

POPE BENEDICT XVI AND THE MUSLIM QUESTION

“God is not pleased by blood, and not acting reasonably is contrary to God’s nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats... To convince a reasonable soul one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death.”¹

Preliminary

That a Pope is infallible, but not indefectible, is a distinction not well understood by the vast body of Catholics. A Pope is infallible. That is, when teaching definitively in faith or morals and intending to bind the faithful, he cannot err. That charism is given him by Almighty God not, as the ignorant think, for his own benefit, but for the benefit of God’s faithful people. So does Almighty God give them a guarantee that they may know the truth in matters essential for their salvation.

But the Pope is not indefectible; he can make mistakes, including mistakes of judgment. Anyone who doubts this should remember the interchange reported by St Paul in *Galatians* where he corrects St Peter, the first Pope and head of the Apostles, publicly over an error of judgement. In the very first public statement he made after his elevation, an impromptu address to priests, deacons and religious in the Diocese of Val d’Aosta on 29th July 2005, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed this distinction:

“The Pope is not an oracle; he is infallible in very rare situations, as we know; therefore, I share with you these questions, these problems. I also suffer...”²

There can hardly ever have been a Pope who did not made mistakes.

All this is by way of preface to a consideration of the troublesome Muslim question. For one is entitled, indeed obliged, to criticise certain of the activities and failures of Pope Benedict’s predecessors for placing him in the situation in which he finds himself today in addressing *the Muslim question*, the incursion of Muslim influence and Muslim values into societies grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI is an intelligent man. He knew well what he was doing in quoting the criticisms of Mohammedanism by Manuel II Paleologus in his address to the University of Regensburg on 12th September 2006. The dilemma he faced was that none of his immediate predecessors had ever thought it necessary to address publicly the defects in Mohammedanism, the recourse to violence in spreading its beliefs and the evils which seem to be an inevitable accompaniment wherever it operates. They had taken another course which, naïvely, they had hoped would bear fruit.

¹ Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus in 1391(?) quoted by Pope Benedict XVI in his address to scientists at the University of Regensburg, 12.9.2006.

² Reproduced by Zenit at Code: ZE05072909

The Muslim Question

Muslim influence in the world has grown steadily over the last thirty years as peoples from Arab countries, bolstered by 'petrodollars' and an incremental birth rate, have spread into non-Muslim civilisations. Western, derivatively Christian, countries have increasingly accepted emigrants from these and other Mohammedan countries to fill lacunae in their populations which are the inevitable consequence of the self-indulgent—contraceptive and death dealing—lifestyle their members have adopted. In accepting, all unconsciously, an influence which may ultimately place them in a fearful bondage, they are reaping a just return for their selfishness. The regret is that the punishments they deserve are likely to be visited more abundantly upon their children.

There is a fundamental incompatibility between Mohammedanism and Catholicism, an incompatibility which has existed since the very establishment of Mohammedanism in Arabia in the early seventh century. That incompatibility was well illustrated, in the 13th century, by St Thomas Aquinas to his fellow Dominicans—

“Mohammed seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us. His teaching also contained precepts that were in conformity with his promises, and he gave free rein to carnal pleasure. In all this, as is not unexpected, he was obeyed by carnal men. As for proofs of the truth of his doctrine, he brought forward only such as could be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom. Indeed, the truths that he taught he mingled with many fables and with doctrines of the greatest falsity. He did not bring forth any signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration; for a visible action that can be only divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth. On the contrary, Mohammed said that he was sent in the power of his arms—which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants. What is more, no wise men, men trained in things divine and human, believed in him from the beginning. Those who believed in him were brutal men and desert wanderers, utterly ignorant of all divine teaching, through whose numbers Mohammed forced others to become his followers by the violence of his arms. Nor do divine pronouncements on the part of preceding prophets offer him any witness. On the contrary, he perverts almost all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments by making them into fabrications of his own, as can be seen by anyone who examines his law. It was, therefore, a shrewd decision on his part to forbid his followers to read the Old and New Testaments, lest these books convict him of falsity. It is thus clear that those who place any faith in his words believe foolishly.”³

Nothing has changed. The violence and arrogance that in the seventh century characterised Mohammedanism is, as the world is well aware, no less insolent in the twenty first. The Mohammedan knows only one response to criticism of his religion, violence and threats of violence. There is no room with him for reasoning which would deny that he knows better than those who oppose him!

³ Summa Contra Gentiles Bk.I, 6 [4]

Mohammedanism is a sort of inversion of Catholicism. Belloc maintained that Mohammedanism was a Catholic heresy. Love is central to Catholicism: in Mohammedanism love is only peripheral. Christ taught, as His Church teaches today, 'greater love no man hath than that he lay down his life for his friend'. The Commandments of God forbid a man to kill another innocent man but he may *in extremis* give up his own life for that man. Mohammedanism, in contrast, allows that a man can show no greater respect for Allah than by killing another whom he assesses as adverse to Mohammedanism, or by killing himself. It is notorious that in the name of religion Muslims do this every day, and are lauded as martyrs in consequence!

Vatican Naivety

Vatican dicasteries for some forty years past have conducted their activities on the basis that it is possible to engage in dialogue with Muslims. The ground for this conduct is the sentiment expressed by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in its *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* (28.10.1965) concerning the Church's attitude to Muslims.

"The Church has... a high regard for Muslims... They worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own... [T]hey highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms deeds and fasting.

"Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The Sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values."⁴

Much of this is, with respect, naïve.⁵ It ignores reality, the constitutional antipathy between Catholicism and Mohammedanism. It is a gross understatement to talk of 'quarrels and dissensions' between Christians and Muslims (or, as another translation has it, 'quarrels and hostilities'). The two are mortal enemies because fundamentally opposed. It was the injustice of the Mohammedan towards pilgrims which precipitated the Crusades: "Why," the Christians of the time asked themselves, "should we continue to suffer the ruthless control over the holy places of those who have no faith in Christ?" Again, there cannot be 'mutual understanding' with a people whose ideology holds that they may disregard the rights of others.

⁴ *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* (28.10.1965), n. 3 translation in 'Conciliar and Post Conciliar Document, General Editor Austin Flannery O. P., New Revised Edition, Dublin, 1996.

⁵ The foundation and root of this naivety is subjectivism which is the chief philosophical characteristic of the age, the fruit of modern philosophy. The catalyst for this approach was the remarks of John XXIII in his Opening Speech to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the course of which he criticised those who forecast a worsening of standards and signalled the abdication of the exercise of the Church's authority to discipline the wrongheaded. (Cf. *Failure of the Executive Power* at <http://www.superflumina.org/executivefailure.html>).

Such people will only pay lip service to any suggestion of mutual respect. Moreover, there can be no effective dialogue with representatives of a body which has no central ruling authority, something Mohammedanism lacks.

This is not to say that there are not to be found among Muslims fine and noble people. There are. But regrettably, they are a minority and should any speak out in the name of reasonableness they will be attacked by their fellows. As a general rule, the followers of Mohammed adopt unquestioningly the violence endemic in his teachings and 'revelations' and express in their conduct the arrogance which accompanies it. Allah is not a God to be loved, but to be feared. He is no loving father, but a ruthless force.

Wherever the Mohammedan faith predominates, its followers will not suffer another religion to flourish, especially the religion established by God Himself, the Catholic faith. The Muslim is intolerant and, in his intolerance, hypocritical, for he will not suffer others to deal with him as he chooses to deal with them.

There is no question of give and take.⁶ Muslims are intransigent. Their religion is right and they will not be moved. They will take every concession given them and give nothing in return. They only thing they understand is obduracy, the refusal of their opponents to make the least concession. The only attitude to be taken by any society that does not wish to be subverted by their influence is an unwavering insistence that they comply with that society's reasonable demands or suffer exclusion.

The Certitude Of Salvation

Salvation, the beatitude of the soul in the vision of God, does not come through the Mohammed or adherence to his teachings. At the moment of death the individual soul does not come face to face with Mohammed, but with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who will judge the soul then and there on the moral actions of life. This is reality, not conjecture. Almighty God has revealed it to us that we may know what lies ahead of us. This is reality whether one is Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic or atheist. It is reality for man and woman, for adult and child. It matters not we may *think about* reality; in the end we will have to face it!

The Catholic Church was established by Almighty God for the salvation of all men and outside Christ's Church the salvation of no one is assured. The salvation of no Muslim, therefore, is assured, no matter what Mohammed may have said. The Pope and every Catholic bishop, priest and layman has a duty to work towards the salvation of all men—Muslims included. The truth ought, then, to be proclaimed publicly by the Church in the teeth of Mohammedanism *every day* that no man

⁶ In his opinion piece published in *The Australian* on 19th September 2006, *Talk while we can*, Cardinal George Pell reported an interchange he had with the Lebanese Sunni leader, Mohammed Rashid Kabbani, some three years prior. Kabbani asked him, the Cardinal said, 'to do what I could to protect the rights of the Muslim minority in Australia to live peacefully.' The Cardinal gave him an explicit assurance, and asked him in turn, to work to protect the Christian community in Lebanon. Kabbani's response was it 'wasn't really necessary as they weren't a minority but Arabs like himself.'

should think that he can get to heaven by slaughtering the innocent. The Church's rulers ought to insist publicly that the proper destination of the souls of those Muslims who murder the innocent is not beatitude; it is hell!

In the view of this writer, it is the realisation of the importance of this issue which moved Pope Benedict XVI to quote as he did from the 14th Century Byzantine Emperor last month. In his appeal to the superiority of reason over violence, and of the soul over the body, Manuel II Paleologus outlined precisely what it is that distinguishes Catholicism from Mohammedanism.

Michael Baker

18th October 2006—*St Luke*