

Bishop says Najib's remarks on Christians puzzling
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Catholic Bishop Dr Paul Tan Chee Ing today expressed puzzlement that Prime Minister Najib Razak could, after a trip to see the Pope Benedict in Rome earlier this week, still speak like as if “the sincerity of Malaysian Christians in their desire to dialogue with Muslims is subject to proof.”

“I don't want to sound carping and querulous especially after the announcement of diplomatic ties between Malaysia and the Vatican but the prime minister's latest remarks, to my mind, are nothing if not puzzling,” said the titular head of Roman Catholics in the Melaka-Johor diocese.

Bishop Paul, who is concurrently president of the Catholics' Bishops Conference of Malaysia, was referring to the Najib's remarks in Sepang yesterday that were directed at Christians.

“We wish to tell our friends, the Malaysian Christians ... that if they respect us, we will also respect them,” the PM was reported by Malaysian Insider to have said.

“This is puzzling - painful even - coming from a leader who has just been to see the Pope and has announced the establishment of diplomatic ties between the Vatican and Malaysia,” said Bishop Paul Tan.

“It is as if the loyalty of Christians to the constitution of the country which states that Islam is the official religion of the federation is in doubt and the sincerity of Christians in their desire to dialogue with Muslims is subject to proof,” he asserted.

“Begging the prime minister's pardon, I feel matters are the other way round. It is his government's fidelity to the freedom of religion guarantees in the constitution that is in doubt, not Christians' respect for Islam,” argued Bishop Paul Tan.

“Our subscription to the constitution ipso facto is respect for Islam as the official religion of the country. The Roman Catholics Church is a founding member of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST).

“The initiative to form the council in 1984 was a reflection of the desire of Christians to dialogue with other religions,” he reminded.

Meeting with Pope a window dressing

Bishop Paul Tan said Muslims don't want to be part of the MCCBCHST “for reasons better known to them and which I don't want to comment.”

“Yet, after our oft-repeated loyalty to the constitution and our efforts at promoting inter-religious dialogue, it is our sincerity that is subject to proof, judging from the prime minister's remarks,” said Bishop Paul Tan.

“I take no relish in saying this but say it I must: this invidious double standards in judgment of the sincerity of Christians has gone so long that if unchallenged it would become the conventional wisdom,” he asserted.

“The prime minister's trip to the Vatican, as I had feared, was so much window dressing - his latest remarks are the confirmation,” he said.

Bishop Paul Tan said: “At this point, superfluous as it may seem, I want to reaffirm the loyalty of Malaysian Christians, particularly of Roman Catholics, to the constitution which upholds Islam as the official religion of the federation.

“Also, I want to reiterate our unwavering desire to dialogue with Muslims whom I welcome as brothers in our common humanity. May we not be wise above measure and sobriety but we must cultivate truth in charity.”

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