

Courtyard of the Gentiles Seen As Turning Point for Dialogue

Believers and Nonbelievers Discuss Life's Greatest Questions

VATICAN CITY, MARCH 27, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- With the promotion of the Courtyard of the Gentiles, Benedict XVI created a new starting point for dialogue between believers and nonbelievers, says a Vatican spokesman.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office, made this reflection on the latest episode of "Octava Dies."

The Courtyard of the Gentiles was launched Thursday at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO, in the presence of diplomats, international officials and representatives of the world of culture.

The initiative, promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture, takes up a suggestion of Benedict XVI to create a space for dialogue "with those to whom religion is something foreign, to whom God is unknown and who nevertheless do not want to be left merely Godless, but rather to draw near to him, albeit as the Unknown" (Benedict XVI, Dec. 21, 2009).

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, chose the French capital to launch the forum because of its symbolic status as the home of the Enlightenment and its impact on the world.

Father Lombardi reflected on the video message that the Pontiff addressed to young people and which was played in the Notre Dame Cathedral square during the closing session of the two-day gathering.

"You wish to be together to meet and to dialogue about the great questions of human existence," Benedict XVI said in his message. "Those of you who are nonbelievers want to take believers to task, demanding from them the witness of a life consistent with what they profess and rejecting any deviation that makes religion inhuman."

"You who are believers," he added, "you want to say that the question of God is not a threat to society, it does not threaten human life! The question of God must not be absent from the great human questions of our time.

"You have much to say to each other [...] I profoundly believe that the meeting between the reality of faith and reason allows man to find himself."

The Pope's message, Father Lombardi observed, "is an impassioned call for the common search for the Absolute, without mutual fears and diffidence."

"A message entirely and only positive, encouraging, to raze the bastions," the Jesuit continued. "The God known in faith is also always a mysterious God, and his worshipers do not feel at all distant from those who truly seek the unknown God. This is what the Pope invites everyone not to be afraid and to travel 'the path toward a new world' together.

"It is a difficult path and 'it has not shortcuts,' but it is an exciting path 'of freedom, equality and fraternity'."

"Words of great hope," Father Lombardi stressed. "Benedict XVI told us from the very first day of his pontificate that the question of God is the first [question] of all. And it regards all of us without distinctions and limits."

The priest added that the Courtyard of the Gentiles "is an optimal point of departure for this path."

On ZENIT's Web page:

Benedict XVI's video message: www.zenit.org/article-32135?l=english

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