



AMERICA/ECUADOR - "Laity and religious freedom": the voice of the Church

Quito (Agenzia Fides) - On 13 March the Bishops of Ecuador published a pastoral letter titled: "Laity and religious freedom". The document, sent to Fides Agency, is divided into two sections and expresses the Church's thought on the subject.

The introduction states: "In our country we are witnessing - in the global phenomenon of globalization - a special interest in the different ways of thinking, regarding a sharing of knowledge and an appreciation of different cultures ... " So the Bishops write: "We want to share some ideas on laity, laity of the State and religious freedom".

The first part of the document highlights "the confusion between laity and secularism". Secularism seeks "the total separation between State and Church".

According to an exact conception, "a secular State does not mean 'non-religious' or, worse, anti-religious, but only 'secular', that is, it does not profess a particular religious denomination". For this reason, "the State cannot impose religion, yet it must guarantee its freedom and harmony among the followers of different religions; and the Church, as social expression of Christian faith, has its independence and lives its community form based on faith, which the State must respect".

In the second part, on religious freedom, the document develops the argument very clearly: "Religious freedom is not an exclusive right of believers, but of the whole family of peoples of the earth. It is a real conquest of legal and political progress, and an essential element for a true state of law". Furthermore, it is stated that "the secular state is called to the service of citizens and society according to their cultural, economic, linguistic or religious characteristics".

The document concludes by stating that "the secular state has the duty to protect, ensure and promote laity and religious freedom as a means to strengthen democracy and society itself, because these elements encourage greater citizen participation and help to overcome ideological prejudices and unjustified limitations within society, in a climate of mutual friendship and cooperation". (CE) (Agenzia Fides 14/03/2014)