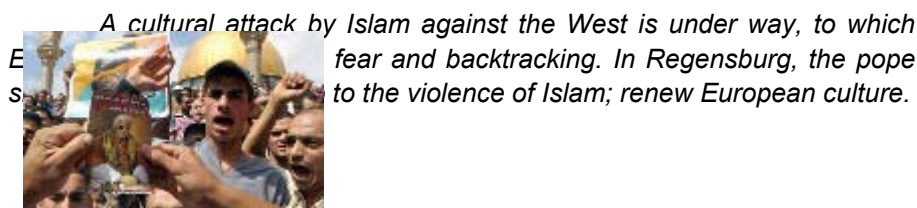


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VIOLENT ISLAM, COWARDLY EUROPE: FROM THE CARTOONS TO REGENSBURG

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A cultural attack by Islam against the West is under way, to which fear and backtracking. In Regensburg, the pope to the violence of Islam; renew European culture.

Beirut (AsiaNews) – A year ago, on 30 September 2005, in Denmark, 12 satirical cartoons about Muhammad were published, sparking a controversy that inflamed the Muslim world. Recently, we have witnessed a remake, a sort of “Cartoons no.2”, with the reaction of the Muslim world to the speech of the pope in Regensburg. These facts, like the threats against an opera of Mozart in Berlin, or against a French teacher, reveal two very worrying phenomena: the easy use of violence in Islam, together with its inability to dialogue; the West, especially Europe, as a big coward that is losing its identity.

Regensburg: “Cartoons no.2” affair

The starting point of the cartoons was a desire to counter the self-censorship that often prevails in the western world where Islam is concerned.

A Danish cartoonist was asked to design Muhammad on the cover of a children’s book. The man received threats and consequently refused. So the head of the newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, launched a competition, inviting 12 cartoonists to make satirical illustrations of Muhammad.

A threat to freedom became a challenge. Everything was, however, confined to a newspaper. What was unacceptable was the response, certainly not spontaneous, from Muslims at international level. The proof that the rallies were organized lies in the reality that they broke out two or three months after the publication of the cartoons, after some imams visited Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other countries to draw some reactions.

The “Cartoons no.2” affair came about with the address of Benedict XVI in Regensburg. Here too, everything smacked of being organized. At least 99% of those who protested have not even read the speech as yet. Yesterday I took part in a broadcast on Iranian television with two imams, a Palestinian Sunni and an Iranian Shiite. They all told me they had read the speech in Arabic two days after it was given. But this was not true: the translation into Arabic was prepared only eight days later, by a friend who

put it on his private site. When I tried to explain the meaning of the entire text, they kept quoting the famous phrase of Manuel II Paleologus, like a script. Even the pope has been used to hit out at the west. Usually, Muslims hesitate to attack the pope, even if the Catholic Church is always perceived alongside the West. Even in that broadcast on Iranian television, Benedict XVI, Bush, Blair, Merkel, Israel, Zionists and so on, were thrown together, accused of “conspiring against Islam”.

European culture and wine

The tendency to see a “conspiracy” is present among cultured Muslims.

A few days ago, in Berlin, an opera of Mozart, *Idomeneo* was cancelled: it featured the decapitated head of Muhammad (together with those of Jesus, Buddha and Neptune) and the director of the theatre feared Islamic vendetta.

Islamic pressure on our culture is becoming increasingly pervasive.

In France, a teacher Robert Redeker, who criticized Islam at school, was threatened with death. Two years ago, some people wanted to destroy the tomb of Dante Alighieri because he put Muhammad in hell; a year ago, some wanted to destroy the fresco of St Petronius in Bologna because Muhammad was depicted as condemned in the universal judgment.

Two years ago, in Geneva, the theatrical work of Voltaire, *Zadiq*, was banned because it talked about Muhammad. But then: Dante, St Petronius, Voltaire, Mozart, the cartoons, the pope... all European culture is censored by Europeans out of a false respect for Islam or for a quiet life!

There is no realization that our culture and uniqueness are at stake.

Let me give another example. Every year, it becomes known that a Muslim delegation refused to participate in a reception given by some European authorities or others, because apart from non alcoholic drinks, wine and spirits were served, and these are banned by rigorous Islam. In Paris, some months back, an Iranian delegation withdrew because France refused to do away with wine. Three years ago, in Germany, an Iranian delegation led by Rafsanjani, was invited to a banquet offered by the foreign affairs minister. As soon as they arrived, when they saw that wine and spirits were being served, they withdrew to a small room. After discussing together, they asked that all alcoholic drinks be removed. One minister said that the wine and spirits removed from the reception would be replaced by food and drink, happen on a regular basis.



Similarly, there are swimming pools where specific times are reserved for women, to please some fanatical Muslim. In hospitals, there are demands that Muslim women should not be touched by male doctors.

And particular food that is permissible (*halâl*) for Muslims is starting to be demanded everywhere: in hospitals, schools and so on.

Intolerant Islam

On Islam's part, there is insupportable intolerance. Is wine being served? Don't drink it! Are they attacking Muhammad? Respond by writing something, a statement... why respond with violence?

The case of Regensburg is evident. One phrase out of a speech containing hundreds was picked, a phrase that was not even an expressed thought of the pope, and yet they tried to say the pope quoted it because it reflects his way of thinking. Which is untrue. And even if it was true, it would have been enough to respond with research, with an article, or a statement. But to create a global movement means this episode is being used for another purpose. It's really manipulation.

Islam's no.1 problem today is that of violence. Yesterday on television, the Iranian imam said Zarqawi and Bin Laden were only "terrorists", they did not represent Islam because "no one follows them". But this is another falsehood. A survey conducted by *al-Jazeera* on "what do you think about Bin Laden?" revealed that 50% of those interviewed backed Bin Laden, while the other half rejected him.

The problem of violence of Islam cannot be put off. It also affects peace on the planet. Today, many wars in the west and in Asia are caused precisely by Muslims who want autonomy, a state for themselves. It is enough to cite Bosnia, Thailand, the Philippines, Kosovo, Kashmir, Nigeria... to say nothing of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Wherever there is a Muslim minority concentrated in an area where it becomes the majority, a separatist war is quick to break out. It should be noted that violence is practiced mostly against their fellow members of the faith, Muslims. Just look at violence in Iraq, or in Pakistan, where Sunnis and Shiites attack each other to the point of striking mosques, their most sacred places. In Algeria, in the name of the Koran and the Prophet, nearly 100,000 people were killed in recent years...

But when violence is committed in the name of God, this is a blasphemy, an offence against God. And this is what the pope was talking about. A text attributed to Muhammad says: "Take the sentiments, the customs of God" (*takhallaqû bi-akhlâq Allâh*) [the same expression we use to translate St Paul: "Have the same sentiments of Jesus Christ..."]. There is the need, then, for Islam to rethink its relationship with violence, to take on the "sentiments" of God. Therefore the pope insisted: "Violence is contrary to the nature of God".

Cowardly West

Another aspect that should be mentioned is the cowardice of the west: Mozart, Voltaire, Dante, the matter of wines and spirits, reveal we are faced with a cultural attack of the Muslim world against the West, which sometimes succeeds, and other times does not. But meanwhile, the west is backtracking. By dint of doing so, precedents are created, to the point of

creating a mentality and norms. I am not defending conflict among civilizations here, but there does need to be disagreement on values, especially to defend human rights, which come before any culture.

Years ago, there was a global campaign against infibulation and stoning of women in Africa. Tarik Ramadan, in his time, had expressed himself about this, about stoning and corporal punishment in Islam, saying: "Give us a moratorium, give us time to evolve." But the question is: how many more women must be stoned so that you can evolve?"

Faced with Muslim demands, the West chooses to renounce affirmation of human rights, in the name of culture, patience, doing good, multiculturalism... in reality, the awareness of European identity and its value is being lost. Even a minimum amount of pride is missing. In general, among French, Italians, Germans, doubt is spreading about the European identity, there is reticence, shame.

And yet, we Africans and Asians recognize in you Europeans a common legacy, that the pope himself has often highlighted, talking about Hellenism, Christianity, Enlightenment... there is the need to become conscious once again of the European identity, which has Christianity as a bonding agent at the base, without rejecting anything of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, but purifying everything (Christianity included). And people should be proud of this identity.

Europe brought absolutely unique values to the world: the human person, equality, human rights, freedom, democracy, ecology, a non-violent rapport with nature (also under the influence of India)... these are acquisitions that came in useful for Gandhi too, and other world cultures.

The speech of the pope in Regensburg was also a proposal to revive European awareness and to open it up to universal dialogue. Highlighting the two pillars – religion without violence and the integration of faith and reason – Benedict XVI has launched a proper agenda for the world of the third millennium: reflecting all together about violence and non-violence, especially about their ties with religions and ideologies; reflecting together about the revision of our sacred texts, to give them an interpretation worthy of God and of Man; reflecting together about projects for a more equitable and human society; about freedom, its merits and its limits, about secularization and a healthy secularism; about cultures and multiculturalism, etc. These are some of the themes suggested by the pope in his speech at Regensburg for sincere and authentic dialogue.

See also

- [09/28/2006_VATICAN - UN - Mgr Lajolo: Pope against religious violence and...](#)
- [11/8/2005_VATICAN – ASIA - Peace and coexistence guaranteed by objective moral.](#)
- [09/18/2006_Vatican - islam - The Pope and eastern and western terrorism](#)
- [09/20/2006_VATICAN-ISLAM - Pope: I was misunderstood about Islam, may my words...](#)
- [09/25/2006_VATICAN – ISLAM - Pope: dialogue between Muslims and Christians "a vital..."](#)