

## THE REGENSBURG LECTURE BY BENEDICT XVI

### A Critical Analysis

1. This session aims at a critical analysis of the lecture delivered by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg, Germany, on September 12<sup>th</sup> 2006.
2. The quote which was sensationalized by the media and infuriated the Muslim community around the world was: “Show me just what Mohammed (PBUH) brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” (7<sup>th</sup> Conversation. The Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus)
3. Emperor Manuel II Paleologus further remarked: “Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. “God”, he says, “is not pleased by blood – and not acting reasonably 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....” (Controversy 3 b-c; Theodore Khoury, pp.144-145)
4. In the footnote of the papal text, was a reference to Controversy VII, 2 c: Theodore Khoury, pp.142-143. Footnote 3 states “In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that his sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur’an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point, I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic.”
5. Due consideration must be given to the papal text. The text began with an explanation of the Greek Philosophy in relation to the Biblical Faith. The text explains the *logos* of St. John’s Prologue: “*LOGOS* means reason & word – “a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason.” “Not to act “with *logos*” is contrary to God’s nature.”
6. The papal texts mentioned the climate of **intellectualism** of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas Vs the **voluntarism** of the Middle Ages (*Dun Scotus*) in Europe which claims that God is beyond human reason. The papal text elaborates: “Rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continued to act lovingly on our behalf.” The papal text cites Romans 12:1 which affirms that “worship is in harmony with the eternal Word and with the reason.”

7. The 16th century REFORMATION in Europe suggests that FAITH IS JUST PHILOSOPHY which is more “an articulation of the faith based on an alien system of thought” that is, metaphysics. The proponents of *Sola Scriptura* (only scripture) “sought faith in its pure, primordial form, as originally found in biblical Word.” This is a line of reasoning that seeks to a mathematical understand of how matter works and uses nature efficiently, to the extent of how nature can be exploited for our purposes. This way of reasoning depends on “verification” through conducting experiments (do a lab test) - a scientific mentality inherent in science & technology.
8. This way of reasoning reduced theology to “a science” taught along other subjects in the university. There is no place for ethics and religion that seeks to understand the bigger questions of the meaning of life in relation to the divine. [“Theology...as an inquiry into the rationality of faith.”] It also reduced the human persons to “my subjective experience.” E.g., “This is what I think and feel is right and so it must be right.”
9. The papal texts touches on the modern reasoning in **Cultural Pluralism**: there are many cultures today and therefore the message of the bible must be taken out and away from the Greek culture (which emphasized the importance of reason) in order to present it anew thro’ the cultures of today’s society. Then we can “return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate in anew in their own particular milieux.”
10. **Modern Scientific REASON**: In the Western world, it is widely held that only positivistic reason and the forms of philosophy based on scientific reasoning are universally valid.” “Yet the world’s profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine ... is incapable of entering into dialogue of cultures.”
11. The TABLET, 23 Sept 2006, carried comments that the papal text contains **mistakes** in quoting Emperor Manuel II Paleologus: (a) “He quoted directly an insult hurled by the Byzantine emperor at the character of Mohammad.” [The TABLET, 23 Sept 2006: 6]
12. Secondly, the Tablet adds: the papal text “carries a misidentification of a passage from the Qur’an as early rather than late in the career of Mohammad and an undeveloped understanding of the emergence of *jihad* and its abuse, partially based on misdating the passage. The medieval text also leaves the general impression that Muslims do not employ reason as a tool for Qur’anic exegesis. Written after three centuries of Crusades, which the Byzantine emperor and his Persian interlocutor might have agreed were dismal failures, the text is representative of the kinds of accusations Christians often made against Muslims.” [The TABLET, 23 Sept 2006: 6]
13. Furthermore, “If anything, the episode, set off by the papal address at Regensburg, demonstrated that, even after decades of gestures of good will, improved relations and dialogue, not far below the surface are the effects of the longer legacy of mutual polemics, wars and

- occupation – namely hostility and suspicion.” [The TABLET, 23 Sept 2006: 6]
14. **Professor Mona Siddiqui**, Director of the Centre for the Study of Islam, Glasgow University, in her article entitled ***ON THE PATH TO MUTUAL RESPECT***, remarks: “The ease by which marchers are mobilized and threats directed are symptoms of a community not only feeling under siege but slightly reveling in their victim status. From Cairo to London, we have seen calls for apologies for a comment that could have been consigned to the annals of papal intellectualism; instead the comment became yet another mark of mutual distrust and suspicion between some Muslims and the Western world. This has damaged no one but it has made Islam appear like a complete idiosyncrasy in the West. Islam is a major world religion which doesn’t need this kind of weak defense. Why some Muslims are so quick to resort to violent acts may be more about political self-interest than any genuine search for justice. There are no easy answers as to why acts of intense violence have become such defining aspect of the Muslim faith.” [The TABLET, 23 Sept 2006: 8]
  15. **Professor Mona Siddiqui** adds: “The real reason why Pope Benedict’s lecture touches on so many sensitivities is because the theological analysis carried within it serious political implications. For Pope Benedict, Christianity cannot just be Europe’s past; it must also be Europe’s future. It is the Pope’s aspirations to make Christianity once again a living force in the West that underlies so much of his current thinking both in relation to other faiths and in his attempts to unify the Christian Church. As a Pope, he has every right to work towards this goal but Europe is not just the Catholic Church, nor is the Catholic Church just the pontificate. The Pope cannot ignore the growing diversity within his own faith nor in the other faiths that are also a major part of Europe. True, he is concerned about the challenge of secularism, but if religions and reason are to come together to face contemporary challenges, can it be any religion or can it only be Christianity?” “Muslims must learn that differing viewpoints and multiple voices are the very essence of civil society. Even when the viewpoints touch on something as sacred as the Prophet and his legacy, responses must be dignified and respectful. This would reflect the true essence of Islam; calling for revenge and retribution is doing little more than proving all the critics right.” [The TABLET, 23 Sept 2006: 8]
  16. The **Open Letter of 38 prominent Muslim religious scholar and leaders** around the world addressed to the Pope and dated October 12, 2006 is worth our consideration. In response to the allusion that “*There is compulsion no in religion*” (*al-Baqarah 2:256*), the Open Letter clarified that “some Muslims of Medina wanted to force their children to convert from Judaism or Christianity to Islam, and this verse was precisely an answer to them not to try to force their children to convert to Islam” and “We emphatically agree that forcing others to believe – if such a thing be truly possible at all – is not pleasing to God and that God is not pleased by blood.”

17. The **Open Letter** denies that Muslims only subscribe to a God totally beyond human experience and that “God’s will is not bound up with any categories” as “God has many names and attributes” such as the Merciful, the Just, the Seeing, the Hearing, the Knowing, the Loving – “*Lo, God enjoins justice and kindness...*” (*al-Nahl*, 16:90) and “*He has prescribed for himself mercy*” (*al-An’am*, 6:12; see also 6:54) and “*My Mercy encompasses everything*” (*al-A’raf* 7:156)
18. On the question on the use of reason in Islam, the **Open Letter** argues that “Muslims through the ages have maintained a consonance between the truths of the Quranic revelation and the demands of human intelligence, without sacrificing one for the other. God says, *We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves until it is clear to them that it is the truth* (*Fussilat* 41:53). Reason itself is one among the many signs within us, which God invites us to contemplate, and to contemplate with, as a way of knowing the truth.”
19. The **Open Letter** clarifies that *Jihad* means struggle, and specifically struggle in the way of God. “Holy war” as such “does not exist in Islamic languages.” “This struggle may take many forms, including the use of force. However, the prophet (PBUH) has instructed that in times of war, “the non-combatants are not permitted or legitimate targets” and “Religious beliefs alone does not make anyone the object of attack. The original Muslim community was fighting against pagans who had also expelled them from their homes, persecuted, tortured and murdered them. Thereafter, the Islamic conquests were political in nature.”
20. **From Asia**, a leading Asian theologian, Aloysius Pieris, SJ offers a critique: “The Word of God is the *logos*, the primordial reason...has been invoked in the apologetical treatises of the Church.” This approach “gives Aristotle an honourable mention” aimed at “explaining reality to the satisfaction of the rational beings” “demonstrating God’s existence and nature to the *wise and intelligent*” but omits the emphasis on “transforming society to the satisfaction of the oppressed masses” and “bear witness to God’s love before the *little ones* with whom God is in direct communion (cf. Mt 11:25)”
21. **Conclusion.** The worldwide sensation and reaction were the unforeseen “fallouts” from the Regensburg’s lecture. The Catholic Church has matured and gained some understanding of Islam and the Muslim community, both from the protests but more so from the open dialogue initiated through the Open Letter of the Islamic Leaders.

Jojo M. Fung, SJ