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## RELIGION IS BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT THAN SOME THINK

The advent of modern terrorism in its various forms, often linked to religious extremism, has brought to the world's consciousness the importance of facing up to the impact religion and human relationships have on the lives of billions of people.

Many individuals in the western world have over a long period of time advocated secularist philosophies as a means of smothering the historical fires of sectarianism and intolerance. This approach increasingly is being found wanting, as our post modernist society seeks once again to find answers to the disillusionment many people find in their lives. The hunger experienced by many people for spirituality, meaningful relationships and personal identity, points to the desire for happiness and the quest for inner healing, which the secular ideology doesn't address very well. Clearly, the current rampantly individualistic focus on life is being questioned. A culture of blame and complaint which follows from this is all too apparent, as if we have the right to live in a perfect world, which many people seem to expect. There is little fulfilment living in a structure of neutrality or in a belief vacuum.

When one takes a close look at what is happening worldwide, it is becoming clear that religion and spirituality are back on many people's agenda. Growing numbers are intrigued by the findings of astro-physicists, and by the stunning cosmic photographs taken by orbiting satellites and space craft. Spiritual-religious questions inevitably emerge from exposure to all of this.

Political leaders at national and international levels have slowly come to recognize that religion is not simply of nuisance value but is a reality in the lives and behaviours of billions of humans. Religious diversity is an international reality which has to be properly managed so that all citizens of sovereign states are able to have a place in the sun, while according the same rights to others who are different from themselves.

National, civic cohesion is not always robust as the recent experience in Kenya has demonstrated. Any nation, given circumstances where groups within a population are marginalized or treated badly, has the capacity to wobble or catastrophically implode.

There is nothing wrong with positive religious difference and multicultural diversity. Normally, these characteristics strengthen a society's mosaic of diversity. However, a State has to be vigilant since extremism in its worst forms is always toxic and cannot be supported by the body politic. Similarly, any rabid form of dehumanizing by religious zealots is equally

toxic. Religion and faith only have a positive place in a society when they provide inspiration and guidance for their adherents, helping them to rise above unreliable human weaknesses and promoting the good of humanity.

Acknowledging the spiritual and religious dimensions of people ought to be rejoiced in – not denigrated!! Even religious difference which is negative or crusading, can sometimes lead to a greater good, if managed properly.

The strengthening emergence of spirituality and religion in our time allows them to take a rightful place in society. They, are welcome signs of positive societal growth and national maturity. Liberal democracies that welcome this development will be strengthened, not weakened, supporting this growing phenomenon.

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