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Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster gives lecture at Netherhall House

“Religion is not a problem for legislators to solve but a vital contribution to the national conversation”

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Archbishop Vincent Nichols of the diocese of Westminster delivered the Inaugural Thomas More Lecture on 7

December 2011 commenting on the Pope's words during his visit to the UK last year: "Religion is not a problem for legislators to solve but a vital contribution to the national conversation".

The lecture was organised by the Thomas More Institute and took place at Netherhall House, a student residence in London which is a corporate work of Opus Dei.

The archbishop called for the public sphere not to be "faith-blind" but "faith-sensitive" and discussed the role of religious reasoning in the secular public sphere. He explained three ways in which religion contributed to secular society:

Firstly, offering "service in the task of forming community, a community that is both cohesive and open, a community that reaches for universality and respects particularity". In today's society the

innate human need to belong to a community must be reconciled with modern ideas of autonomy and independence.

Secondly, the archbishop pointed to the search for a meaningful life and the need to reject the idea of having no purpose during our time on earth: "like the environment, we humans have an ecology that we must respect to survive", he said.

The third and final point of engagement outlined was the work of organisations such as Caritas in favour of the poor and marginalised.

The lecture was reported by the Daily Telegraph and an extract also appeared in the Guardian Comment is Free section. Vatican commentator John Allen reported it in his weekly column at the National Catholic Reporter.

The full text of the lecture can be found in the Thomas More Institute.

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