

Muslims ask pope for response

Vatican response so far "misses the very point."

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Muslim leaders at an interfaith peace conference with Pope Benedict XVI in Naples chided him for not responding to a recent olive-branch missive from Muslim scholars and complained that the reaction of a high Vatican official "misses the very point of dialogue."

Benedict spoke October 21 at the opening of the 21st International Meeting for Peace. In a written communiqué, Muslims said they were "still awaiting a proper response" from the pontiff to the open letter, signed by 138 Muslim clerics and scholars and made public October 11.

The Naples conference assembled some 300 religious leaders, including the archbishop of Canterbury, the Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople, the chief rabbi of Israel, and representatives of Islam, Buddhism and Shintoism.

The communiqué pointedly objected to comments by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, who told a French newspaper that the Islamic belief that the Qur'an is the literal word of God makes theological dialogue between Muslims and Christians "difficult."

"This attitude, it seems to Muslims, misses the very point of dialogue," the communiqué stated. "Dialogue is by definition between people of different views, not people of the same view." Recalling the "interfaith work of the late Pope John Paul II," the communiqué suggested that the Vatican has become less open to other faiths.

John Esposito, director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, said contents of the communiqué "were mentioned orally to the pope over lunch and handed personally to Cardinal Tauran by Sheikh Ibrahim Izzedin," a signatory of the original letter, who sat at Benedict's table at lunch on October 21. -*Religion News Service*