

# Can Atheists and Believers Form a Duet?

## Pope to Address "Courtyard of the Gentiles"

VATICAN CITY, MARCH 18, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The president of the Pontifical Council for Culture is giving more details about the project Benedict XVI entrusted it in order to foster dialogue with non-believers.

Today in the Vatican press office, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi spoke about the official launch of the Courtyard of the Gentiles, scheduled for next Thursday in Paris, and presided over by Irina Bokova, director-general of UNESCO.

"At the request of Benedict XVI the Church has decided to embark on a new stage of dialogue, exchange and joint activity among believers and non-believers," the cardinal explained.

The name for this initiative, "Courtyard of the Gentiles," evokes "the image of the vast area near the Temple of Jerusalem reserved for debates between Jews and non-Jews," he said.

This effort is designed to be a complement to the Church's ongoing interreligious dialogue.

"The aim," Cardinal Ravasi continued, "is to help to ensure that the great questions about human existence, especially the spiritual questions, are borne in mind and discussed in our societies, using our common reason."

### Discordance

Cardinal Ravasi acknowledged that believers and non-believers stand on different ground. But, he said, "they must not close themselves in a sacral or secular isolationism, ignoring one another or, worse still, launching taunts or accusations.

"Of course, differences must not be skimmed over, contradictory ideas must not be dismissed, or discordances ignored," the cardinal affirmed, "[...] but thoughts and words, deeds and decisions can be confronted, and even come together."

The culture council president called for replacing a paradigm of "duel" with one of "duet": "A duet in which the sound of the voices may be at antipodes -- such as a bass and a soprano -- yet manage to create a harmony without renouncing their own identity; in other words ... without fading away into a vague ideological syncretism."

The event is open to everyone, especially young people. The Pope will address those present from screens set up for the occasion, explaining the significance and objectives of the Pontifical Council for Culture initiative.

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