

HOLY SEE

Statement by Monsignor Anthony R. Frontiero
At the 2007 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
26 September 2007, Warsaw

During Working Session 4: Fundamental Freedoms
Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief

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 is not 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

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.

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, a solidarity that is integrating the supernatural order of faith, hope, and love with the natural order of people's involvement in the world, including in the issues of social conflict and social justice.

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.

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