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## The Pope's Big Mistake

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There is a big difference between what is written by journalists and authors in articles and books on one hand, and the words of the senior leader of the Catholics, the largest and most influential Christian church on the other hand.

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Furthermore, there is a big difference between the Catholic Pope and clergymen of other churches whatever their sect may be, and like Islam, Christianity has its own diversity of doctrines and various political positions. The clergy also consists of the simple, the sincere, the religiously devoted, the fundamentalist, the politicized and the extremist.

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The Pope cannot be compared to American fundamentalists such as Robert Grant and Jerry Falwell who insolently do not miss an opportunity to incite hatred against Islam using the opinions and actions of terrorists as a pretext.

The Vatican was blamed more perhaps because Arabs and Muslims had become accustomed to its dialogue and support during difficult times. The Vatican had explicitly backed Muslims and Arabs during major confrontations against Israel, as well as the American government and kept away from supporting Arab Christian groups that conflicted with other Arabs.

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It is true that the Pope aimed to criticize the current manifestation of Islamic Jihad that is also criticized by groups of Muslim scholars as it uses the Holy Quran as a pretext. A significant number of Muslim preachers believe that extremists have hijacked the Quranic concept of Jihad, which is defensive, and have transformed it into a basis to kill. The Pope might be unaware of the fact that those who claim to carry out "Jihad" have actually killed more Muslims than Christians and members of other religions in Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere. This should be obvious to anyone who watches the news and should not be overlooked by a man who spearheads the most associated religion to Islam.

In reference to the Pope's comments, it was reportedly said that Bin Laden was willing to hand over all his money in order for the Pope to drop a verbal bomb such as this one to provoke anger amongst the Muslims in the East and the West for the benefit of Al Qaeda and similar movements that aim to create more religious, sectarian and ethnic conflicts. What the Pope does not know is that for many years, scores of Muslim scholars had joined the fight against extremist groups and denounced the exploitation of Islam as a pretext for terrorist acts, conflicts and wars. Therefore, what the Pope hears regarding terrorist acts carried out by Muslims, and what he hears in the tapes in which terrorists brag about their actions on the pretext of Islamic concepts, does not justify attributing such crimes to this religion. The most recent tape issued by Al Qaeda's Ayman al Zawahiri is in keeping with the Pope's latest sermon. Whilst the former declares an extremist version of Islam that is propagated via the media, the Pope asserts this version of Islam, adopting al Zawahiri's interpretation of the concept of Jihad and claiming that it defines Islam.

Perhaps we should blame those who distort the real meaning of Islam whether they are Muslims or claim to be Muslims more than we blame those who belong to other religions. More than ever before, leaders of religious action are obliged to avoid confrontations now that we live in a world that is full of gunpowder.



**Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed**

the general manager of Al - Arabiya television. Mr. Al Rashed is also the former editor-in-chief of Asharq Al - Awsat, and the leading Arabic weekly magazine, Al Majalla. He is also a senior Columnist in the daily newspapers of Al Madina and Al Bilad. He is a US post-graduate degree in mass communications. He has been a guest on many TV current affairs programs. He is currently based in Dubai.

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