

Documents

I

Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections*

Text of Pope Benedict XVI's

Lecture at the University of Regensburg on Tuesday, 12 September 2006

Your Eminences, Your Magnificences, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a moving experience for me to be back again in the university and to be able once again to give a lecture at this podium. I think back to those years when, after a pleasant period at the Freisinger Hochschule, I began teaching at the University of Bonn. That was in 1959, in the days of the old university made up of ordinary professors. The various chairs had neither assistants nor secretaries, but in recompense there was much direct contact with students and in particular among the professors themselves. We would meet before and after lessons in the rooms of the teaching staff. There was a lively exchange with historians, philosophers, philologists and, naturally, between the two theological faculties. Once a semester there was a *dies academicus*, when professors from every faculty appeared before the students of the entire university, making possible a genuine experience of *universitas* — something that you too, Magnificent Rector, just mentioned — the experience, in other words, of the fact that despite our specializations which at times make it difficult to communicate with each other, we made up a whole, working in everything on the basis of a single rationality with its various aspects and sharing responsibility for the right use of reason — this reality became a lived

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experience. The university was also very proud of its two theological faculties. It was clear that, by inquiring about the reasonableness of faith, they too carried out a work which is necessarily part of the “whole” of the *universitas scientiarum*, even if not everyone could share the faith which theologians seek to correlate with reason as a whole. This profound sense of coherence within the universe of reason was not troubled, even when it was once reported that a colleague had said there was something odd about our university: it had two faculties devoted to something that did not exist: God. That even in the face of such radical scepticism it is still necessary and reasonable to raise the question of God through the use of reason, and to do so in the context of the tradition of the Christian faith: this, within the university as a whole, was accepted without question.

I was reminded of all this recently, when I read the edition by Professor Theodore Khoury (Münster) of part of the dialogue carried on — perhaps in 1391 in the winter barracks near Ankara — by the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam, and the truth of both.¹ It was presumably the emperor himself who set down this dialogue, during the siege of Constantinople between 1394 and 1402; and this would explain why his arguments are given in greater detail than those of his Persian interlocutor.² The dialogue ranges widely over the structures of faith contained in the Bible and in the Qur’an, and deals especially with the image of God and of man, while necessarily returning repeatedly to the relationship between — as they were called — three “Laws” or “rules of life”: the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur’an. It is not my intention to discuss this question in the present lecture; here I would like to discuss only one point — itself rather marginal to the dialogue as a whole — which, in the context of the issue of “faith and reason,” I found interesting and which can serve as the starting-point for my reflections on this issue.

¹ Of the total number of 26 conversations (διάλεξις - Khoury translates this as “controversy”) in the dialogue (“Entretien”), T. Khoury published the 7th “controversy” with footnotes and an extensive introduction on the origin of the text, on the manuscript tradition and on the structure of the dialogue, together with brief summaries of the “controversies” not included in the edition; the Greek text is accompanied by a French translation: “Manuel II Paléologue, Entretiens avec un Musulman. 7^e Controverse,” *Sources Chrétiennes* n. 115, Paris 1966. In the meantime, Karl Förstel published in *Corpus Islamico-Christianum (Series Graeca* ed. A. T. Khoury and R. Gle) an edition of the text in Greek and German with commentary: “Manuel II. Palaiologus, Dialoge mit einem Muslim,” 3 vols., Würzburg-Altenberge 1993–1996. As early as 1966, E. Trapp had published the Greek text with an introduction as vol. II of *Wiener byzantinische Studien*. I shall be quoting from Khoury’s edition.

² On the origin and redaction of the dialogue, cf. Khoury, pp. 22–29; extensive comments in this regard can also be found in the editions of Förstel and Trapp.

In the seventh conversation (διάλεξις - controversy) edited by Professor Khoury, the emperor touches on the theme of the holy war. The emperor must have known that surah 2, 256 reads: “There is no compulsion in religion.” According to some of the experts, this is probably one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. 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 addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: “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.”³ The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, 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,” he says, “is not pleased by blood — and not acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ) 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....”⁴

The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God’s nature.⁵ The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality.⁶ Here Khoury quotes a work of the noted French Islamist R. Arnaldez, who points out that Ibn Hazm went so far as to state that God is not bound even by his own word, and that nothing would

³ Controversy VII, 2 c: Khoury, pp. 142–143; Förstel, vol. I, VII. Dialog 1.5, pp. 240–241. 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 this 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 the 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.

⁴ Controversy VII, 3 b–c: Khoury, pp. 144–145; Förstel vol. I, VII. Dialog 1.6, pp. 240–243.

⁵ It was purely for the sake of this statement that I quoted the dialogue between Manuel and his Persian interlocutor. In this statement the theme of my subsequent reflections emerges.

⁶ Cf. Khoury, p. 144, n. 1.

oblige him to reveal the truth to us. Were it God's will, we would even have to practise idolatry.⁷

At this point, as far as understanding of God and thus the concrete practice of religion is concerned, we are faced with an unavoidable dilemma. Is the conviction that acting unreasonably contradicts God's nature merely a Greek idea, or is it always and intrinsically true? I believe that here we can see the profound harmony between what is Greek in the best sense of the word and the biblical understanding of faith in God. Modifying the first verse of the Book of Genesis, the first verse of the whole Bible, John began the prologue of his Gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the *λόγος*". This is the very word used by the emperor: God acts, *σὺν λόγῳ*, with *logos*. *Logos* means both reason and word—a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason. John thus spoke the final word on the biblical concept of God, and in this word all the often toilsome and tortuous threads of biblical faith find their culmination and synthesis. In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* is God, says the Evangelist. The encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him: "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (cf. *Acts* 16: 6–10)—this vision can be interpreted as a "distillation" of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry.

In point of fact, this rapprochement had been going on for some time. The mysterious name of God, revealed from the burning bush, a name which separates this God from all other divinities with their many names and simply asserts being, "I am," already presents a challenge to the notion of myth, to which Socrates' attempt to vanquish and transcend myth stands in close analogy.⁸ Within the Old Testament, the process which started at the burning bush came to new maturity at the time of the Exile, when the God of Israel, an Israel now deprived of its land and worship, was proclaimed as the God of heaven and earth and described in a simple formula which echoes the words uttered at the burning bush: "I am." This new understanding of God is accompanied by a kind of enlightenment, which finds stark expression in the mockery of gods who are merely the work of human hands (cf. *Pss* 115). Thus,

⁷ R. Arnaldez, *Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue*, Paris 1956, p. 13; cf. Khoury, p. 144. The fact that comparable positions exist in the theology of the late Middle Ages will appear later in my discourse.

⁸ Regarding the widely discussed interpretation of the episode of the burning bush, I refer to my book *Introduction to Christianity*, London 1969, pp. 77–93 (originally published in German as *Einführung in das Christentum*, Munich 1968; N.B. the pages quoted refer to the entire chapter entitled "The Biblical Belief in God"). I think that my statements in that book, despite later developments in the discussion, remain valid today.

despite the bitter conflict with those Hellenistic rulers who sought to accommodate it forcibly to the customs and idolatrous cult of the Greeks, biblical faith, in the Hellenistic period, encountered the best of Greek thought at a deep level, resulting in a mutual enrichment evident especially in the later wisdom literature. Today we know that the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced at Alexandria — the Septuagint — is more than a simple (and in that sense really less than satisfactory) translation of the Hebrew text: it is an independent textual witness and a distinct and important step in the history of revelation, one which brought about this encounter in a way that was decisive for the birth and spread of Christianity.⁹ A profound encounter of faith and reason is taking place here, an encounter between genuine enlightenment and religion. From the very heart of Christian faith and, at the same time, the heart of Greek thought now joined to faith, Manuel II was able to say: Not to act “with *logos*” is contrary to God’s nature.

In all honesty, one must observe that in the late Middle Ages we find trends in theology which would sunder this synthesis between the Greek spirit and the Christian spirit. In contrast with the so-called intellectualism of Augustine and Thomas, there arose with Duns Scotus a voluntarism which, in its later developments, led to the claim that we can only know God’s *voluntas ordinata*. Beyond this is the realm of God’s freedom, in virtue of which he could have done the opposite of everything he has actually done. This gives rise to positions which clearly approach those of Ibn Hazm and might even lead to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God’s transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions. As opposed to this, the faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which — as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated — unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language. God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf. Certainly, love, as Saint Paul says, “transcends” knowledge and is thereby capable of perceiving more than thought alone (cf. *Eph* 3: 19); nonetheless it continues to be love of the God who is *Logos*. Consequently, Christian

⁹ Cf. A. Schenker, “L’Écriture sainte subsiste en plusieurs formes canoniques simultanées,” in *L’Interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa. Atti del Simposio promosso dalla Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede*, Vatican City 2001, pp. 178–186.

worship is, again to quote Paul — “λογικη λατρεία”, worship in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason (cf. *Rom* 12: 1).¹⁰

This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history — it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.

The thesis that the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith has been countered by the call for a dehellenization of Christianity — a call which has more and more dominated theological discussions since the beginning of the modern age. Viewed more closely, three stages can be observed in the programme of dehellenization: although interconnected, they are clearly distinct from one another in their motivations and objectives.¹¹

Dehellenization first emerges in connection with the postulates of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Looking at the tradition of scholastic theology, the Reformers thought they were confronted with a faith system totally conditioned by philosophy, that is to say an articulation of the faith based on an alien system of thought. As a result, faith no longer appeared as a living historical Word but as one element of an overarching philosophical system. The principle of *sola scriptura*, on the other hand, sought faith in its pure, primordial form, as originally found in the biblical Word. Metaphysics appeared as a premise derived from another source, from which faith had to be liberated in order to become once more fully itself. When Kant stated that he needed to set thinking aside in order to make room for faith, he carried this programme forward with a radicalism that the Reformers could never have foreseen. He thus anchored faith exclusively in practical reason, denying it access to reality as a whole.

The liberal theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ushered in a second stage in the process of dehellenization, with Adolf von Harnack as its

¹⁰ On this matter I expressed myself in greater detail in my book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco 2000, pp. 44–50.

¹¹ Of the vast literature on the theme of dehellenization, I would like to mention above all: A. Grillmeier, “Hellenisierung-Judaisierung des Christentums als Deutepinzipien der Geschichte des kirchlichen Dogmas,” in idem, *Mit ihm und in ihm. Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven*, Freiburg 1975, pp. 423–488.

outstanding representative. When I was a student, and in the early years of my teaching, this programme was highly influential in Catholic theology too. It took as its point of departure Pascal's distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In my inaugural lecture at Bonn in 1959, I tried to address the issue,¹² and I do not intend to repeat here what I said on that occasion, but I would like to describe at least briefly what was new about this second stage of dehellenization. Harnack's central idea was to return simply to the man Jesus and to his simple message, underneath the accretions of theology and indeed of hellenization: this simple message was seen as the culmination of the religious development of humanity. Jesus was said to have put an end to worship in favour of morality. In the end he was presented as the father of a humanitarian moral message. Fundamentally, Harnack's goal was to bring Christianity back into harmony with modern reason, liberating it, that is to say, from seemingly philosophical and theological elements, such as faith in Christ's divinity and the triune God. In this sense, historical-critical exegesis of the New Testament, as he saw it, restored to theology its place within the university: theology, for Harnack, is something essentially historical and therefore strictly scientific. What it is able to say critically about Jesus is, so to speak, an expression of practical reason and consequently it can take its rightful place within the university. Behind this thinking lies the modern self-limitation of reason, classically expressed in Kant's "Critiques," but in the meantime further radicalized by the impact of the natural sciences. This modern concept of reason is based, to put it briefly, on a synthesis between Platonism (Cartesianism) and empiricism, a synthesis confirmed by the success of technology. On the one hand it presupposes the mathematical structure of matter, its intrinsic rationality, which makes it possible to understand how matter works and use it efficiently: this basic premise is, so to speak, the Platonic element in the modern understanding of nature. On the other hand, there is nature's capacity to be exploited for our purposes, and here only the possibility of verification or falsification through experimentation can yield decisive certainty. The weight between the two poles can, depending on the circumstances, shift from one side to the other. As strongly positivistic a thinker as J. Monod has declared himself a convinced Platonist/Cartesian.

This gives rise to two principles which are crucial for the issue we have raised. First, only the kind of certainty resulting from the interplay of mathematical and empirical elements can be considered scientific. Anything

¹² Newly published with commentary by Heino Sonnemans (ed.): *Joseph Ratzinger-Benedikt XVI, Der Gott des Glaubens und der Gott der Philosophen. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der theologia naturalis*, Johannes-Verlag Leutesdorf, 2nd revised edition, 2005.

that would claim to be science must be measured against this criterion. Hence the human sciences, such as history, psychology, sociology and philosophy, attempt to conform themselves to this canon of scientificity. A second point, which is important for our reflections, is that by its very nature this method excludes the question of God, making it appear an unscientific or pre-scientific question. Consequently, we are faced with a reduction of the radius of science and reason, one which needs to be questioned.

I will return to this problem later. In the meantime, it must be observed that from this standpoint any attempt to maintain theology's claim to be "scientific" would end up reducing Christianity to a mere fragment of its former self. But we must say more: if science as a whole is this and this alone, then it is man himself who ends up being reduced, for the specifically human questions about our origin and destiny, the questions raised by religion and ethics, then have no place within the purview of collective reason as defined by "science," so understood, and must thus be relegated to the realm of the subjective. The subject then decides, on the basis of his experiences, what he considers tenable in matters of religion, and the subjective "conscience" becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical. In this way, though, ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter. This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity, as we see from the disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is so reduced that questions of religion and ethics no longer concern it. Attempts to construct an ethic from the rules of evolution or from psychology and sociology, end up being simply inadequate.

Before I draw the conclusions to which all this has been leading, I must briefly refer to the third stage of dehellenization, which is now in progress. In the light of our experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was an initial inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The latter are said to have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieu. This thesis is not simply false, but it is coarse and lacking in precision. The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which had already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed. True, there are elements in the evolution of the early Church which do not have to be integrated into all cultures. Nonetheless, the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself.

And so I come to my conclusion. This attempt, painted with broad strokes, at a critique of modern reason from within has nothing to do with putting the clock back to the time before the Enlightenment and rejecting the insights of the modern age. The positive aspects of modernity are to be acknowledged unreservedly: we are all grateful for the marvellous possibilities that it has opened up for mankind and for the progress in humanity that has been granted to us. The scientific ethos, moreover, is — as you yourself mentioned, Magnificent Rector — the will to be obedient to the truth, and, as such, it embodies an attitude which belongs to the essential decisions of the Christian spirit. The intention here is not one of retrenchment or negative criticism, but of broadening our concept of reason and its application. While we rejoice in the new possibilities open to humanity, we also see the dangers arising from these possibilities and we must ask ourselves how we can overcome them. We will succeed in doing so only if reason and faith come together in a new way, if we overcome the self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically falsifiable, and if we once more disclose its vast horizons. In this sense theology rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith.

Only thus do we become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today. In the Western world it is widely held that only positivistic reason and the forms of philosophy based on it 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 and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures. At the same time, as I have attempted to show, modern scientific reason with its intrinsically Platonic element bears within itself a question which points beyond itself and beyond the possibilities of its methodology. Modern scientific reason quite simply has to accept the rational structure of matter and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature as a given, on which its methodology has to be based. Yet the question why this has to be so is a real question, and one which has to be remanded by the natural sciences to other modes and planes of thought — to philosophy and theology. For philosophy and, albeit in a different way, for theology, listening to the great experiences and insights of the religious traditions of humanity, and those of the Christian faith in particular, is a source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding. Here I am reminded of something

Socrates said to Phaedo. In their earlier conversations, many false philosophical opinions had been raised, and so Socrates says: “It would be easily understandable if someone became so annoyed at all these false notions that for the rest of his life he despised and mocked all talk about being — but in this way he would be deprived of the truth of existence and would suffer a great loss.”¹³ The West has long been endangered by this aversion to the questions which underlie its rationality, and can only suffer great harm thereby. 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, not to act 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.

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II

Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI*

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,
And may Peace and Blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad*

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,
Do not contend with people of the Book except in the fairest way....
(The Holy Qur'an, al-Ankabut, 29: 46).*

Your Holiness,

With regards to your lecture at the University of REGENSBURG in Germany on September 12th 2006, we thought it appropriate, in the spirit of open exchange, to address your use of a debate between the Emperor Manuel

¹³ Cf. 90 c-d. For this text, cf. also R. Guardini, *Der Tod des Sokrates*, 5th edition, Mainz-Paderborn 1987, pp. 218–221.

* Reproduced with thanks from *Islamica Magazine*. The text is available at: <www.islamica-magazine.com/online-analysis/open-letter-to-his-holiness-pope-benedict-xvi.html>.

II Paleologus and a “learned Persian” as the starting point for a discourse on the relationship between reason and faith. While we applaud your efforts to oppose the dominance of positivism and materialism in human life, we must point out some errors in the way you mentioned Islam as a counterpoint to the proper use of reason, as well as some mistakes in the assertions you put forward in support of your argument.

There is no Compulsion in Religion

You mention that “according to the experts” the verse which begins, *There is no compulsion in religion (al-Baqarah 2: 256)* is from the early period when the Prophet “was still powerless and under threat,” but this is incorrect. In fact this verse is acknowledged to belong to the period of Qur’anic revelation corresponding to the political and military ascendance of the young Muslim community. *There is no compulsion in religion* was not a command to Muslims to remain steadfast in the face of the desire of their oppressors to force them to renounce their faith, but was a reminder to Muslims themselves, once they had attained power, that they could not force another’s heart to believe. *There is no compulsion in religion* addresses those in a position of strength, not weakness. The earliest commentaries on the Qur’an (such as that of Al-Tabari) make it clear 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. Moreover, Muslims are also guided by such verses as *Say: The truth is from your Lord; so whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve. (al-Kahf 18: 29)*; and *Say: O disbelievers! I worship not that which ye worship; Nor worship ye that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which ye worship. Nor will ye worship that which I worship. Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion (al-Kāfirūn: 109: 1–6)*.

God’s Transcendence

You also say that “for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent,” a simplification which can be misleading. The Qur’an states, *There is no thing like unto Him (al-Shura 24: 11)*, but it also states, *He is the Light of the heavens and the earth (al-Nur 24: 35)*; and, *We are closer to him than his jugular vein (Qaf 15: 16)*; and, *He is the First, the Last, the Inward, and the Outward (al-Hadid 57: 3)*; and, *He is with you wherever you are (al-Hadid 57: 4)*; and, *Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God (al-Baqarah 2: 115)*. Also, let us recall the saying of the Prophet, which states that God says, “When I love him (the worshipper), I am the hearing by which he hears, the sight by which he sees,

the hand with which he grasps, and the foot with which he walks.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari* no. 6502, *Kitab al-Riqaq*).

In the Islamic spiritual, theological, and philosophical tradition, the thinker you mention, Ibn Hazm (d. 1069 CE), is a worthy but very marginal figure, who belonged to the *Zahiri* school of jurisprudence which is followed by no one in the Islamic world today. If one is looking for classical formulations of the doctrine of transcendence, much more important to Muslims are figures such as al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) and many others who are far more influential and more representative of Islamic belief than Ibn Hazm.

You quote an argument that because the emperor is “shaped by Greek philosophy” the idea that “God is not pleased by blood” is “self-evident” to him, to which the Muslim teaching on God’s Transcendence is put forward as a counterexample. To say that for Muslims “God’s Will is not bound up in any of our categories” is also a simplification which may lead to a misunderstanding. God has many Names in Islam, including the Merciful, the Just, the Seeing, the Hearing, the Knowing, the Loving, and the Gentle. Their utter conviction in God’s Oneness and that *There is none like unto Him* (*al-Ikhlās* 112: 4) has not led Muslims to deny God’s attribution of these qualities to Himself and to (some of) His creatures (setting aside for now the notion of “categories,” a term which requires much clarification in this context). As this concerns His Will, to conclude that Muslims believe in a capricious God who might or might not command us to evil is to forget that God says in the Quran, *Lo! God enjoins justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbids lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorts you in order that ye may take heed* (*al-Nahl*, 16: 90). Equally, it is to forget that God says in the Qur’an that *He has prescribed for Himself mercy* (*al-An’am*, 6: 12; see also 6: 54), and that God says in the Qur’an, *My Mercy encompasses everything* (*al-A’raf* 7: 156). The word for mercy, *rahmah*, can also be translated as love, kindness, and compassion. From this word *rahmah* comes the sacred formula Muslims use daily, *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*. Is it not self-evident that spilling innocent blood goes against mercy and compassion?

The Use of Reason

The Islamic tradition is rich in its explorations of the nature of human intelligence and its relation to God’s Nature and His Will, including questions of what is self-evident and what is not. However, the dichotomy between “reason” on one hand and “faith” on the other does not exist in precisely the same form in Islamic thought. Rather, Muslims have come to terms with the power and limits of human intelligence in their own way, acknowledging a hierarchy of knowledge of which reason is a crucial part. There are two

extremes which the Islamic intellectual tradition has generally managed to avoid: one is to make the analytical mind the ultimate arbiter of truth, and the other is to deny the power of human understanding to address ultimate questions. More importantly, in their most mature and mainstream forms the intellectual explorations of 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.

What is "Holy War"?

We would like to point out that "holy war" is a term that does not exist in Islamic languages. *Jihad*, it must be emphasized, means struggle, and specifically struggle in the way of God. This struggle may take many forms, including the use of force. Though a *jihad* may be *sacred* in the sense of being directed towards a sacred ideal, it is not necessarily a "war." Moreover, it is noteworthy that Manuel II Paleologus says that "violence" goes against God's nature, since Christ himself used violence against the money-changers in the temple, and said "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword..." (Matthew 10: 34-36). When God drowned Pharaoh, was He going against His own Nature? Perhaps the emperor meant to say that cruelty, brutality, and aggression are against God's Will, in which case the classical and traditional law of *jihad* in Islam would bear him out completely.

You say that "naturally the emperor knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur'an, concerning holy war." However, as we pointed out above concerning *There is no compulsion in religion*, the aforementioned instructions were not later at all. Moreover, the emperor's statements about violent conversion show that he did not know what those instructions are and have always been.

The authoritative and traditional Islamic rules of war can be summarized in the following principles:

1. Non-combatants are not permitted or legitimate targets. This was emphasized explicitly time and again by the Prophet, his Companions, and by the learned tradition since then.
2. Religious belief 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.

3. Muslims can and should live peacefully with their neighbors. *And if they incline to peace, do thou incline to it; and put thy trust in God(al-Anfal 8: 61)*. However, this does not exclude legitimate self-defense and maintenance of sovereignty.

Muslims are just as bound to obey these rules as they are to refrain from theft and adultery. If a religion regulates war and describes circumstances where it is necessary and just, that does not make that religion war-like, anymore than regulating sexuality makes a religion prurient. If some have disregarded a long and well-established tradition in favour of utopian dreams where the end justifies the means, they have done so of their own accord and without the sanction of God, His Prophet, or the learned tradition. God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Let not hatred of any people seduce you into being unjust. Be just, that is nearer to piety (al-Ma'idah 5: 8)*. In this context we must state that the murder on September 17th of an innocent Catholic nun in Somalia — and any other similar acts of wanton individual violence — 'in reaction to' your lecture at the University of Regensburg, is completely un-Islamic, and we totally condemn such acts.

Forced Conversion

The notion that Muslims are commanded to spread their faith "by the sword" or that Islam in fact was largely spread "by the sword" does not hold up to scrutiny. Indeed, as a *political* entity Islam spread partly as a result of conquest, but the greater part of its expansion came as a result of preaching and missionary activity. Islamic teaching did not prescribe that the conquered populations be forced or coerced into converting. Indeed, many of the first areas conquered by the Muslims remained predominantly non-Muslim for centuries. Had Muslims desired to convert all others by force, there would not be a single church or synagogue left anywhere in the Islamic world. The command *There is no compulsion in religion* means now what it meant then. The mere fact of a person being non-Muslim has never been a legitimate *casus belli* in Islamic law or belief. As with the rules of war, history shows that some Muslims have violated Islamic tenets concerning forced conversion and the treatment of other religious communities, but history also shows that these are by far the exception which proves the rule. 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. Indeed, we believe, and Muslims have always believed, that *Whoso slays a soul not to retaliate for a soul slain, nor*

for corruption done in the land, it shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether (al-Ma'idah 5: 32).

Something New?

You mention the emperor's assertion that "anything new" brought by the Prophet was "evil and inhuman, such as his alleged command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." What the emperor failed to realize — aside from the fact (as mentioned above) that no such command has ever existed in Islam — is that the Prophet never claimed to be bringing anything fundamentally new. God says in the Holy Qur'an, *Naught is said to thee (Muhammad) but what already was said to the Messengers before thee (Fussilat 41: 43)*, and, *Say (Muhammad): I am no new thing among the messengers (of God), nor know I what will be done with me or with you. I do but follow that what is Revealed to me, and I am but a plain warner (al-Ahqaf, 46: 9)*. Thus faith in the One God is not the property of any one religious community. According to Islamic belief, all the true prophets preached the same truth to different peoples at different times. The laws may be different, but the truth is unchanging.

"The Experts"

You refer at one point non-specifically to "the experts" (on Islam) and also actually cite two Catholic scholars by name, Professor (Adel) Theodore Khoury and (Associate Professor) Roger Arnaldez. It suffices here to say that whilst many Muslims consider that there are sympathetic non-Muslims and Catholics who could truly be considered "experts" on Islam, Muslims have not to our knowledge endorsed the "experts" you referred to, or recognized them as representing Muslims or their views. On September 25th 2006 you reiterated your important statement in Cologne on August 20th 2005 that, "Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends." Whilst we fully concur with you, it seems to us that a great part of the object of inter-religious dialogue is to strive to listen to and consider the actual voices of those we are dialoguing with, and not merely those of our own persuasion.



Christianity and Islam

Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and

over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world's population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. As the leader of over a billion Catholics and moral example for many others around the globe, yours is arguably the single most influential voice in continuing to move this relationship forward in the direction of mutual understanding. We share your desire for frank and sincere dialogue, and recognize its importance in an increasingly interconnected world. Upon this sincere and frank dialogue we hope to continue to build peaceful and friendly relationships based upon mutual respect, justice, and what is common in essence in our shared Abrahamic tradition, particularly 'the two greatest commandments' in Mark 12: 29-31 (and, in varying form, in Matthew 22: 37-40), that, *the Lord our God is One Lord; And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second commandment is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

Muslims thus appreciate the following words from the Second Vatican Council:

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. (*Nostra Aetate*, 28 October 1965)

And equally the words of the late Pope John Paul II, for whom many Muslims had great regard and esteem:

We Christians joyfully recognize the religious values we have in common with Islam. Today I would like to repeat what I said to young Muslims some years ago in Casablanca: "We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection" (*Insegnamenti*, VIII/2, [1985], p. 497, quoted during a general audience on May 5, 1999).

Muslims also appreciated your unprecedented personal expression of sorrow, and your clarification and assurance (on the 17th of September) that your quote does not reflect your own personal opinion, as well as the Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone's affirmation (on the 16th of September) of the conciliar document *Nostra Aetate*. Finally, Muslims appreciated that (on September 25th) in front of an assembled group of ambassadors from Muslim countries you expressed "total and profound respect for all Muslims." We hope that we will all avoid the mistakes of the past and live together in the future in peace, mutual acceptance and respect.

And all praise belongs to God, and there is neither power nor strength except through God.

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(listed in alphabetical order)

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