Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis gives his talk during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Jan. 31. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Vatican City — February 2, 2018
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Every religious leader must unmask and condemn any attempt to use God's name to perpetuate evil and to justify hatred, violence and exploitation, Pope Francis said.

"Violence promoted and carried out in the name of religion can only discredit religion itself," the pope said.

Therefore, "such violence must be condemned by all, and especially by genuinely religious persons, who know that God is always goodness, love and compassion, and that in him there is no room for hatred, resentment or vengeance," he said Feb. 2.

Pope Francis spoke to political and religious leaders taking part in a conference in Rome dedicated to "Tackling Violence Committed in the Name of Religion."

Thanking them for their visit, the pope told them that it was "highly significant that political authorities and religious leaders can meet to discuss how to respond to acts of violence committed in the name of religion."

There is a great need "for a common commitment on the part of political authorities, religious leaders, teachers and those engaged in the fields of education, training and communications, to warn all those tempted by perverse forms of misguided religiosity that these have nothing to do with the profession of a religion worthy of this name," he said.

"The religious person," he said, "knows that among the greatest blasphemies is to invoke God as the justification for one's own sins and crimes, to invoke him in order to justify killing, mass murder, enslavement, exploitation in whatever form, oppression and persecution of individuals and entire populations."

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And, he said, every truly religious person knows that no one can claim to use the name of God, who is holy, "in order to perpetrate evil."

"Every religious leader is called to unmask any attempt to manipulate God for ends that have nothing to do with him or his glory," the pope said. "We need to show, with unremitting effort, that every human life is sacred, that it deserves respect, esteem, compassion and solidarity, without regard for ethnicity, religion, culture or ideological and political convictions."

Belonging to a particular religion, Pope Francis said, does not bestow "additional dignity and rights upon individuals, nor does nonadherence deny or diminish them."