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Pope defends outreach to Anglicans

by Francis X. Rocca by Religion News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI defended his plan to make it easier for Anglicans to convert to Catholicism, saying that it served the "ultimate purpose" of dialogue between the two denominations.

The pope spoke on Friday, Jan. 15, at a special plenary session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Catholic church's highest doctrinal authority.

The Vatican announced in October that Anglicans, many of whom have been upset by their church's growing acceptance of female clergy and homosexuality, will be allowed to join special Catholic dioceses while retaining many of their traditional prayers and hymns, and to a limited extent a married priesthood.

Some Anglicans have criticized the Vatican's move as a blow to ecumenical relations.

On Friday, however, Benedict insisted that the plan "is not in any way contrary to the ecumenical movement, but shows, instead, its ultimate purpose which consists in reaching full and visible communion of the disciples of the Lord."

In the same speech, which reviewed the congregation's recent work on a number of matters, the pope also rejected charges that Catholic bioethical teachings, such as a ban on high-tech fertility treatments, pose an "obstacle to freedom and scientific research."

"In response to such attitudes, which tend to replace the truth with a fragile and easily manipulated consensus," Benedict said, Christianity offers "morally trustworthy perspectives within which human reason can seek and find valid solutions" to ethical problems.

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