

ALL BELIEVERS HAVE COMMON TASK, PONTIFF SUGGESTS

Notes Importance of Witnessing to Humanity's Spiritual Dimension

LONDON, SEPT. 17, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Believers of all faiths have a mission to give common witness to the spiritual dimension of humanity and the importance of religious values, Benedict XVI affirmed today in a meeting with representatives of various British religious communities.

On the second day of his four-day trip to the United Kingdom, the Pope met today with Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities. The chief rabbi of England, Lord Jonathan Sacks, and a Muslim representative, Khaled Azzam, both gave him official greetings.

The Holy Father began his address expressing the Catholic Church's appreciation for the witness given by "spiritual men and women" at a time when "religious convictions are not always understood or appreciated."

He said that believers' presence in social and economic life points to the fact that a human being is a fundamentally spiritual being.

"On the spiritual level, all of us, in our different ways, are personally engaged in a journey that grants an answer to the most important question of all -- the question concerning the ultimate meaning of our human existence," the Pontiff stated. "The quest for the sacred is the search for the one thing necessary, which alone satisfies the longings of the human heart."

He said the witness of religious believers reflects the importance of this spiritual quest for human life itself. Natural sciences, meanwhile, though able to "bring great benefit to the human family," "do not and cannot answer the fundamental question, because they operate on another level altogether. They cannot satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart, they cannot fully explain to us our origin and our destiny, why and for what purpose we exist, nor indeed can they provide us with an exhaustive answer to the question, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'"

Nevertheless, Benedict XVI clarified, the quest for the sacred does not "devalue other fields of human enquiry."

"On the contrary," he said, "it places them in a context which magnifies their importance, as ways of responsibly exercising our stewardship over creation. [...] [God] entrusted us with the

task of exploring and harnessing the mysteries of nature in order to serve a higher good. What is that higher good? In the Christian faith, it is expressed as love for God and love for our neighbor. And so we engage with the world wholeheartedly and enthusiastically, but always with a view to serving that higher good, lest we disfigure the beauty of creation by exploiting it for selfish purposes."

So genuine religious belief, the Holy Father said, points to the duty to live peaceably with neighbour and the "importance of living a life of integrity. Properly understood, it brings enlightenment, it purifies our hearts and it inspires noble and generous action, to the benefit of the entire human family. It motivates us to cultivate the practice of virtue and to reach out towards one another in love, with the greatest respect for religious traditions different from our own."

Building bridges

The Catholic Church, the Pontiff said, has emphasized interreligious dialogue since the Second Vatican Council. But for this enterprise to be fruitful, he said, it needs "reciprocity on the part of all partners in dialogue and the followers of other religions."

In this context, he mentioned places in the world in need of mutual respect and freedom of religion and conscience, "even after conversion from one religion to another."

The Bishop of Rome called for dialogue on various levels: formal discussions as well as "simply living alongside one another," and also dialogue of action, which could include "exploring together how to defend human life at every stage and how to ensure the non-exclusion of the religious dimension of individuals and communities in the life of society."

Benedict XVI concluded by assuring the religious groups that Catholics "will continue to work to build bridges of friendship to other religions, to heal past wrongs and to foster trust between individuals and communities."