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MESSAGE BY THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

THE CROSS SPEAKS OF HOPE

Pope Benedict XVI on his recent Apostolic visit to Cyprus spoke of the importance the Cross has for the world: *“the Cross is not just a private symbol of devotion, it is not just a badge of membership of a certain group within society, and in its deepest meaning it has nothing to do with the imposition of a creed or a philosophy by force. It speaks of hope, it speaks of love, it speaks of the victory of non-violence over oppression, it speaks of God raising up the lowly, empowering the weak, conquering division, and overcoming hatred with love”.*

These words are of great significance bearing in mind that just a few months ago the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Italy should remove all crosses from public places. When Italy filed an appeal against this decision, several countries, amongst them Malta, intervened as third parties.

It is with satisfaction that we note that Malta’s intervention was made with the joint approval of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. On that occasion the Prime Minister said that, *“on a point of principle, we insist that a country which has upheld particular values and traditions for centuries should not be obliged to change them just because an individual objects to them. Indeed, the social and cultural characteristics of society should be respected for as long as the people of such a society so decide. A court which decides otherwise will not be showing sensitivity to such aspects and will be taking a wrong path”.*

We fully endorse this position. In this way we, as a nation, would be contributing our share in public life so that Europe does not lose its Christian roots because, as Pope John Paul II had stated: *“Europe’s history would be incomprehensible without reference to the events which marked the great period of evangelization and then the long centuries in which Christianity, despite the painful division between East and West, came to be the religion of the European peoples” [Ecclesia in Europa, 24.]*

It would be illogical to prohibit religious symbols such as the Cross from public places when society has grown conscious of the right to religious freedom. The display of the Cross in public places does not impose a religion: in our tradition, the cross is a symbol and expression of the highest altruism and generosity, and of the deepest solidarity offered to all.

We also feel that the spirit of dialogue which exists between different churches and religions should provide an excellent occasion so that the respective religious traditions are respected.

We furthermore exhort Christians to treasure the Cross as the sign of humanity's redemption by Christ. We encourage them to bear witness to their faith by taking up the cross and following Jesus.

✠ Paul Cremona O.P.

✠ Mario Grech

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