

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN THE TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Vatican City, 12 November 2013 (VIS) – A press conference was held in the Holy See Press Office this morning to present the book “Il Dialogo Interreligioso nell'Insegnamento Ufficiale della Chiesa Cattolica (1963-2013)” (“Interreligious Dialogue in the Official Teaching of the Catholic Church, (1963-2013)”). The speakers in the conference were Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Fr. Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, M.C.C.J., secretary of the same dicastery, along with Bishop Francesco Gioia, O.F.M. Cap., editor of the work.

The aim of this third edition, which covers the papal magisterium from the Vatican Council II until Benedict XVI, is to present directly to both Catholics and followers of other religions the official thought of the Church, following the spirit of “Nostra Aetate”, which encourages the faithful, “through dialogue and collaboration with the members of other religions, and bearing witness to Christian faith and life, to recognise, safeguard and promote those spiritual and moral goods, as well as the socio-cultural values they embody”.

“The selection of the texts respects the competences of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, omitting however on the one hand the dialogue with Jews, which is the competence of the Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, constituted within the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and on the other, ecumenical dialogue, or rather the aspect of relations with the other Churches and ecclesial communities, which again falls within the scope of the Council for Unity”, explained Cardinal Tauran.

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.

“The advantage of a volume in book form, even if it is rather long at 2100 pages, is that of offering easy access to the method and theological foundations of interreligious dialogue as taught and practised in the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. The three indices - analytical, geographical and general – allow the user to find most interesting content in just a few minutes, and then perhaps to go and search for the texts in electronic format on the internet”, added the Cardinal.

“The novelty of this book”, he said, “consists in the collection of annotated texts by Benedict XVI ... whose contribution was decisive. In the seven years of his pontificate, we find 188 texts regarding interreligious dialogue from Benedict XVI, compared to 591 from John Paul II during more that a quarter of a century. Attention to this theme has been constant, indeed growing, in each pontificate. 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', explaining the principles of Islam and expressing hope for mutual comprehension, and 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".

Cardinal Tauran also mentioned that, like his predecessors, Benedict XVI affirmed that religious freedom was a sacred and inalienable right, and 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".

Before concluding, the president of the Pontifical Council praised the patience and painstaking attention to detail of Bishop Francesco Gioia, who along with various officials in the dicastery, edited this and previous editions of the volume.

Fr. Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot 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".

"There is still a long way to go", he concluded, "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. ... 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".