

[A “Moderate” Muslim Lectures the West](#)

Author : Jacob Thomas on Oct 02, 2006 - 12:42 PM

Pope Benedict XVI's lecture at Regensburg University in Germany has caused a veritable tsunami among Muslims. My eyes caught early this week, the title of an op-ed article in the online Arabic newspaper, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, “**The Vatican's Pope Encourages Extremism.**”

I'm not very happy with that translation of the Arabic headline, “*Baba'l Vatican, wa Taghthiyat al-Tatarrof.*” Perhaps a more literal rendering of the original words would be more accurate, “*The Vatican's Pope is Feeding Extremism.*”

It was noteworthy that the article appeared on Thursday, the 6th day of Ramadan, 1427 AH, corresponding to 28 September 2006. One would expect the author to manifest a more “spiritual” approach to the controversy, but oh no! I've seldom read such a vitriolic attack on a Christian leader and on a Western political figure as I noticed in this wordy article. I must add here that I had a very hard time in translating the article, as if it was written in an archaic Arabic style, where each sentence would constitute nowadays, a lengthy paragraph.

The author began by relating an account of a talk-show on an Arabic-language television station, where the audience had the opportunity to register their reaction to the program.

“The cable channel MBC has a popular program, “Corner Stone,” that is hosted by Sheikh Salman al-‘Awda. Last Friday, the program dealt with the latest anti-Islamic statements coming from the Vatican. It was followed by a period of viewers' phone calls. One caller, a sympathizer with al-Qaeda, referred to the Pope's words in order to justify jihad against Christians.”

The article proceeded in a sarcastic tone, “*I would like to send the exchange that took place on the MBC channel, as a present to the Pope who has managed to fan the flames of extremism and terrorism. Also, I would like to send a carbon copy to President Bush who has disturbed our world by calling for a war on terrorism and extremism; and succeeded to bring about the ruin of three Islamic countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, and lately, Lebanon.*”

“When we consider the impact of the Pope's speech on the Muslim world, as well as the policies of the conservative Rightist American government, which requires other nations to relinquish their convictions, while at the same time, it insists on returning to its own religious fundamentals, we realize the great damage that both the Pope and President Bush have done.”

Having fulminated endlessly against what he considered the religious and political representatives of the West, he ended with these words, borrowed from the medical world:

"I would like to offer a medical prescription to all Western people. Please keep away from us your mad men; so that our mad men are not let loose against you! I'm afraid some of them have already managed to get out.

Analysis and Comments

As mentioned at the beginning of my article, I have seldom read such accusatory words addressed to Western political or religious leaders. While the writer considered himself as a "moderate" Muslim who has no use for the radicals among his fellow-religionists, his words manifested the worst attitude to the sober and rational words of Pope Benedict XVI, when addressing scholars and students at a German university.

The article ignored the decade-long brutal regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the reign of terror of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and Hezbollah's destruction of the delicate religious balance that had existed in Lebanon since the 1920s. And of course, he couldn't stop his diatribe against President Bush by painting him as an enemy of Islam, and ended with a very impolite statement implying that the President and the Pope were "mad people."

I can do no better in describing the prevailing Islamic attitude vis-à-vis the West, as exhibited by the writer, than to quote from an excellent piece that appeared in the **Wall Street Journal**, on Thursday, 21 September, 2006. The writer, Reuel Marc Gerecht is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. I recommend highly that you read the entire article, as it deals with some fundamental problems that afflict the vast Islamic world. I'm sure you can get hold of it by "googling" it!

Mr. Gerecht's words may appear rather blunt in those Western societies that have been softened or desensitized by the blight of political correctness and multiculturalism, but they're desperately needed.

"Is the Pope wrong to imply--in a rather roundabout way--that there is today something amiss inside Islam, as a community of believers sharing one faith and a long, common cultural tradition? There probably isn't a single liberal editor at a major American or European paper who doesn't think that there is something a little dysfunctional--a disposition that tolerates, if not encourages and admires violence as an expression of religious outrage--among young Muslim males from Northern Europe to Indonesia. We might not be able to put our finger precisely on it--the problems of a radicalized British Muslim of Pakistani ancestry are not the same as a Sunni Iraqi suicide bomber who blows up Jordanian and Palestinian women and children--but we know there is something wrong within Islam's global house, something that cannot be blamed exclusively on Western prejudice, bigotry, military actions or colonialism.

*"Pope Benedict nailed two facts about Islam that are contributing factors to the faith's very rough entry into modernity. **The prophet Muhammad, the model for all Muslims, established the faith through war and conquest. His immediate successors, the Rightly Guided Caliphs, whom traditional and radical Muslims cherish, reinforced Islam's identity as a victorious faith through the rapid creation of a world empire. Christianity***

was also at times spread by "the sword," and its use of that sword against nonbelievers and heretics was more savage than any Muslim imperialist's. But Christianity was not born to power. Jesus is not a conqueror. The doctrine of the 'two swords' always existed in Christian lands--the division of the world between church and state--and created enormous tension. It helped produce Western civic society. [Emphasis is mine, JT]

"The Pope doesn't tell us how we should proceed to counter the defects he sees in Islam. He should, since that would begin a real, painful but meaningful dialogue, which will surely cut both ways between the West and Islam. But what is most disturbing in the Western reaction to the pope's speech--and one sees the same reaction among those who are uncomfortable with President Bush's use of the term 'Islamofascism'--is the often well-intentioned refusal to talk openly about the other side. No one wants to offend, so we assume a public position of liberal tolerance, hoping that good-willed, nonconfrontational dialogue, which criticizes 'our' possibly offensive behavior while downplaying 'theirs' will somehow lead to a more peaceful, ecumenical world. But we need to talk and argue about these things. We need to stop treating Muslims like children, and viewing our public diplomacy with Islamic countries as popularity contests. Given what's happened since 9/11, a dialogue of civilizations is certainly in order. To his credit, Benedict has at least tried to approach the invidious issues that will define any helpful discussion."

Gerecht's words described the problem we face with Islam in the clearest possible way. Unfortunately, a genuine **"dialogue of civilizations,"** while is **"certainly in order,"** is not likely to happen unless moderate Muslims set aside their deep-rooted prejudices, and stop regarding themselves as victims of the West, and of its evil designs. As long as Muslim writers and intellectuals fail to acknowledge that their forefathers were far from innocent, as they had also played the imperialistic game; there is no hope for any genuine dialogue to take place. A true dialogue requires total honesty, and a willingness to acknowledge the great wrongs that Islam inflicted on huge areas of the world. Unfortunately, the article that *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* published on the sixth day of the month of fasting does not augur well for the future relations between Islam and the Rest of the world.