

Religious attacks by the media must be rejected, say officials

VATICAN CITY - Anti-religious commentary distributed by media outlets can create tensions and incite violence and therefore must be rejected, said Vatican and Muslim representatives.

Attacking religion in the mass media especially via satellite television channels must be opposed considering “the dangerous effect” that these broadcasts can have on social cohesion and on peace between religious communities, said a statement issued after the annual meeting of officials from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and from al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt.

The Vatican released a copy of the statement to journalists March 2.

The Feb. 23-24 meeting in Cairo focused on the role religions can play in either causing or preventing religious violence.

The al-Azhar meeting was chaired by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the pontifical council, and by Sheik Mohammed Abd al-Aziz Wasil, president of al-Azhar’s permanent committee for dialogue with the monotheistic religions.

The meeting’s final statement said greater attention must be paid to the fact that manipulating religion or religious beliefs for political or other interests can lead to violence.

It called for ending discrimination on the basis of religious identity and said that if laws are to be just they should guarantee the “fundamental equality” of all people regardless of religious affiliation.

The ideals of justice, solidarity and cooperation between all people must be promoted so as to foster peace and prosperity, it said.

Members of the dialogue group also called on preachers, teachers and the writers of school textbooks to be respectful of other religions and not make “statements or

references to historical events that directly or indirectly can arouse a violent attitude among followers of the different religions.”

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, the Vatican representative to the Arab League and former head of the interreligious council, told Vatican Radio Feb. 25 that both Christians and Muslims feel “that sometimes in textbooks there are things that are not accurate and things that don’t help appreciate the other religion or the other person.”

Greater sensitivity and attention must be paid to “the way history is presented,” he said.

“There is work to be done, in fact, to give a more nuanced view of certain periods of history, whether it is the Islamic invasions of other countries or whether it is the Crusades,” Archbishop Fitzgerald said.