

According to news media, Pope Benedict XVI said Tuesday that Islamic holy war was against God's nature and invited Muslims to join in a peaceful cultural dialogue.

In a speech at Regensburg University, Benedict made an unusual reference to jihad, or holy war -- a concept used by today's Islamic extremists to justify suicide bombings and other attacks.

The Pope's attack on Islam and Prophet Muhammad is reminiscent of the early days preceding the wave of crusades that many argue are the cause of many of today's world conflicts. History itself calls Benedict into question. After all what were the Crusades? And in fact it was the Crusades that weakened the Byzantine Empire and allowed Islam to triumph in the Ottoman conquest. And as for quoting the Byzantine emperor -- big deal. That is like asking Billy Graham if the Buddha spoke the absolute truth. He ain't gonna say yes! And what about the Inquisitions? Surely the Pope is in a poor position to argue theologically when his own church has killed millions of its own due to aberrant belief. It would seem obvious that Catholicism is highly intolerant and not given to dialogue.

One must also distinguish the actions of the followers from those of the founder. Muhammed (pbuh) did not advocate the use of the sword and in fact didn't leave Arabia. His followers did, but even there the evidence of forced "conversions" is minimal. However, the Roman Empire forcibly made Christianity the state religion. Once given a taste of all that power I suppose it is difficult for pontiffs even today to give it up.

Jihad in Islam is of two forms: one to defend the faith physically from an attacker (note the word is defend) and one to defend the faith by argument. No where can it be found in the literature written by orthodox Muslim theologians that one is to go out and spread the faith by the sword. Yet, the Catholics exterminated the Albigensians in France. Catholics murdered Huegonots in France. The Counter Reformation was largely carried out by the sword (The Thirty Years War).

Theologically, in Christianity God is so transcendent that He can only be apprehended and comprehended in the Son. In Islam, the same transcendent God can be apprehended and comprehended by the believer through prayer and the Qur'an. The totally Other is far more accessible by man in Islam. And Christianity isn't any more rational than Islam. Both are belief systems. Period. Christians have attempted a synthesis between faith and logic. But Pascal's point still stands: the heart has reasons reason knows not of.

There is no such thing as Islamic terrorism -- any more than there is Christian terrorism. There are terrorists who claim Islam as their religion, just as there are terrorists who claim Catholicism as theirs (the IRA, for example).

What Benedict is doing is playing religious power politics. He is afraid of the growth of Islam. He is afraid of it eroding his power base. He is afraid too many nations may become Islamic states or controlled by Islamic voters -- which would eliminate his chances to re-establish the Holy Roman Empire -- that civil state which would carry out the wishes of the Church (read Benedict). This is nothing but power politics at its ugliest. The Pope is scared. Period.

Talk? If you want to talk, you don't insult the one you want to talk to first. This isn't about talk. It is about power. It is the rallying speech. Look out for the Crusaders. They are amassing.

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