

The Vicar of Christ?

By David Wright

On September 12, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a lecture at the University of Regensburg in Germany. His speech outraged Muslims around the world. And why? The leader of the Roman Catholic Church quoted Manuel II Palaiologos, a Byzantine emperor who condemned “holy war,” charging that Muhammad spread his faith at sword point. The pope, of course, was telling the truth. Even now, 15 centuries after Islam’s inception, radical Muslims are preaching hatred against the West and vowing to destroy us if we refuse to surrender to Allah. Ironically, leaders in the Middle East threatened violence if the pope didn’t apologize immediately.

Realizing that he had stirred up a nest of hornets, the pope meekly backed down. He said that he had merely quoted the medieval emperor but didn’t agree with him. The pope declared that he respected Islam. The whole thing was a regrettable misunderstanding.

This is the man who calls himself the Vicar of Christ, a pompous title suggesting that the pope is Jesus’ official representative on earth. Surely, it is fair to ask whether the conduct of the so-called “vicar of Christ” is consistent with that of the Lord he pretends to represent. How, then, does Jesus respond when rebuked for telling the truth?

On trial before Annas the high priest, Jesus gave offense and an angry officer slapped his face. The Lord said, “If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” (John 18:23). Jesus never backed down. He told the truth, took the consequences, and rebuked those who mistreated him. Anyone truly representing Christ will do the same thing.

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