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BaptizedPagan

Saturday, September 16, 2006

Of Benedict, Islam, and Regrets

So as [Pope Benedict's quotations from Manuel II Palaeologus](#) are circulating around the world and causing deep unrest in many Muslim countries, it's time to talk about what Benedict's up to. That's right. Not "accidentally did," but is up to.

It is conceivable, as [John Allen](#) and [even Rocco](#) seem to suggest, that this is a reminder of how non-PC and/or slightly naive with regard to public relations Benedict might be; in the mainstream media, this is being presented as the "goofy ivory-tower professor quoted something interesting he read in his study and was foolish enough to say it out loud" trope. And it is possible that Benedict expected everyone to read his text in full and not draw the conclusions that they are currently drawing in the Muslim world. (One might point out that [he is apologizing](#) that his remarks were misunderstood and/or taken out of context, not that he made them.)

But this is a pope who is nothing if not careful and deliberate in what he chooses to say and when he chooses to say it. And the fact that this is one of his earliest forays into the world of international politics after the end of the summer vacations and *just a few days before* his new Secretary of State took on the job seems a little too well-timed to be simply coincidental. Tarcisio Bertone and Ratzinger were close colleagues for many years at the CDF, and, by all accounts, are substantially of one mind on many theological and political issues. So while I may be wrong, I have to think that this is the beginning of a larger shift within the Vatican, rather than a simple media gaffe. (They say that studying the Vatican's tea leaves is a good preparation for a career in Sinology...)

What I'm far less sure about is what the nature of such a shift, or what Benedict's plan in doing all of this. Was this a test balloon to see how blunt he could be in dialogue with the Muslim world? An attempt to push towards confrontation, at some intellectual level at least, between Christianity and Islam? An intentional provocation designed to confirm the pope's own notions (prejudices?) vis-a-vis Islam? Another aspect that we Americans often forget is the European angle; with Benedict's longtime concerns over the deChristianization of Europe, is this directed primarily at the European community, an attempt to induce Europeans to "choose sides" in some way with regard to their large Muslim populations?

I honestly can't see the rationale clearly yet, and there are more possibilities I no doubt haven't thought of. But having been a student of Ratzinger's theology and practice for a while before he became pope, the one thing I'd be willing to bet on is that this is the start of a program, not a flash in the pan.

posted by BaptizedPagan at [11:27 AM](#)

4 Comments:

My dear friend ... Just one question: do you think that the reaction that happened in the Muslim world is justified? And, related question, that the fault is entirely with the Pope?

[Oh, on my grand tour of the northeast, I'll be in Boston ... we should meet up! Even if it seems our paths seem to have lead us down very divergent paths. Or rather, the way we think. Whateva ... :)]

By [Gashwin](#), at [8:23 PM, September 18, 2006](#)

The Point, More or Less

Can one be repentant and unrepentant at the same time? I'm an (un)repentant Roman Catholic, gay male, pro-life, academic from the Athens of America. Find out here what I'm repenting from, and what I'm not, as well as what I'm reading, cooking, writing, or otherwise using to fill my days.

About Me

Name:BaptizedPagan
Location:Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States

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MASS READINGS

1: [Wis 2:12,17-20](#)

R: [Ps 54:3-8](#)

2: [Jas 3:16-4:3](#)

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