



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHL
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 0538

Giovedì 18.10.2007

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• INTERVENTO DI MONS. ANTHONY FRONTIERO DEL 25 SETTEMBRE 2007

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Nei giorni 24 settembre - 5 ottobre 2007 si è svolta a Varsavia la riunione annuale di attuazione degli impegni assunti, nell'ambito dei diritti umani, dai 56 Stati partecipanti all'Organizzazione per la Sicurezza e la Cooperazione in Europa (O.S.C.E.). La Santa Sede è stata rappresentata da Mons. Anthony Frontiero, Ufficiale del Pontificio Consiglio della Giustizia e della Pace. Riportiamo qui di seguito i suoi interventi del 25 settembre, sul tema della tolleranza e della non discriminazione, e del 26 settembre, sulla libertà religiosa:

• INTERVENTO DI MONS. ANTHONY FRONTIERO DEL 25 SETTEMBRE 2007

Mr. Chairman,

The Delegation of the Holy See joins the previous delegations in congratulating you for chairing this session, and expresses its gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this important discussion. In particular, the Holy See welcomes the addition of the new webpage on Discrimination Against Christians that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE has recently posed on TANDIS (Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System). Be assured that the Holy See will do its part in assisting the ODIHR in following and updating this new and important resource in the fight against the discrimination of Christians. In this regard, the Holy See would like to recommend that the OSCE continue to advance its pro-active concern for this important matter in clear and concrete ways, including by monitoring and reporting data on incidents of discrimination and intolerance against Christians, and by sponsoring upcoming fora to address this issue among the participating States of the OSCE.

The consideration of tolerance and non-discrimination at the outset of this Meeting is a positive indication of the political will in the OSCE region to face squarely the problems between the interaction of cultures and peoples which constitute serious political and security issues, and ultimately enables us to relate to one another peacefully and contribute to the advancement of the human race.

The Delegation of the Holy See continues to be concerned with the all-too-often and flagrant violations against the right to freedom of religion throughout the OSCE region. Despite the decisions adopted by OSCE participating States to ensure and facilitate the freedom of the individual to profess and practice a religion or belief, alone or in community with others, through transparent and non-discriminatory laws, regulations, practices and policies, the realization of this commitment remains yet to be seen.

Recent examples of such violations include: the unacceptable intolerance demonstrated in an OSCE country, where some months ago three Christians were brutally murdered; the condemnation, and in many cases detention and arrest, of "unauthorized" religious minorities for "illegal religious activities" because believers pray or go to church; and state introduced restrictions on religious freedom, including restrictions on missionary activity. In some cases, despite the indications of religious-motivated violence, local police forces fail to intervene to stop attacks on religious minorities.

These episodes of religious violence highlight the underlying tension in the OSCE region around religious freedom. They also are evidence of a certain discrimination and intolerance against Christianity, and in some cases a mockery of Christianity. Deliberately mocking and undermining central tenets of the Christian faith as a means to promoting the rights of other groups is a flagrant contradiction to the religious freedom and mutual respect that all people should enjoy, not to mention to the work of building a more just and peaceful community. Such practices attempt to dismantle the progress made thus far in the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

In his Message for the celebration of the 2007 World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict XVI recalled the urgent need, even within the framework of current international difficulties and tensions, for a commitment to a human ecology¹ that favours the promotion of mutual respect and understanding among peoples, which is a key to ending intolerance and discrimination, and, ultimately to peaceful coexistence. Such a commitment must be guided by a vision of the person untainted by ideological and cultural prejudices or by political and economic interests, which can often instill hatred and violence.

Notwithstanding the reality of differences that exist within the various cultures of man, one element that cannot be admitted is the cultivation of seeds of hostility and violence against fellow human beings. "Equally unacceptable are conceptions of God that would encourage intolerance and recourse to violence against others."² Peaceful coexistence among people is not only threatened by the conflicts between ideologies, but also by indifference as to what constitutes man's true nature.³ Many in contemporary society actually deny the existence of a specific human nature, which only adds to confusion and, in many cases, hinders authentic dialogue. Clarity in this regard is needed so that a weak vision of the person will not open the door to authoritarian impositions and leave people defenceless and easy targets for oppression and violence.

A true human community where people can live together in peace and security presupposes respect for human

rights. Yet, if these rights are grounded on a false conception of the person, how can they promote and safeguard a society built on mutual respect and understanding? Relativistic notions of what it means to be a person offer insufficient justification and defense of human rights; because if rights are absolute, how can they be founded on a notion that is merely relative? Human rights, therefore, must be grounded in the objective requirements of human nature. Otherwise, in some cases the human person is marked by a permanent dignity, and rights that are always and everywhere valid; in other cases a person may not have a permanent dignity, and negotiable rights.⁴ This state of affairs is what we witness everyday in acts of intolerance and discrimination. Without a clear and strong awareness of who we are as persons, it will always be easier to claim that some people are worthy of respect and others are not; some people have the right to life, liberty, and religious belief, and others do not. Objective truth about the dignity of the human person created by God, and the rights and subsequent duties and responsibilities that flow from that dignity, must be the basis for any authentic discussion of every issue that is facing the human family.

Yet, the task at hand is not simply to condemn actual injustices in the light of an adequately understood concept of the human person and human dignity, but to work together for a meaningful new future.⁵ Somehow, hopefully in part through our discussions in these days, we must break through the collective individualism which so often fuels discrimination and intolerance, and find our way to a new imagination based on solidarity. Such a new imagination will lead to a fundamental re-interpretation of social frameworks enabling them to truly foster mutual respect and understanding, and authentically defend human rights as basic conditions for life in community with others.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Cf Benedict XVI, 2007, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, n.10.

2 Ibid.

3 Cf. Ibid., n.11.

4 Cf. Ibid., n.12.

5 Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 42.

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• INTERVENTO DI MONS. ANTHONY FRONTIERO DEL 26 SETTEMBRE 2007

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See reiterates its firm conviction that the dignity of the person and the very nature of the quest for God require that all people should be free from every constraint in the area of religion. Society and the State must not force a person to act against his conscience or prevent him from acting in conformity with it.¹ This said, the Holy See stresses that the right to religious freedom ought to be part of the juridical order and recognized as a civil right. The Holy See also wishes to stress that such norms are required by the need for the effective safeguarding of the rights of all citizens and for the peaceful settlement of conflicts of rights, also by the need for an adequate care of genuine public peace, which comes about when people live together in good order and in true justice.²

Although a religious community may, because of historical and cultural ties to a nation, be given special recognition on the part of the State, such recognition should never create discrimination within civil or social order for other religious groups. Unfortunately, however, such a vision of relations between States and religious organizations seems not always to be shared by all and the right to religious freedom is, as we have seen, being violated, "even to the point that imparting catechesis, having it imparted, and receiving it become punishable

offences."³

In his recent address to the Executive Committee of the Centrist Democratic International (CDI), Pope Benedict XVI recalled that the right to religious liberty is fundamental, irrepressible, inalienable, and inviolable. Moreover, the exercise of this freedom includes the right to change religion, which should be guaranteed not only legally, but also in daily practice. "In fact, religious liberty corresponds to the human person's innate openness to God, who is the fullness of truth and the supreme good. An appreciation for religious freedom is a fundamental expression of respect for human reason and its capacity to know the truth. Openness to transcendence is an indispensable guarantee of human dignity since within every human heart there are needs and desires which find their fulfilment in God alone. For this reason, God can never be excluded from the horizon of man and world history! That is why all authentically religious traditions must be allowed to manifest their own identity publicly, free from any pressure to hide or disguise it."⁴

As we witness the varied religious reactions to the social problems of our day, there is evidence that the significant world religions, including Christianity, are promoting peace and justice as essential dimensions of their religious commitment. Men and women involved in these movements recognize an intrinsic connection between their religious faith and the active concern for the well-being of society. There is evidence of a universal solidarity on the horizon.

Christian discipleship and the quest for personal holiness include responsibility for the world. Faith traditions and religious experience based on reason and truth offer the promise and hope that the spiritual life is to be realized in a sustained, practical involvement for the well-being of God's world.

In 1971, in his Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens*, Pope Paul VI argued that utopia can be an unrealistic dream that prevents people from effective action. But utopia, rightly understood, is a positive vision that criticizes the existing order, generates a forward-looking imagination, recognizes the as yet unrealized possibilities of the present, and supplies energy for the creation of a new future.⁵ Religion will continue to serve as a meaningful, substantial, and positive part in the quest for such a new future, especially if religions are delivered from their possible shortcomings and failures, and if they respect authentic aspirations. Religion, in the service of peace, human rights, and social justice will be effective to the extent that it embraces the Holy Spirit's inspiration to be faithful to its deepest values.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 421.

2 Cf. *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, n. 423.

4 Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Executive Committee of the Centrist Democratic International*, 21 September 2007.

5 See Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 37

