

Freedom must reflect divine will

VATICAN CITY - Human freedom must be exercised in accordance with God's law, including the obligation to protect human life, said members of a dialogue commission representing the Vatican and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel.

"Freedom of choice is derived from God and therefore is not absolute, but must reflect divine will and law," said members of the Catholic-Jewish commission at the end of their mid-March meeting in Jerusalem.

Members of the dialogue commission discussed their communities' teaching on freedom of religion and conscience and limits on that freedom, said the statement published by the Vatican.

The human capacity to make choices is a reflection of the divine image in which men and women are made, but freedom also carries with it responsibilities, participants said.

"The idea of moral relativism is antithetical to this religious world view and poses a serious threat to humanity," they said.

The rabbis, cardinals and bishops participating in the dialogue said the 18th-century Enlightenment and its appeal to the use of reason "helped bring about a purification from the abuse of religion," but "secular society still requires religious foundations to support lasting moral values."

The sanctity and dignity of human life, they said, are "inviolable human rights" in addition to being religiously inspired ethical principles.

The participants also said that in the area of religious freedom governments legitimately can intervene only when "a threat is posed by the promotion, teaching or exercise of violence and specifically terrorism and psychological manipulation in the name of religion."

"It is legitimate for a society with a predominant religious identity to preserve its character, as long as this does not limit the freedom of minority communities and

individuals to profess their alternative religious commitments, nor to limit their full civil rights and status as citizens, individuals and communities,” they said.

A commitment to the religious freedom of others “obliges us all to safeguard the integrity and dignity of holy sites, places of worship and cemeteries of all religious communities,” they said.

Recognizing that religious communities have not always upheld those principles, the commission members said modern religious leaders have a special obligation “to prevent the improper use of religion and to educate toward respect for diversity, which is essential in order to ensure a healthy, stable and peaceful society.”

The statement ended with prayers that God would “bless and inspire” religious and political leaders “to work determinedly to promote peace, dignity, security and tranquillity in the Holy Land.”