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## Religion to Promote the Authentic Values of a Nation

Because of the very nature of my mission of representing the Holy Father, the Pope, to be his Pronuncio to India, I deem it a rare privilege to be open to friendship with each one of you; and friendship obviously has a religious connotation. Let me be a little informal in saying that I really feel very happy in the presence of all of you. My message is a religious one, and to begin with, it is a message of friendship which I may extend to all of you who are in the fellowship of religious pursuits.

The very fact that you all have accepted the invitation, and that all of you are present at a meeting of this kind obviously means that all of us here are religious persons, persons really, seriously and happily committed to religion, to religious families, and bring to religions an attitude representing all aspects of human realities and human experience.

Obviously religion deserves to be described as friendship, also as it is not simply a moral attitude but has, besides, the virtue of love. So I myself give a religious connotation to my experience of friendship at this moment. And the religious dimension far from diminishing the value of friendship actually enhances and perfects it. Sometimes you get to know us physically; people at a distance, perhaps, think of us in exaggerated terms. And the origin of this attitude may be seen in any religion. Sometimes there is need to have this consciousness of one's own religion to realize the full implications of it to human beings. Friendship is a great human value and it is good to understand it deeply so that we may discover all its implications, the "religious" being one among them.

The theme of the seminar is very interesting. My interest in a topic of this kind arises from the fact that religion is supposed to penetrate - not as a matter of inquisitiveness but because of the very

nature and responsibility of religion - every area of human experience. So religion and national integration is a very interesting and challenging theme.

The concept of nationalism if understood properly is a very noble one. The Pope himself had occasion to stress this idea with reference to his own country. He does not make a secret of his being a Polish, and everybody knows how he is very close to Poland and how on more than one occasion he has been making references to a Polish nationalist in the positive sense including some high and positive values. As a matter of fact in Poland the very idea of nationalism is very deeply linked also with a religious dimension.

So there is a positive concept of nationalism and we are dealing with this one, a concept which is open to other nations, which is open to international co-operation, international brotherhood and mutual understanding of all to the exclusion of any narrow concept of nationalism in which there can be no genuine interest of any nation. And religion has something to say and contribute on this aspect, because if nationalism is a value, obviously religion also enters the scene, and one of the concerns of religion is national life, the life of a nation. The same applies to justice and peace which are positive values. As regards the concepts of justice, peace, human development, fraternity, equality among men, women and nations, religion is very much there. Religion is at their root and is the source of these values; religion stands for the spiritual values and the moral values which are the very soul of peace, justice and human development, equality, fraternity and national life; and so the concept of a nation is linked with religions as you can imagine. This is what I felt even when I arrived here.

The problem of religious freedom is practically the same everywhere. The secular state is supposed to allow and respect religious freedom. I mentioned secular state because I feel there should be no interference and conflict between religion and nationalism. Religion is one thing while nationalism is another; but nationalism in the right sense can prosper in a secular state. I do not mean that there is no relationship between the two: there must be good relations between religion and nationalism and this can best happen in a secular state. So there are a few comments on my part on the importance of the theme.

Ofcourse, everybody knows that India is a huge country where one finds various cultures, various states, but even so there is real unity. One is happily surprised to see how such a large federation of states and how such a large geographical area with all its variety is sticking together. It is really very creditable. So the promotion of this national unity, the promotion of national integration is in the best interests of India and also of the great role which India is performing on the international scene; and India has a right to have a say because of its importance. So this unity and integration, national spirit, and practice of religion in thought and spirit is important.

I am sure that by your participation in this conference and especially those who are presenting papers in this you will contribute to the success of this meeting. It is important to note that ideas move propel, and yet we should not have an élitist attitude. We are good respectable people, yet not very different from other people, and the educated ones among us have a special responsibility because it is from such persons that ideas emanate and spread. And you must ensure that your thinking should be right to make an impact on public opinion. This is not an easy task as not everybody is able to understand religion. It is important, therefore, to dedicate ourselves to research in order to get the right ideas and interpretations spread. It is in this way that religion can be successful and I hope, pray and wish that you will find ways to put out the positive results of your sharing and researches for the benefit of everybody, for the promotion of the all-important values which I have mentioned already.