I hope and pray that this relationship will continue to bear fruit, and that it will be mirrored in a growing acceptance of the need for dialogue and respect at every level of society between the world of

reason and the world of faith."

"For such cooperation to be possible, religious bodies -- including institutions linked to the Catholic Church -- need to be free to act in accordance with their own principles and specific convictions based upon the faith and the official teaching of the Church," the Pope stated.

"In this way," he affirmed, "such basic rights as religious freedom, freedom of conscience and freedom of association are guaranteed."

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