

## **Benedict XVI Made 'Decisive Contribution' to Interreligious Dialogue**

**Cardinal Tauran Pays Tribute to Pope Emeritus at Book Launch**

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Benedict XVI made a “decisive” contribution to interreligious dialogue, proposing a dialogue of “charity in truth” that resulted in a praiseworthy initiative between Muslims and Christians.

This was the view shared today by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The cardinal was presenting a new edition of a book Nov. 12 at the Vatican called “Il Dialogo Interreligioso nell’Insegnamento Ufficiale della Chiesa Cattolica (1963-2013)” (Interreligious Dialogue in the Official Teaching of the Catholic Church, (1963-2013)).

The aim of the book, now in its third edition, is to cover the papal magisterium on matters concerning interreligious dialogue from the Second Vatican Council until the pontificate of Benedict XVI (relations with Jews are not included as that is the responsibility of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity).

The book is written in the spirit of “Nostra Aetate”, which encourages the faithful “to recognise, safeguard and promote those spiritual and moral goods” in common with other religions, as well as “the socio-cultural values they embody”.

“The novelty of this book”, Cardinal Tauran said, “consists in the collection of annotated texts by Benedict XVI ... whose contribution was decisive.”

“In the seven years of his pontificate,” he said, “we find 188 texts regarding interreligious dialogue from Benedict XVI, compared to 591 from John Paul II during more than a quarter of a century.”

“Attention to this theme has been constant, indeed growing, in each pontificate,” he continued. “Benedict XVI proposed a 'dialogue of charity in truth'. A year after the Regensburg address, 38 Muslim scholars, who subsequently increased to 138 in number, wrote to the Pope in a document entitled 'A common word between us and you'.”

That initiative explained the principles of Islam and expressed hope for mutual comprehension, as well as a relationship between Islam and Christianity based on love for God and neighbour, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus.

“The result of this praiseworthy initiative was the creation of the Islamic-Christian Forum, which continues to exist to this day”, the French cardinal said.

He also mentioned that, like his predecessors, Benedict XVI affirmed that religious freedom was a sacred and inalienable right, and he lost no opportunity to confirm this.

“Convinced that to deny or limit religious freedom in an arbitrary fashion means cultivating a reductive vision of the human person and rendering impossible the affirmation of an authentic and lasting peace for the whole human family, the Pope identified in the process of worldwide globalisation, still in process, a fortuitous occasion for promoting relationships of universal brotherhood among men,” he said.

The book is fundamentally a collection of Council texts, encyclicals, apostolic exhortations and addresses from John XXIII to Benedict XVI. There are also some documents from the dicasteries of the Roman Curia regarding interreligious dialogue. In total there are 909 documents, consisting of 7 Council texts, 2 by John XXIII, 97 by Paul VI, 2 by John Paul I, 591 by John Paul II, 188 by Benedict XVI, 15 from the Roman Curia, 3 legislative texts, and 4 from the International Theological Commission.

## A Long Way to Go

Fr. Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, Secretary of the Pontifical Council, said “there is still a long way to go but with Pope Francis the dialogue of friendship continues.”

“In just a few months, Pope Francis has already held many meetings with representatives of other religions, and has spoken widely on interreligious dialogue,” he said. “I would also like to recall that this year the Pope himself signed the annual message to the Muslim community to celebrate the end of Ramadan”.

Fr. Ayuso briefly listed the statements made by the most recent Popes in their teachings on dialogue with followers of other religions.

For example, Paul VI, in his “*Ecclesiam Suam*”, expressed his profound conviction that “The Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make”. John Paul I, in spite of the brevity of his 33-day pontificate, followed the same path as his predecessor, “calling all to collaborate in creating a

bulwark, within nations, against blind violence and to promote improvement in the conditions of less fortunate populations”.

John Paul II developed the “culture of dialogue” and, following the dramatic events of 11 September 2001 and their tragic consequences in the Middle and Near East, proposed a decalogue for peace to the Heads of State and representatives of the governments throughout the world.

At the beginning of Benedict XVI's pontificate and in the wake of John Paul II, he stated that “the Church wants to continue building bridges of friendship with the followers of all religions, in order to seek the true good of every person and of society as a whole”.

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