

REMARKS ON THE REGENSBURG CONTROVERSY

Scott Appleby

Four points in ten minutes:

I beg your indulgence and patience with my first two points, which may seem obvious but nonetheless need repeating at this moment in our common history. I think it is important to try to establish two contexts for this panel discussion and, indeed, for any future discussion of our theme today that might occur on this campus and/or be conducted by anyone in this audience who would speak as one coming “from Notre Dame.”

1. Given the volatile and often painful and mutually damaging nature of the public discussions about Islam and Christianity since 9/11, the first context we must insist upon honoring is this: The official Roman Catholic teaching on and attitude toward Islam is wholly positive, constructive, respectful and open-hearted. I would add my own gloss to this statement, namely, “and therefore any interaction of practicing Catholics with Muslims, should be characterized by respect, a spirit of mutual inquiry and understanding and, not least, compassion. Any deviation from this attitude, even if one feels insulted or provoked, is a betrayal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a departure from the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.”

The most recent, fully authoritative Roman Catholic teaching on Islam is found in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, an ecumenical council convened, presided over and its teachings affirmed and promulgated by two popes, John XXIII and Paul VI. Each of their three successors—John Paul I, John Paul II and Benedict XVI—have said nothing to contradict the major texts on Islam found in the documents of Vatican II; indeed, they have only deepened the Church’s commitment to the principles and guidelines established by the Council. The first of these passages comes from *Lumen Gentium*, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, in Chapter 2: “The People of God”:

“But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Moslems: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day.”

Lumen Gentium (21 November 1964)

The second relevant text is found in *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (28 October 1965):

“3. The church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity. They endeavor 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. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet; his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they 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, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.”

2. A second context to establish, and insist upon, is the level of authority and solemnity that are to be accorded to the remarks Pope Benedict XVI offered in his now controversial address to a non-Muslim audience in Regensburg. Put simply, the lecture was not infallible, inerrant, dogmatic or even, strictly speaking, doctrinal. This is worth noting, since many Muslims and Christians—and even some educated Roman Catholic Christians, who should know better—operate under the impression that the pope speaks infallibly whenever he opens his mouth, or at least when he gives a theologically,

philosophically and doctrinally informed lecture like the one in Regensburg. Not so. The doctrine of papal infallibility, defined by the First Vatican Council in 1870, teaches that the protection from serious theological error on faith and morals, promised by Christ to the entire Church and normally exercised by an ecumenical council convened by a pope (such as Vatican II), may be exercised by a pope acting without the benefit of a council **under certain specified conditions**, none of which obtained in the speech at Regensburg, as Pope Benedict XVI has indicated. [In fact, the popes have spoken infallibly, in the way defined by Vatican I, on only two occasions in history, in 1854 (defining the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary) and in 1950 (defining the doctrine of Mary's Bodily Assumption into heaven).

This is not to say that a pope's non-infallible statements are to be ignored, disregarded or received by **Catholics** with the same skeptical or even defiant attitude that might be appropriate when an ordinary Catholic professor delivers, say, some offhand remarks in the Hesburgh Center. Even though Joseph Ratzinger is an academically trained theologian and a professor, among other things, as pope he is to be accorded the extraordinary measure of respect and deference appropriate to the Vicar of Christ—even when he is delivering a lecture for a specific occasion rather than addressing the universal church on the subject of a doctrine revealed by Christ.

Nonetheless, a pope can and does make mistakes when he is not speaking infallibly or solemnly. Indeed, as has been widely noted, the text of Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg lecture included at least one significant error of fact. Verse 256, of sura 2 {"Al-Baqara"} of the Qur'an teaches that "There is no compulsion in religion. " The Holy Father stated that this is a Meccan chapter, i.e. one of the suras of the early period, when Muhammad was still powerless and under threat. Were that so, Muhammad would have had a practical, not necessarily a principled, reason for prohibiting Muslims from conversions by force or by coercion: they were in no position to do so, and the wiser military tactic under those conditions was to lay low, biding their time. And one could then argue, as the pope inadvertently implied, that when Muslims are in charge and not

powerless, they are enjoined to force conversions. But this is an inaccurate reading of the Qur'an.

The sura in question prohibiting coercion in matters of religion was delivered by Muhammad when he was in Medina, in a position of strength. Most classical as well as contemporary Muslim theologians and commentators view the “no compulsion in religion” verse as central to the Muslim view on conversion and regard the few Qur'anic verses that seem to contradict this verse as exceptions speaking to a specific context. In short, Pope Benedict selected an extreme position on the interpretation of free and coerced conversion in Islam, and implied that it was the mainstream position by quoting the 14th century Byzantine emperor Paleologus to that effect and not effectively refuting or correcting his source-text.

Which leads to point **number 3**: If the pope was intending to “open a dialogue with Islam” with this speech, as the Vatican claimed after the fact, one must acknowledge with humility that this was a less than artful, even naïve, way to do so. Less than artful because too opaque, too refined, too academic a lecture for a topic this volatile: one opens a dialogue, it may be expected, with a clearer set of questions for one's interlocutor, rather than a backdoor slight intended to provoke reaction. Naïve because one cannot believe that the pope intended to spark a violent backlash, naïve because the world has not the patience or erudition for a nuanced professorial lecture, and/or naïve because the pope should have anticipated that the sensation-hungry international media would make that brief reference to Islam in a longer speech about something else, *the world headline*. (Just as I can see tomorrow's *Observer* headline now: “Appleby calls pope artless and naïve”).

Question for the damage control/media relations folks in the Vatican: The moment it became clear that the “knock-the-chip-off-my-shoulder” Muslims around the world were using the speech to stoke their sensation-hungry rage, would not it have been shrewder to claim that the pope's speech was not intended as a papal statement of any kind on contemporary Islam and violence, but instead a call for reason and reasonableness in religion at this sensitive time? And wouldn't it have been even shrewder to add the coda

that the great medieval scholastics such as St. Thomas Aquinas turned to their Muslim counterparts, as valued and challenging conversation partners on contested philosophical matters, precisely because the latter were eager students of The Philosopher Aristotle, the paragon of reason? Islam's respect for reason and rational discourse, indeed to religio-legal reasoning and jurisprudence, is well known. Acknowledging that Islamic legacy would have been a strong way to open a dialogues on faith, reason and coercion.

Point 4. If the pope is to pronounce upon Islam and violence, which inevitably he must, may he always do so after and before apologies for the many historical cases, up to and including the present, when Christians, including Roman Catholics, have distorted the teachings of Christ as a justification for coercion in religion and violence of the most dehumanizing kind. To his credit, Benedict has repeatedly acknowledged and lamented violence committed in the name of Christianity. One of the hallowed titles of the Holy Father is "the servant of the servants of God." In this crucial business of leading the world into a peaceful inter-religious, cross-cultural dialogue, humbling oneself, as a servant who humbles himself to wash the feet of the other, seems the relevant example from Christ's life. Only in this way will reasonable Muslims, who number in the hundreds of millions, be truly invited to become genuine allies, not adversaries. And only with the hearts and minds and steel convictions of such Muslims will any war on Islamic radicalism and violence be won.

Scott Appleby

September 28, 2006

“The Catholic Church and Islam: Allies or Adversaries?”
Hesburgh Center for International Studies
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I am a historian of Western Christianity in Reformation era, not a specialist on Islam or Catholic-Muslim relations. I would like to make four points, concerning, respectively 1) the main thrust of Benedict’s talk; 2) the continuity between his remarks that caused the uproar and previous statements addressed to Muslims during his pontificate; 3) the question of the Catholic Church and Islam as allies or adversaries; and 4) what the best institutional analogue for Islam might be within Christianity.

1. Benedict’s talk is emphatically not about Islam per se. It is a concise, challenging reflection on a Catholic understanding of the relationship between faith and reason seen historically and inter-religiously, in terms recognizable from Augustine to John Paul II’s *Fides et ratio*, above all in the context of the modern university. The upshot? Catholicism insists on the reasonableness of God and the coinherence of faith and reason; lose that relationship *either* by making reason no more than scientific rationalism, *or* by making God’s will utterly transcendent and faith entirely divorced from reason, and pathologies ensue. One such pathology is the widespread, modern Western insistence that the exercise of reason has nothing to do with religion, morality, or God; another is any appeal to God’s will and religious faith used to justify violence.

2. Far from being hostile to Islam, Benedict has repeatedly reached out to Muslims and Muslim leaders, distinguishing between Islam and the use of violence in the name of religion. On April 25, 2005, the day after he became pope, he addressed delegates of other Christian and non-Christian religious traditions in Rome. He said:

I am *particularly grateful* for the presence in our midst of members of the Muslim community, and I *express my appreciation* for the growth of dialogue between Muslims and Christians, both at the local and international level. . . . The world in which we live is often marked by conflicts, violence and war, but it earnestly longs for peace, peace which is above all a gift from God, peace for which we must pray without ceasing. *Yet peace is also a duty to which all peoples must be committed, especially those who profess to belong to religious traditions* [my emphases].

Note: positive toward Muslims, negative on violence, commitment to peace an imperative. In the summer of 2005 at World Youth Day in Cologne, he took up a similar theme in an address to “dear and esteemed Muslim friends”:

I am certain that I echo your own thoughts when I bring up one of our concerns as we notice the spread of terrorism. I know that many of you have firmly rejected, also publicly, in particular *any connection between your faith and terrorism* and have condemned it. I am grateful to you for this, for it contributes to the climate of trust that we need.

Terrorist activity is continually recurring in various parts of the world, plunging people into grief and despair. Those who instigate and plan these attacks evidently wish to poison our relations and destroy trust, making use of all means, including religion, to oppose every attempt to build a peaceful and serene life together.

Thanks be to God, *we agree on the fact that terrorism of any kind is a perverse and cruel choice which shows contempt for the sacred right to life and undermines the very foundations of civil coexistence.*

Benedict frankly acknowledged the historical record of frequent conflicts between Christians and Muslims, “with *both sides* invoking the Name of God, as if fighting and killing the enemy could be pleasing to him. *The recollection of these sad events should fill us with shame, for we know only too well what atrocities have been committed in the name of religion*” [my emphases]. Again: positive towards Muslims, negative toward violence (whether Muslim *or* Christian) as opposed to God’s will, and an imperative to peace. In Cologne, addressing Muslim leaders, Benedict explicitly broached the issue of “any connection between your faith and terrorism.” No reference to any fourteenth-century sources. But clearly, it would seem, the repetition of a theme suggested the day after he became pope.

3. Are the Catholic Church and Islam allies or adversaries? For multiple reasons, the question seems calculated to evoke no simple answer. It’s a question that Benedict himself seems to be asking repeatedly, most recently in Regensburg. Implicitly, he seems to be saying, in reaching out to Muslims repeatedly, that *he* very much wants them to be Abrahamic allies—on issues ranging from the opposition to abortion and pornography to wariness of secularism—and is wondering whether *they* want to be allies with the Church. But he seems also to be saying: such alliance presupposes an unequivocal renunciation of violence and terrorism. I do not think one can plausibly argue that Benedict’s statements or actions, taken as a whole and viewed fairly, suggest that he is tarring all Muslims with the brush of violence (although some irresponsible journalists made it seem so two weeks ago). But the pope *is* saying, forcefully and repeatedly, that those who tar themselves with that brush *cannot* be allies with the Catholic Church.

4. A final point: a major challenge in the quest for greater understanding, mutual dialogue, respect, and the building of a relationship as allies derives from the nature of Islam. As a historian of Christianity, it seems to me that the decentralized character of the Muslim world seen as a whole is quite unlike the Catholic Church, with its hierarchical diversity-in-unity, and much more like Protestant Christianity, with a huge spectrum of different traditions and sensibilities represented. If this is so, it makes the question even of official, Vatican dialogue with “Islam” much more daunting than sometimes seems assumed. The Church maintains formal ecumenical dialogues with numerous different Protestant churches and traditions, none of whom speak for the others. What does this imply for its relations with “Islam”? The reality seems to be that while the vast majority of Muslims denounce violence as a perversion of their faith, not all do; but the sociological realities of the religion prevent the former from exercising any authority or control over the latter. Categorizing as “terrorists” those who regard

themselves as true Muslim believers does not change their convictions. I think Benedict recognizes this; and I think we should as well.

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28 September 2006

On the remarks of Benedict XVI at Regensburg

I'd like to begin by thanking the Kroc and Nanovic Institutes for sponsoring this event. We are here because of a controversy aroused by a speech, a controversy by turns tragic, telling, ominous, even absurd. We are not here because of the speech itself. Yet I dare so no papal speech for many years has been so scrutinized in retrospect. Of course the speech and the reaction are not unrelated, but there is merit in distinguishing them before we figure out how they were related.

I'm going to address the speech, and do so around three assertions. First, the pope identifies his task as "a critique of modern reason from within." Second, in making his critique Benedict offers specific interpretations of Islam, which have become controversial, and Christianity, which have not been controversial. My focus will be on the latter. Third, the setting where these remarks were delivered – a university -- indicates the context in which Benedict XVI wanted them to be understood, and underscores their importance for us here at this university.

The task: critique

The Holy Father's main target is a truncated view of reason he believes operates in the secular west. Benedict blames this misplaced view of reason on what he calls a de-Hellenization that's been at work in Europe's last 5 centuries. He identifies three stages in that de-Hellenization: 1) The Protestant Reformation, whose approach culminated in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant; 2) Protestant liberal theology embodied by Adolf von Harnack; and 3) Contemporary awareness of cultural pluralism that has led to calls to inculturate the Gospel, a call which can tend to relativize the all-important synthesis with Hellenism so decisive, he believes, for Christian history. This diagnosis is part of an attack on what Benedict sees as a contemporary "dictatorship of relativism" operative in the western secular academy.

The Holy Father claims he offers his critique in order not to denigrate reason, but to broaden it. He wants to overcome what he sees as a debilitating self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically verifiable. He thus identifies his task as "a critique of modern reason from within" so that "we can become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today." Thus, though he mentions Manuel II Paleologus' characterization that Islam's view of God allows God to be unreasonable, this is more of an aside than a main point. The pope's target was not Islam.

Characterizing Islam and Christianity

Benedict characterizes Islam and Christianity in making his critique. It is in the effort to assert that violence is opposed to reason that he raises Islam, and then says, perhaps linking the propensity to violence within Islam with its a-rational approach to God, "But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent." As Rashied Omar has so carefully just explained, Benedict over-generalizes "Muslim teaching" in making his point. I would call this "cherry-picking" the evidence, selectively choosing to simplify a complex reality for a particular purpose.

Easily overlooked has been that Benedict also characterizes Christianity. In emphasizing what he celebrates, namely, an "inner rapprochement between biblical faith and Greek

philosophical inquiry,” he asserts that Christianity took its “historically decisive character in Europe.”

As someone who tries to understand the spread of Christianity, I would stress at the same time that whatever “inner rapprochement” occurred, it has always already been one that has been inter-religious and intercultural. Even in the first four centuries after Christ, a great deal of the most important theological reflection shaping doctrinal developments emerged from North Africa, Egypt, and Asia Minor. And from its origins Christianity has been in dialogue with Judaism, and later Islam as well as Zoroastrianism, not to mention myriad other smaller religious traditions. To give but one telling example, David Barrett says there might have been 12 million Christians in Persia up to the year 1000. Their ways of being Christian depended on roots in East Syriac Christianity, whose richness we increasingly appreciate, but whose underpinnings, though arguably Hellenic, differed from those shaping Christianity centered in Rome and Constantinople.

Finally, contemporary Christianity grows most vitally where one could argue that the de-Hellenization the Pope discerns is not an issue -- because Hellenization did not occur.

The setting

Finally, we should note that Benedict spoke at a German university, and began by nostalgically evoking the intimacy he enjoyed as a young professor of theology at another German university. He recalled the faculty 4 decades ago “working in everything on the basis of a single rationality.” This reminds one that then Father Joseph Ratzinger was profoundly shaped by the 1968 student unrest and looks back wistfully at the pre-1968 German university.

One might ask two questions about this nostalgia. First, does he idealize the German university before 1968? I imagine such places having undergone profound tumult in the three decades before he arrived, having lost their Jewish members, for instance, due to the horrors of the war and the Shoah. A rather ardent anti-Marxism likely also was in place, at least officially. Might then the “single rationality” Benedict recalls have been related to the homogeneity of the post-war faculty?

Second, one might question, as I do, whether one needs to have an agreed-upon “single rationality” in place *before* such dialogues ensue. I believe, to the contrary, that practices like inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue can generate a practical reason or “logic of practice” discernible over time. Such practices have their own logic that often cannot be articulated or identified unless in retrospect. Indeed, I believe that demanding certain kinds of ground rules (like a “single rationality”) beforehand can make dialogue hard to start at all.

Yet Benedict’s challenge to a university like ours remains. He closed his remarks with these words: “It is to this great logos, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university.” The Pope’s challenge to universities thus remains, and it is right on target. I hope that we here at Notre Dame take it up.

Pope Benedict XVI's Comments on Islam in Regensburg: A Muslim Response

A. Rashied Omar*

(Input at panel discussion on Pope Benedict in Regensburg: The Catholic Church and Islam: Allies or Adversaries, University of Notre Dame, September 28, 2006)

I would like to begin with an apology. I would like apologize to my Catholic brothers and sisters for the undignified and deplorable manner in which some of my co-religionists have responded to the comments on Islam of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, during his lecture at the University of Regensburg/Germany on September 12, 2006.

I condemn the killing of an Italian nun and her bodyguard in Somalia and the firebombing attacks on churches in the West Bank and Gaza. The cowardly and senseless gunning down of Sister Leonella Sgorbati and her Somalian bodyguard, and the desecration of churches in Palestine are abominations that clearly violate Islamic ethics which call for respect for the sanctity of life, the holiness of all places of worship and for dignified responses to hurtful remarks (Qur'an 24:55).

It is heartening to learn that some Muslim organizations in the United States are raising funds to repair the destruction to the churches, and the Hamas prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, Ismail Haniya, had also unequivocally condemned the attack on churches. A similar condemnation of the killing of Sister Sgorbati was issued by the Union of Islamic Courts in Somalia and they claim to have arrested a suspect.

We are living in volatile and distressing times and Muslim must not become weary of saying over and over again, loudly and unequivocally, that violence and hatred

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is contrary to the teachings of Islam. And the news media must be responsible enough to make sure our voices are heard.

I welcome Pope Benedict's invitation to engage in a dialogue about the critical issues on faith and reason that he has raised during his lecture at the University of Regensburg. It is within this spirit of a rational and respectful dialogue of cultures and religions called for by Pope Benedict that I offer the following responses to his comments on Islam.

The chief focus of the Pope's Regensburg academic lecture was not Islam: rather, it was aimed at the Western academy and the trajectory of the Western intellectual tradition. The Pope's main argument was that those versions of the Christian faith that have embraced Greek philosophy and thus compatible with reason should not be marginalized but ought to have a central place in the Western academy. The Pope was therefore not referring primarily to Islam but rather criticizing the Western academy for having divorced itself from divine reason. This central thesis could have been satisfactorily argued without reference to Islam.

The intriguing questions then remains: Why did Pope Benedict choose to make comments on Islam in his Regensburg lecture? What purpose did the Paleologus quote serve within the overall argument of his lecture?

We cannot know the mind of another speaker in terms of motivations to include or not include this or that in a speech. Moreover, reading the mind of a Pope is an especially risky business – even more perilous if done by a non-Catholic! What we can legitimately analyze, however, is the function served by certain remarks within the logic

of the speech, and the outcome of the speech as a whole within the social, cultural, and political context of the times.

In my reading the reference to Islam in the Regensburg lecture is not coincidental. Rather it serves to support a subsidiary thesis advanced by Pope Benedict. God in Muslim belief, according to the Pope, was “absolutely transcendent.” Such an utterly transcendental Muslim God is not therefore “bound up with any of our categories even that of rationality.” Muslims, so the sub-text of this argument goes, do not believe in a God who embraces human categories – reason and rationality among them.

A fair inference is that Islam is at base irrational, which would explain why it seems so unreasonable to its contemporary detractors. In short, the Pope seems to be saying, there are theological foundations for the propensity of Muslims towards violence and forced or coerced conversions.

The implications of this argument are alarming. For what Pope Benedict seems to suggest is that the categories “Christianity” and “Islam” are mutually exclusive. In other words, reason and rationality can have no place in Islam, whereas they are primary to and in fact pervade Christianity. Please forgive me, but to Muslim ears this smacks of triumphalism.

Sometimes people try to bolster their own positions without providing an argument, but by merely casting their adversaries in a negative light. I think this is how the use of the Paleologus quotation played out in the view of Muslim scholars.

Within this context then the citation from Paleologus makes good sense. It is not irrelevant but central to Pope Benedict’s thesis on Islam. The Paleologus citation is a platform for the rest of the argument. If I am reading the Pope’s view correctly, it makes

for a very honest point of conversation, but one that is fraught with risks. Since this position also involves misrepresentations of Islamic doctrine, the venue and timing of such dialogue is critical. While the speech was delivered at a university, its publicity took it outside the cerebral corridors of academia and into a tense and poisoned world of politics and anxiety.

But how does Pope Benedict arrive at his conclusions?

Using the Paleologus citation as a springboard, Pope Benedict develops an overly simplistic picture of the complex and diverse Muslim theologies on the nature of God. Rather than take account of the diverse and often competing traditions the Pope selectively retrieved from a vast Muslim theological tradition one viewpoint, thereby reducing Islam to one voice of a multi-vocal, centuries-long internal argument.

Specifically, the Pope Benedict invokes the German professor Theodore Khoury who in turn uses the French Scholar, Roger Analdes's interpretation of an eleventh century Spanish Muslim scholar Abu Muhammad `Ali Ibn Hazm's (994 - 1064 C.E.) theology of God: "Ibn Hazm went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and that nothing would oblige him to reveal the truth to you. Were it God's will, we would even have to practice idolatry." Pope Benedict used this isolated quote to illustrate his point that Islam, because of its utter transcendentalism, is beyond the realm of the rational.

The question then arises: Is this an accurate depiction of classical or contemporary Muslim theologies of God?

With due respect to the considerable erudition of Pope Benedict, his portrayal of Muslim theology is woefully inaccurate. Quite to the contrary of what the Pope asserts,

from its very beginning in the seventh century, Muslim theology was comprised of various contending schools. A recurrent theme in the classical Muslim literature is the struggle of reconciling the notion of a transcendent God, whose likeness is unrivalled, with that of an immanent God who in the words of the Qur'an is closer to us than our jugular vein (50:16). The varied Muslim responses to this challenge have spawned a number of different theological trends, such as the ultra rationalists, the M`utazili, the Ash`ari and the Maturidi. The ultra rationalist school of theology is best represented by the twelfth century scholar Abul Walid Ibn Rushd (1128-1198 C.E.) known in the west as Averroes. Ibn Rushd and the Mu'tazili school of theology argued that one could reach the equivalent guidance to that represented in divine revelation by solely and exclusively relying on the rational capacity that has been endowed to us by God. The other two theological schools, the Asha'ri and the Maturidi can be located on the spectrum of rational defenders of tradition. So too is Shia theology, deeply entrenched in a rationalist defense of faith. The nominalists are certainly represented by ninth century scholar Ahmed ibn Hanbal (780-855 C.E.) and later, Ibn Hazm who believed that we do not have instruments to interpret the divine and hence we must submit to pure belief.

Unlike the extreme position of Ibn Hazm, most of the Muslim theological tendencies seek to balance between transcendence and immanence. Classical Muslim theologians sought to capture in a neat formula the seemingly antithetical positions contained in the Qur'an. Moreover both the primary Islamic theological sources, the Qur'an, and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad support such a sense of balance (mizan). For example, the Qur'an teaches Muslims that God is closer to the person than

his/her jugular vein” (50:16). And furthermore, “Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God.” (2:109).

Contemporary Muslim theologies are a hybrid of classical Muslim schools such as Mu`tazili, Ash`ari, Maturidi, and Shi`i with further adaptation, all a very far cry from the monochromatic view depicted by Pope Benedict in his Regensburg lecture.

In conclusion, I return to the key initial question: why did Pope Benedict bring any of this material on Islam – certain to provoke reaction – into a speech primarily about the Western intellectual tradition? The Pope called for a dialogue here on faith and reason, and the implications of their entanglement with violence in the world today. Opening the door to Muslims, Christians and secularists as he did by constructing a comparative framework for analysis invites us all to reflect on this critical issue of our time. However injudicious his portrayal of Islam may have been, the Pope's invitation to dialogue should be welcomed by Muslims and indeed all people of faith and of conscience. Such a dialogue should however not be restricted to the theological roots of violence but must move on to address the asymmetries of power and maldistribution of wealth in this world in which religion is so heavily implicated. Finding the theological roots of violence is one part of the problem, identifying the political and economic causes is a greater imperative

We live in a fragile world and some would argue on the precipice of a global catastrophe. Leaders of all faith communities should not allow themselves to be distracted from the task at hand of building bridges of honesty, truth and trust through a true and meaningful dialogue with each other. The first task in such an endeavor is to ensure that we have accurate representations of each other that lend integrity to our work.

Failing to do so, would mean that religion and religious actors only add to the dehumanization that surrounds us.

Muslim leaders have an especially onerous challenge of condemning violent overreactions and not allowing misguided individuals who acted in a thoroughly reprehensible and depraved way in response to Pope Benedict's remarks on Islam to speak on behalf of our communities.

Despite our current predicament I am hopeful that Catholics and Muslims will weather this latest hiccup in their relationship thanks in large part to the strong bridges that were built between our two communities by Pope John-Paul II. These strong and firm links will hopefully help Catholics and Muslims to brave the aftermath of this regrettable episode.

REMARKS ON THE REGENSBURG CONTROVERSY

W.David Solomon

Like many of you, I suspect, I was shocked by the response to the Pope's lecture at Regensburg. A friend had sent me by email an English version of the talk a day after it was presented and had encouraged me to look at it as another interesting contribution to Pope Benedict's long-term project of reflecting on modern conceptions of reason. In first reading through the talk, I barely noticed the quotation that has caused so much trouble. Indeed, when the protests following on the lecture first emerged, I assumed that the Pope had given two talks at Regensburg—and that I had simply missed the talk in which he allegedly referred in an offensive manner to the Islamic world. When I was convinced that the talk I read was the offending talk, I went back and read it again, looking for what I had missed. Even on this second reading, knowing the reaction the talk had prompted in much of the Islamic world, I was struck by how strained the reading of this document must have been to produce the violent consequences it provoked.

I am not an expert on international politics, on comparative religion, or on theology. I am trained as a moral philosopher, however, and I am accustomed to the close readings of texts. I would like to submit that a close reading of this text should make us hesitate before we accept the verdict on its offensiveness circulated in the days and weeks after it was presented. It is shocking that virtually none of the press reports of the talk paid serious attention to the real content of the talk. This might not seem surprising since it is a dense and measured piece of philosophical reflection, drawing on many philosophical resources in order to address (once more) an ancient set of philosophical issues centered on the relation of faith and reason. Although discussions of these issues have been commonplaces of philosophical discourse for millennia, they are hardly common fare on the pages of the popular press which played such an important role in contributing to the violent response to this address. Nor are they issues easy to popularize without over-simplifying them in ways that remove the very features of them that have engaged the interest of the most profound thinkers on faith, reason, and ethics throughout the centuries. Even granted that there are these obstacles to the popular presentation of the Pope's concerns in this address, however, when the stakes are this high, the press should have done a better job.

The popular press has tended to focus on two closely related questions about the Regensburg Lecture. First, some have raised questions about whether the offense given to the Islamic world was intentional or merely a slip. Was the Pope's use of the offending quotation intentionally vicious or merely insensitive? Others have focused on questions about the real intent of the talk. What was he really trying to do? Draw a line in the sand? Rally the tattered remains of the European Christian world to confront Islam? Provoke a conflict with the Islamic world for some reason associated with the goals or ambitions of the Catholic church? These questions all presuppose, of course, that the lecture contains elements that should be regarded as offensive to Islam.

I would like to suggest that we might instead read the document straight. Instead of investigating (or speculating on) Pope Benedict's motives or deep intentions, we should simply look at what he says. Of course, it is part of a popular postmodern perspective on texts that there is no straight reading of them. The claim is often made

that every reading of a text is an interpretation. While there is no doubt something to this claim, even the most radical of postmodernists must, at some point in an encounter with texts, read them innocently. If one didn't, one couldn't be so confident of the dangers of such an innocent reading. In any event, I maintain that there is a straight reading of this document and that, if we wish to understand the Pope's real intentions in giving the Regensburg lecture, we should attend to this straight reading.

The offending quotation is actually in the introduction to the lecture, an introduction focused largely on some nostalgic comments by Pope Benedict on his early years as a faculty member at the university. He has especially fond memories of a time when disciplinary specialization was less prominent in the university and conversations across disciplinary and theological boundaries were more frequent and more acceptable. Deep disputes among competing religious traditions or between some religious tradition and atheism were negotiated in a reasonable and non-violent manner. This leisurely introduction is followed by the main body of the lecture which gives a dense account of the 2000 year history in the European world of the interaction of faith and reason. The most significant event in this history is the convergence of Greek rationalism and Biblical faith to form the Christian community with a commitment to the slogan, "acting unreasonably is contrary to God's nature."

The bulk of the Pope's narrative, however, concerns a series of three modern attacks on this convergence and the idea that the central claims of Greek rationalistic philosophy are compatible with (indeed essential to) the living out of the Christian gospel. The first attack emerges in the Protestant Reformation in which it is claimed that in the early church Greek thought swamped the gospel message: philosophy trumped history. From this historical claim it is alleged to follow that the accretions of Greek philosophical thought have to be scoured away from the Gospel truths they are obscuring. The second line of attack comes from the perspective of liberal theology spawned in the Enlightenment and is best exemplified by the thought of the greatest of German Enlightenment thinkers, Immanuel Kant. This Enlightenment perspective reduced the realm of reason to the merely scientific and made the project of reconciling Greek philosophical ambition with the Christian message, which had been central to the philosophical and theological thought of the first millennium of Christian thought, impossible to achieve. Finally, there has been a third attack from the perspective of contemporary cultural pluralism that worries about whether the ancient merger of Greek rationalism and Gospel Christianity involves a kind of cultural imperialism on the part of the ancient Greeks. The companion worry is that, when we evangelize the world in the name of a theology that partakes of this Greek rationalism, we too are participating in a kind of cultural imperialism.

Pope Benedict's conclusion from this compressed piece of cultural history is that we need to recover a sense of reason that will be true to the classical ideal—and also capable of doing justice to the real ambitions of modern science and the yearning of modern men and women for autonomy and freedom. The main body of the lecture is connected to his opening nostalgic remarks by his claim that it is the task of the modern university—not just the modern Catholic university, but any university worthy of the name—to enter into a dialogue of cultures in which this goal is pursued.

Who is being attacked in this lecture? Is it the Islamic world? Or is it contemporary science? Or perhaps there is some other enemy. One must say in the end

that it appears to be all of us at the university. The Pope feels that the modern university has lost that interdisciplinary character which he recalls so fondly from his earlier years at Regensburg and which makes genuine dialogue across traditions possible. It is surely certain features of the modern university that make it difficult for us to carry out the project of recovering the classical sense of reason. One way in which one rejects the tradition of reason in religious dialogue, of course, is by resorting to force or violence in seeking converts to a religious tradition. Insofar as Christianity (or indeed Islam) has resorted to violence in these cases, it has abandoned the appeal to reason that Pope Benedict sees as the finest fruit of the convergence of the best of pagan Greek rationalism and the religions of the book—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—that emerge into the Mediterranean basin in the millennium around the birth of Christ.

His attack on the replacement of the classical notion of freedom by a more restricted modern notion is not unique to him. In developing this critique he follows a line of argument that has also been followed (in quite different ways, of course) by modern thinkers as diverse as Christopher Dawson and Jacques Maritain, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor. This line of argument was also at the heart of the condemnation of philosophical modernism in the Papal encyclical, *Pascendi*, promulgated by Pope Pius X. The philosophical and theological issues raised by the Pope in this lecture are of the first importance and are deeply controversial. His historical interpretations, especially of the significance of the Enlightenment conception of reason, will be rejected by many, perhaps most, contemporary scholars. It is simply unfair, however, to neglect this straight reading of the text in order to speculate about the Pope's possible motives for including a single quotation from an obscure 14th century text in his introductory remarks.

In reflecting on the response to Pope Benedict's Regensburg lecture, it is difficult to determine which is more dangerous—the ignorant and lazy reporting of the talk by the popular press unwilling and perhaps unable to understand it or the cynical use of it by political forces to foment unrest and to serve narrow and destructive sectarian goals. The ultimate irony of the upshot of the speech is that a beautifully conceived talk—one which focuses on the dangers to modern culture of the loss of the classical conception of reason and its impact on the possibility of genuine dialogue across cultures—should provoke precisely the kind of violent and irrational response Pope Benedict was warning about. Pope Benedict's diagnosis of our modern illness seems to have brought about further and more severe symptoms of that very disease. We may doubt whether those who threatened violence against the Pope—or the Christian church more generally—were aware of how their actions provided further confirmation of the truth of his message.

In defending the Pope's talk, however, we must admit that the Pope's message in this lecture is one that is difficult to promulgate. He is accusing modern men and women of being insufficiently attentive to the demands of reason—and his accusation is put forward in the idiom of rational argumentation. He accompanies that accusation with a brilliant, but brief, history of how we came to suffer from this widespread unwillingness to listen to reason. If he is right then many in the audience for his remarks will be unwilling to respond to his remarks "reasonably." Indeed, they will retreat from reason altogether and respond by speculating about his motives, threatening violence, or simply expressing their attitudinal reactions to his talk. I suspect that Pope Benedict takes little comfort from the fact that the cultural reaction to his talk tends to confirm its central

thesis. I think that we must take him at his word when he says that this lecture was intended to promote a rich dialogue among religions and cultures. If we can accuse him of anything, it is of a certain kind of culpable innocence in supposing that his message might provoke a reasonable debate.

The university is, of course, the place where one would expect such a reasonable response to take place. Hopefully we can see panel discussions at Notre Dame as instances of such a reasonable response. We should recall, however, that things are not so well with contemporary universities. Pope Benedict's opening remarks in this address, which nostalgically reflect on his early career at the University of Regensburg, clearly propose a well-ordered university faculty, free of defensiveness and stultifying academic specialization, and unafraid to address the great questions of human life, as a model for the kind of dialogue of cultures he finds essential for navigating the dangers of modern life. The nostalgic tone of his remarks, however, betrays his deep worries about whether the contemporary university is up to the task. The university, too, has been infected by the many modern maladies of reason. This is nowhere more evident than in the retreat of philosophy and theology departments from engaging—in the name of reason—in the great moral, religious, and cultural debates of our time.

Here, Pope Benedict's thesis in the Regensburg lecture connects to themes prominent in his work over the last two decades—themes that explore the wide-spread acceptance, as he sees it, of relativistic and postmodern conceptions of truth within philosophy and theology departments of the university. These larger issues take us some distance from the particular concerns of the Regensburg address, but they provide part of the background for his concerns in it. We can note, however, that his concerns about the dialogue of cultures expressed in this talk are of a piece with his worries about the deepest features of the modern university. Pope John Paul II's great encyclical on Catholic universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, reminds us that the university emerges from the "heart of the church." It is sometimes said, indeed, that Catholic universities are where the Church does its thinking. Among the many lessons the Regensburg lecture is intended to teach, I suspect, is that a healthy dialogue among religious traditions and among cultures requires healthy universities. For those of us who teach in the philosophy or theology departments of the University of Notre Dame, a university that aspires to be the finest Catholic university in the world, this lesson gives us both a standard by which we can measure our accomplishments and a clear goal at which we can aim. It also gives us some sense of the loss that will be incurred if we fail.