

Archbishop Vincent Nichols: secularists are holding back the faithful



The Archbishop of Westminster has said that intolerance is preventing believers from making “some of the best contributions” to the common good in Britain.

Speaking after an official state visit to the Holy See, Archbishop Vincent Nichols said that secularists, “with a kind of stubbornness, with a dogmatism, want to isolate faith and privatise it”, adding: “It is often that kind of intolerance of the reality of faith which is holding back some of the best contributions that can be made to the common good.”

His comments followed a speech to the Vatican by **Cabinet Minister Baroness Warsi**, who said that Britain was under threat from a rising tide of “militant secularisation”. Baroness Warsi, who was leading an official visit to Rome, said that Britain had “got to the stage where aggressive secularism is being imposed by stealth, leaving us with the ironic situation where, to stave off intolerance against minorities, we end up being intolerant towards religion itself”.

She said that the most worrying part of “this militant secularisation” is that at “its core and in its instincts it is deeply intolerant”.

Baroness Warsi, Britain’s first Muslim female Cabinet Minister, led a ministerial delegation to the Vatican to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and the Holy See.

Archbishop Nichols said that the visit marked the highest point in the modern history of diplomatic relations between Britain and the Holy See.

Baroness Warsi's comments followed a High Court ruling in favour of an atheist town councillor who found prayers before meetings offensive. Mr Justice Ouseley ruled the prayers were not lawful under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Baroness Warsi said that the call for the marginalisation of religion in the public life came from "a well-intentioned liberal elite" who regarded such marginalisation as necessary for progressive equality. "But they don't realise, as the Holy Father has argued for many years, that faith and reason go hand in hand," she said.

She said that the marginalisation of religion also came from the "anti-religionists, the faith deniers, the people who dine out on free-flowing media and sustain a vocabulary of secularist intolerance".

Baroness Warsi told her audience that Europe needed to become more confident in its Christianity.

Archbishop Peter Smith of Southwark said: "Faith has a powerful and positive role to play in Britain, and people of faith need to be willing to speak clearly and calmly about their beliefs. A mature secular society needs to acknowledge the importance of faith for many of its members, and to create a true culture of dialogue in which the free and confident expression of faith is encouraged and celebrated.

"We must resist the intolerance of those who in the name of an aggressive 'secularism' would truly seek to 'impose' on others by denying any public place to faith."

Madelaine Teahan - The Catholic Herald