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January 25, 2007

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[Holy Father thrilled upon receiving New Testament manuscript](#)

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[New era of relations between the Holy See and Vietnam begins](#)

VATICAN CITY, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - This morning Pope Benedict XVI received Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dang of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The meeting is expected to signal a new age in relations between the Holy See and the developing nation which boasts one of the largest Catholic populations in Asia.

After his meeting with the Holy Father, the first between a Pope and Prime Minister of Vietnam, Dang also met with Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B., and Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for Relations with States.

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On Monday the Pontiff met with Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, the Vatican librarian and archivist, as well as the papyrus's donors, the Frank Hannah family.

Up to now the papyrus had been preserved in Cologne, near Geneva (Switzerland), at the headquarters of the Bodmer Foundation, which owned the document. Now it will be kept at the Vatican Apostolic Library.

The Holy Father expressed his gratitude and profound satisfaction for the privilege of receiving this important New Testament manuscript, which is of great historic, spiritual and critical value.

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[New era of relations between the Holy See and Vietnam begins](#)

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After his meeting with the Holy Father, the first between a Pope and Prime Minister of Vietnam, Dang also met with Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B., and Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for Relations with States.

In a press release today, the Holy See expressed its satisfaction for the visit, "which marks a new and important step towards the normalization of bilateral relations. Those relations have, over the last few years, made concrete progress, opening new doors of religious freedom for the Catholic Church in Vietnam."

According to the Vatican Press Office, the two leaders also spoke of remaining problems, expressing their hope "that the difficulties will be faced and resolved through existing channels of dialogue and will lead to a fruitful cooperation between Church and State."

It is the hope of the Church, the Vatican release stated, "that Catholics in Vietnam will be able to more effectively make a positive contribution to the common good of the country, to promoting moral values, in particular among the young, to spreading a culture of solidarity, and to charitable assistance in favor of the weaker sectors of the population."

The Holy Father and prime minister also discussed their opinions on, "the current international situation, with a view to a joint commitment in favor of peace and of negotiated solutions to the serious problems of the present time," the press release concluded.

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MORE HEADLINES

[African bishops take a look back and set plan for the future at evangelization congress](#)

DAR ES SALAAM, January 24 ([CNA](#)) - In preparation for a second Synod of Africa, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) held a Pan-African Congress at Dar-Es-Salaam in Tanzania from the 15th to the 18th of January. The gathered bishops evaluated the progress of evangelisation in Africa and planned for future evangelization projects.

The congress included a wide-ranging discussion on the topic of: "Evangelisation in Africa: Ecclesia in Africa in Retrospect and the Way Forward." According to Aid to the Church in Need, who was represented at the congress, the main purpose of the event was to assess how far evangelisation has progressed and to look ahead at the tasks of evangelisation that are still urgently to be addressed in the Church.

During the discussions the following matters were presented: Proclamation of the Good News, inculturation, and dialogue. Amidst the many troubles seen in Africa, of course, those who took part in the Congress could not avoid talking about reconciliation, justice, and peace.

Christine du Coudray and Father Andrzej Halemba, who took part in the conference for ACN, stressed the importance of the family for the future of Africa

For his part, Father Patrick Thawale said, in his Jan. 17th speech about inculturation: "If we are seriously concerned about the well being of the Church and indeed of the whole world we should surely work hard to improve on the stability and strengthening of the family."

According to Fides, the bishops were also addressed by the Prime Minister of Tanzania, who praised the Catholic Church's involvement in helping Africa to resolve her problems. The prime minister called for a partnership between the Church and African States so that together they could embark upon prophetic actions that would help Africa to make use of her immense riches and to help her take her destiny into her own hands. He stressed that both Church and State should work together to eradicate poverty, HIV/AIDS, corruption and bad governance.

In addition, the Congress discussed the way in which Christian minority groups in some countries are not allowed to freely express their faith. Several representatives testified to the necessity of insisting on greater respect for religious liberty in their countries and told of their renewed efforts to witness to life and love in their evangelization.

Congress participants also appealed to, "our brothers and sisters of the Islamic faith to understand that evangelisation is not meant to proselytise but to be a free proposal of God's love manifested in Jesus Christ," Fides reported.

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[Church of England supports Catholic position on homosexual adoption](#)

LONDON, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - The Church of England has weighed in on the public debate on whether the Catholic Church should be exempt from a gay-rights law that would force 12 Catholic adoption agencies to place children with same-sex couples or close their doors.

In a letter to Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and of York, Dr John Sentamu, said "rights of conscience cannot be made subject to legislation."

They warn against the danger of the row escalating to the point where some might question the ability of people with a strong faith to be in government. They also warn that the argument over the Sexual Orientation Regulations has reached damaging proportions and that "much could be lost".

"Many in the voluntary sector are dedicated to public service because of the dictates of their conscience," they wrote. "In legislating to protect and promote the rights of particular groups the Government is faced with the delicate but important challenge of not thereby creating the conditions within which others feel their rights to have been ignored or sacrificed, or in which the dictates of personal conscience are put at risk.

“It is vitally important that the interests of vulnerable children are not relegated to suit any political interest,” they continued. “And that conditions are not inadvertently created which make the claims of conscience an obstacle to, rather than the inspiration for, the invaluable public service rendered by parts of the voluntary sector.”

The letter comes after the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, wrote to every member of the Cabinet stating that the Catholic Church could not accept a law forcing its adoption agencies to accept gay couples. He said the law would force the agencies to close.

According to The London Times, the move has put Blair in a tough spot. If he accedes to the demands, he will face accusations from the gay rights lobby and from some within his own government of being a “Vatican puppet”. If he stands by the gay lobby, he risks alienating hundreds of thousands of Catholic voters, says The Times report.

But Blair has reportedly signaled his support for the exemption for the Catholic Church despite accusations of blackmail by bishops, threatening with closure, and that he favors a compromise.

However, most other Cabinet ministers believe that compromise is impossible, saying that an exemption would undermine the fundamental position of law.

The prime minister said on Thursday that a decision on the exemption would come sometime next week and that the law requiring homosexual adoption should be put to a vote in Parliament within a month.

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[Boston archdiocese proposes redistribution of \\$3M from closed parishes](#)

BOSTON, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - The Archdiocese of Boston wants to distribute more than \$3 million held by closed parishes to 58 churches that took in parishioners after by closings.

The money could be used by financially struggling parishes to pay for scholarships to Catholic schools, building repairs, and other needs, church officials said.

The proposal affects only “restricted funds,” which are charitable donations given for a specified purpose.

The archdiocese is in the process of gauging the opinion of effected parishioners and benefactors on the plan and will need to seek the approval of Massachusetts’ state Supreme Judicial Court to proceed.

Attorney General Martha Coakley, who is responsible for ensuring that charities spend donations appropriately, has agreed to review reaction to the plan and make a recommendation to the court.

Another \$4 million given by parishioners to closed parishes was not restricted. That money was taken by the archdiocese for general church purposes, which included the paying of the debts of closed parishes.

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[Christian schools in India refuse government order to observe Hindu practice](#)

MUMBAI, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - The Archdiocese of Bhopal issued a statement condemning a government order that obliges students in all schools and colleges to observe the Hindu practice of Suryana maskar on Jan. 25.

The archdiocese said none of its students will participate and that it is boycotting what is clearly a “Hindu religious practice,” reported ICNS.

Christian schools received the government order to send their students for practice session in Lal Parade ground for the suryanamashkar function. According to a Church spokesperson, schools had received notices to implement the order or face the possibility of de-recognition if they failed to comply.

Archbishop Pascal Topno said the Hindu practice should not be imposed on other communities and that Catholics stand together with the Muslim community on this issue. Some people in the Hindu community have also voiced their opposition to the order, saying that it is unnecessary.

A delegation met with the governor Jan. 23 to discuss the issue and a petition has been filed in the Jabalpur High Court.

Father Anand Muttungal, spokesperson of the Madhya Pradesh Bishops' Council, told ICNS that a deligation also met with the director of education, but to no avail.

"This move will divide the community on the basis of religion, and even the children will get affected by this," Fr. Muttungal lamented. "We are not against yoga, in fact it is good for health, but the way it is being done is objectionable," he added.

Surya Namaskar or Sun Salutation, comprising of pranayam, the control of breath and several main yogasanas, is the main component of Yoga. According to ICNS the practice is a traditional prayer offered to the pagan sun god.

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[Help the faithful rediscover the daily importance of Sacred Scripture, Pope instructs Synod of Bishops](#)

VATICAN CITY, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - At midday today, the Holy Father received members of the ordinary council of the Synod of Bishops, who are currently preparing a General Assembly of the Synod on the subject of Sacred Scripture. Pope Benedict expressed his hope that the synod might help to rediscover the importance of the Bible in the lives of all the faithful.

The Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod, scheduled for October 2008 has as its theme: "The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church." The synod's meeting with the Pope comes just prior to their finalization of the "Lineamenta" (draft guidelines) for the General Assembly, which will be distributed to bishops around the world.

"The spiritual activity which expresses and nourishes the life and mission of the Church is necessarily based on the Word of God," Pope Benedict told the bishops.

That Word, moreover, "being destined for all the Lord's disciples - as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity reminded us - calls for special veneration and obedience, in order for it to be recognized also as an urgent call to full union between all believers in Christ."

Benedict XVI pointed out how the "Lineamenta" the members of the ordinary council are about to complete, "will serve as a valuable tool enabling the entire Church to study the theme of the forthcoming assembly."

The Holy Father concluded by expressing his hope that the upcoming General Assembly "may help to rediscover the importance of the Word of God in the lives of all Christians, and of all ecclesial and civil communities."

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[Vatican official condemns "self-genocide" of human race](#)

ABUJA, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - The president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Bishop Elio Sgreccia, denounced this week the different attacks on human life in all its stages, saying mankind is "marching towards a self-genocide of the human race."

"The weakness of the Christian community and the strength of secular society could spell disaster," Bishop Sgreccia warned, and he urged all European citizens to work at reversing the trend. "Up to now the culture of death has been accepted and this path leads to self-destruction."

He also noted the "widespread mentality that trusts in bio-technological power." Such powers, Sgreccia said aim "to change the order of the human species" and to create "men in the image and likeness of other men who have power."

Society is embracing this mentality and, "it now defends the selecting of children so that each one is perfect, without defect, and the eliminating of those that do not fulfill these conditions," he explained during a meeting with local journalists at the University of Saint Paul.

Bishop Sgreccia called this nothing more than "a craving for power" that stems from "a false perception of the origins of man," since "no human being can state that he was born of his own choice, nor that he made himself."

"This is the great lie upon which some seek to build this bio-technological omnipotence that aims to transform the very structure of human nature and in this way liberate it from all cultural precedent," he stressed.

Regarding euthanasia, Bishop Sgreccia warned that "due to the profound secularization" man no longer has "the spiritual energy to confront suffering," and he has lost "the sense of the transcendent."

The bishop also recalled the case of Terri Schiavo, emphasizing that the notion of "extraordinary treatment" for patients should never include the fundamental needs of food, hydration and hygiene.

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[Government in Spanish region of Catalonia publishes "secular liturgical ritual" for baptism, marriage, and funerals](#)

MADRID, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - The government in the Spanish region of Catalonia has published a new manual consisting of pagan formulas to substitute for the traditional Christian rites of baptism, marriage, and burial.

The "Civil Ceremonial Manual" is designed for those who, "under exclusively secular parameters, wish to find formulas to live what we know as the rites of passage with fullness, solemnity, and spirituality."

According to the Spanish daily "La Razon," the author of the manual, Joan Surroca i Sens, claims the publication of the book is justified because "during 2004, for the first time in Catalonia, the number of civil marriages surpassed the number of Catholic marriages" and because "the concept of God has been strongly questioned from all points of view."

The ritual says there is "no need to imitate churches, because we have solemn civil buildings of all eras available that will satisfy even the most demanding among us and will provide the ideal qualities for celebrating the ceremonies," Surroca stated.

A "welcoming" ceremony that mimics baptism consists of readings, suggested exhortations by the ceremony leader, and even space for the participation of "godparents." The readings are taken from authors ranging from Pablo Neruda to Charlie Chaplin, and from the Universal Declaration on the Rights of the Child to Anthony de Mello.

The manual even suggests musical accompaniment for the rites, with songs from classical composers as well as some from Abba, Cat Stevens, Louis Armstrong, and The Beatles.

In its section on marriage, the manual claims the Catholic Church has been “very combative” in response to new laws on civil unions in Spain, but that the Church’s position is of little importance because “the Church is wise and experienced in adapting to the times.”

The manual also addresses end-of-life issues, offering a plug for suicide. “Our respect must also be given to the person who, after calm reflection, decides to put an end to his or her life. Those who show such an individual support if necessary should not be penalized, as long as they act within the confines of the law.”

The civil “Farewell Ceremony” should consist of “a loving and fraternal embrace,” the author states. Later, during the burial, “poems can be read” or friends and family members can talk about “their relationships with the deceased loved one, his or her more human or even humorous side as well, which helps to relieve the tension.”

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[Bishop warns against “contagious pessimism” from negative media coverage of the Church](#)

MADRID, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - Bishop Juan Del Rio of Asidonia-Jerez de la Frontera encouraged Catholics this week not to fall prey to the “contagious pessimism” fostered by the “prophets of gloom and doom” in the media who, he said, constantly portray the Church in a negative and biased fashion.

In his weekly commentary, the Spanish bishop said Catholics must resist the negative and biased portrayal of the Church’s life and work, which “produces pessimism and discouragement in many people regarding the future of the Christian faith in our country and in the European cultural context.”

Bishop Del Rio warned against the “prophets of gloom and doom,” who in their ignorance, “cite well-financed sociological studies in order to show how bad things are for Catholics in the modern world.” The emphasis on scandals and problems in the Church is an attempt to “spread the idea that the Church’s days are numbered,” he said, “and that the Church is a ideological relic from the past, and that democracy and Christianity are incompatible.”

Bishop Del Rio also criticized those modern-day politicians who embrace religious and moral relativism and are “critical of the Church’s doctrine and hierarchy,” ignoring the fact that the principles that govern democracy “were born of Christianity, and those who defend them are sons and daughters of the Christian tradition and culture.”

“For some in power, and Spain is no exception, democracy will be in its prime when Catholicism loses its place in society,” he added, noting that such a mentality has always proven wrong, because Christ Himself sustains the Church.

“We should not be discouraged but rather show the joy of being Catholic in times of trial. It is urgent that we recover confidence in the ability of the faith to positively influence the configuration of a new culture,” the bishop stressed.

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[Beatification process opened for 16 Spanish martyrs](#)

MADRID, January 25 ([CNA](#)) - The Archdiocese of Barcelona has announced that Archbishop Luis Martinez Sistach will preside at a ceremony this Thursday opening the cause of beatification of 16 religious and laypeople who were martyred during the Spanish Civil War of 1936.

The causes to be opened include those of Father Teodoro Illera del Olmo and eight companions of the Congregation of St. Peter in Chains, as well as the lay people Eliseo Maravillo Garcia, Camilia Diez Blanco, and Gregori Diez Blanco.

The cases several religious will also be opened, including that of Sister Carlota Duque Alonso, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Hearts and Sister Andrea Solans Ballestar along with two companions of the Institute of the Capuchin Sisters of the Divine Shepherd.

During the ceremony, Archbishop Sistach will appoint a panel that will take care of the causes and will approve the list of testimonies to be heard during the process.

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