The Pope, Islam, and Us

An Adult Bible Study by Rev. Jayson S. Galler
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That this topic came to be addressed in this particular class is the result of a class on this topic at Grace Lutheran Church, Elgin, Texas, in the wake of the pope’s controversial comments and an initial substantial Biblog post addressing them. Pastor Harris thought the topic would be worth addressing at Trinity also. Since that class other information has emerged and a subsequent Biblog post was made. While much of the content is similar, this particular presentation of the material is largely original for this class.

• Pope Benedict spoke about Islam’s violence in remarks September 12th at the University of Regensburg in Germany. Islam’s reaction was violent, including threats against the pope, the burning of churches, and apparently the killing of a nun.

1) The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur – this is the programme with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time. “Not to act reasonably (with logos) is contrary to the nature of God”, said Manuel II, according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Persian interlocutor. 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. (From paragraph 16 of the Pope’s remarks)

2) In the seventh conversation edited by Professor Khoury, the emperor touches on the theme of the jihad (holy war). The emperor must have known that surah 2, 256 reads: “There is no compulsion in religion”. It is one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. [sic.] But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur’an, concerning holy war. Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the “Book” and the “infidels”, he turns to his interlocutor somewhat brusquely with the central question on the relationship between religion and violence in general, in these words: “Show me just what Mohammed 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”. The emperor goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. “God is not pleased by blood, and not acting reasonably is 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...”. (From paragraph 3 of the Pope’s remarks)
• Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone expressed the pope’s regret that his words offended and emphasized the consistency of the pope’s remarks with the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which documents are also cited by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

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 men. They strive 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. (*Nostra Aetate*, par. 3, tr. Austin Flannery, pp.739-740.)

4) They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; … (*Nostra Aetate*, par. 3, Vatican translation)

5) The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day. (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 841, *Lumen Gentium* 16.)

• Islam denies the divinity of Christ, and therefore rejects the Trinity itself.

6) And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son. Certainly you make an abominable assertion! The heavens may almost be rent thereat, and the earth cleave asunder, and the mountains fall down in pieces, That they ascribe a son to the Beneficent! And it is not worthy of the Beneficent that He should take to Himself a son. (Quran, surah 19, 88-92)

• What are the Muslims’ intentions regarding their belief?
  What is the significance of that intention?

• How does a Christian respond?

7) 

8) 

• What do we as Lutherans say about what Muslims believe?

9) These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and separate us Christians from all other people upon earth. For all outside of Christianity, whether heathen, Turks [for our purposes Muslims], Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, although they believe in, and worship, only [the?] one true God, yet know not what His mind towards them is, and cannot expect any love or blessing from Him; therefore they abide in eternal wrath and damnation. For they have not the Lord Christ, and, besides, are not illumined and favored by any gifts of the Holy Ghost. (LC II:66, Triglotta translation)

• What does all of this mean?

(For the leader’s notes to this study and related links see [http://www.graceelgin.org/resources/popeislamus.html](http://www.graceelgin.org/resources/popeislamus.html).)