

Pope Francis Seen from the Outside... What Do Believers of Other Faiths Think of the Pope? by Roberto Catalano

Roberto Catalano has compiled a new book entitled, "Pope Francis Seen from the Outside... What Do Believers of Other Faiths Think of the Pope?" (In Italian for the moment)

Here's how he describes it in his blog:

Yesterday I received the first copies of the recent publication by Città Nuova Editrice entitled *Papa Francesco visto da fuori... cosa pensano del Papa i credenti di altre fedi*. I am its editor and, in order to contextualize the relationship of the current pontiff with men and women of other religious traditions and different cultures, I offer an extensive introduction. The remainder of the book is produced by contributions from Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, who look at Bergoglio from their respective perspectives.

Why a book on how Pope Francis is seen from the outside? Indeed, this pontificate has seen and continues to see an incredible number of books and volumes on Pope Francis. They continue to come out to highlight aspects of a pontiff who, without a doubt, has marked a great innovation on many fronts and is destined to leave an important mark on the Church and the history of the papacy. It is no coincidence that Bergoglio is often referred to as the 'pope of firsts'. However, at least until now, nothing has ever been published about how Pope Francis is seen and considered by people who believe differently from the Catholics he represents and leads worldwide. Yet, in all likelihood, never has any pope been so internationally known. Undoubtedly, this is helped by the fact that we are in the digital age and the media and social media, of which the pope also makes good use, contribute to the dissemination of his image, his words and his gestures. We cannot hide the fact that the pope 'who has come almost from the end of the world' has been able to read the signs of the times of the last decade as no one else has been able to do. Moreover, in recent years, Pope Francis has been able to involve religions and, above all, their followers, in the concrete proposals that he has had the courage and perseverance to present to the world on the great issues that humanity is facing today: peace, the climate crisis, migrations, the educational emergency and the challenges of globalization that have created what he has called a 'culture of waste'. All this has contributed to creating a vast network of friendship along the lines of the experience Bergoglio had during his episcopate in Buenos Aires. He demonstrated in action what it means, day after day and year after year, to build what he called 'the culture of dialogue' and the 'culture of friendship'.

It was from this awareness that the need arose in the last two years, which then became a real publishing project, to publish in the journal *Nuova Umanità* two Focuses on the current papacy seen from other perspectives: Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Baha'i. This book now brings them together, with some additions, to offer valuable evidence of the recognition of people of different faiths towards the current pope's commitment and openness to other religious traditions and their respective believers. The first part of the text - *Pope Francis. A pontificate read from the perspective of other religions* - intends to offer some introductory considerations that allow readers to frame this collection of interventions and help to read them in the right context. This is an analysis of the papacy of Francis which, of course, remains open

because it is still an ongoing experience.

The second contribution is that of a rabbi, Argentinian, or rather 'portenha', like José Maria Bergoglio. In fact, Rabbi Silvina Chemen proposes an analysis of the figure of the man she still calls 'father Jorge' from the aforementioned perspectives, as a citizen of Buenos Aires where the two met, but also of a Bergoglio who has always been close to the Jewish community. Another rabbi, Israeli-American, resident in Jerusalem but spending long periods in the US, contributes an article on Jewish appreciation for Pope Francis. Rav Ron Kronish is active in peace-building as an independent author and actor in interreligious dialogue, as well as a journalist and author of various publications. He was the founder and chairman for 24 years of the *Interreligious Coordinating Council* in Israel.

Following this, the analysis of Islam's relationship with the figure of the current pope was left to another woman, Dr. Haifa Aikkaf, Yemeni by origin but in Italy for more than three decades. She is an important figure on the Tuscan scene, and not only, in the relations between Muslims and Christians and in the cultural mediation of which she is a promoter and actress, in addition to being an attentive trainer of young Muslim generations in our country. However, since Islam is the religion to which the current pontiff has dedicated special attention, both because of the tensions that pervade the Muslim world with consequences on the international scene, and because it has encountered other critical issues such as the phenomenon of Daesh (ISIS) and the migrations that are often pointed out in Europe as the danger of an Islamic invasion, we wanted to give a voice to the country that has the highest number of Muslims in the world, Indonesia. Here, then, is Prof. Diky Safjan's contribution, which was delivered to the press precisely at the same time as Pope Francis' trip to Asia and Oceania, which included the Indonesian archipelago as its first stop. We could not miss an intervention from the African-American Muslim world which, although little known internationally, represents one of the most open and committed voices of the Islamic cosmos in dialogue with the Catholic Church both locally (in the USA) and internationally. This is thanks to the late Imam W. D. Mohammed, whose memory and role in the complex dialogue is presented by Imam Mikail Saahir of Indianapolis.

Although the so-called Abrahamic religions have been the focus of particular attention of Pope Francis - as demonstrated by the Abu Dhabi Document and his many trips to Muslim-majority countries - other contributions highlight how much the current pontiff is appreciated and followed - not without reservations - also by the world of Eastern religions. The contributions of Rev. Munehiro Niwano, former rector of the Rissho Kosei-kai Movement Seminary in Tokyo, a well-known representative of this reality of Japanese Mahayana Buddhism that has been involved for decades in the animation and leadership of inter-religious dialogue, are presented. Prof. Meenal Katarnikar, a Hindu from Mumbai, on the other hand, presents a stimulating contribution on Pope Bergoglio's sensitivity towards women, and does so with the typical sensitivity of the religions of India.

Of course, the book does not claim to exhaust the attitudes of all religions towards the pope. Many are not represented. The text, on the other hand, does not wish to be a treatise on the attitude of religions towards the current pope, but rather a first attempt to propose to the Italian and western public in general the sensitivity that representatives of different faiths and cultures

nurture towards a pontiff who will undoubtedly leave a fundamental mark on what he himself defines as the 'path of dialogue', which - he never tires of repeating - must be achieved 'together'.

<https://whydntwedialogue.blogspot.com/2025/02/francesco-visto-da-fuori.html?m=1>