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Pastor's Column

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On Genuine Religion

These words are taken from an address given by Pope Benedict XVI to the Representatives of Cameroon's Muslim Community on March 19, 2009, during his visit to Africa:

...I believe a particularly urgent task of religion today is to unveil the vast potential of human reason, which is itself God's gift and which is elevated by revelation and faith.

Belief in the one God, far from stunting our capacity to understand ourselves and the world, broadens it. Far from setting us against the world, it commits us to it.

We are called to help others see the subtle traces and mysterious presence of God in the world which he has marvelously created and continually sustains with his ineffable and all-embracing love.

Although his infinite glory can never be directly grasped by our finite minds in this life, we nonetheless catch glimpses of it in the beauty that surrounds us.

When men and women allow the magnificent order of the world and the splendour of human dignity to illumine their minds, they discover that what is "reasonable" extends far beyond what mathematics can calculate, logic can deduce, and scientific experimentation can demonstrate; it includes the goodness and innate attractiveness of upright and ethical living made known to us in the very language of creation.

This insight prompts us to seek all that is right and just, to step outside the restricted sphere of our own self-interest and act for the good of others.

Genuine religion thus widens the horizon of human understanding and stands at the base of any authentically human culture. It rejects all forms of violence and totalitarianism: not only on principles of faith, but also of right reason.

Indeed, religion and reason mutually reinforce one another since religion is purified and structured by reason, and reason's full potential is unleashed by revelation and faith.

I therefore encourage you, my dear Muslim friends, to imbue society with the values that emerge from this perspective and elevate human culture, as we work together to build a civilization of love.

May the enthusiastic cooperation of Muslims, Catholics, and other Christians in Cameroon be a beacon to other African nations of the enormous potential of an interreligious commitment to peace, justice, and the common good!

In this Lenten Season, let us pray for, and be mindful of, the enormous potential of interreligious commitment, not only for Africa, but for us here in the United States, and indeed, around the world.

It is the only way to justice and peace.