

Cardinal Burke Breaks Ranks

by Hugh Fitzgerald

We have heard many disturbing statements in recent years made by Catholic clerics, from bishops and cardinals right up to Pope Francis, who seem to believe that Islam is a religion like any other, that criticism of Islam is unjustified and based on the motiveless malignity of “Islamophobia,” and that the main duty of Catholics with respect to Muslims is not to challenge or confront them both as to their ideology and as to the many acts of Muslim terrorism, but to engage, rather, in endless Catholic-Muslim Dialogue. Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has had an ill-considered mandate to engage in “dialogue” with Muslims, as the Committee for Ecumenical and Religious Affairs of the United States Conference of Bishops has stated:

“The declaration has been consistently upheld by recent popes. Pope John Paul II affirmed the need for dialogue with Muslims on numerous occasions throughout his long pontificate (1978–2005). For example, in Crossing the Threshold of Hope he remarked in the chapter entitled “Muhammad?” that “believers in Allah are particularly close to us” and that “the religiosity of Muslims deserves our respect” ([New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005], 91, 93). The pope also reiterated the central mandate of Nostra Aetate by reminding the faithful that they are called to maintain “a dialogue with followers of the ‘Prophet’” and that “the Church remains always open to dialogue and cooperation” (ibid., 93, 94).

Unfortunately, while American Bishops claim that Muslims have been willing to engage in such dialogue, they report that the *Christian* side has not been as forthcoming:

“Sadly, in recent years, there has been a deliberate rejection of this call to engage in dialogue with our Muslim

brothers and sisters by some in the Catholic Church and in other ecclesial families. We understand the confusion and deep emotions...

Not “confusion” and unspecified “deep emotions,” but rage.

...stirred by real and apparent acts of aggression and discrimination...

Not unspecified “acts of aggression and discrimination,” but mass murder, repeated again and again.

...by certain Muslims against non-Muslims, often against Christians abroad. We, and increasingly our Muslim partners in dialogue, are concerned about these very real phenomena. Along with many of our fellow Catholics and the many Muslims who themselves are targeted by radicals...

Muslims have not been “targeted” in Europe, even if some have unavoidably been among those killed when large groups have been the target. It is only Shia Muslims in the Middle East and Pakistan who have been deliberately targeted, by Sunnis, and solely because they are regarded by those Sunnis as Infidels, even the worst kind of Infidels.

...we wish to voice our sadness, indeed our outrage, over the random and sometimes systematic acts of violence and harassment—acts that for both Christians and Muslims threaten and disrupt the harmony that binds us together in mutual support, recognition, and friendship.

Translation: if we react to acts of Muslim terrorism by becoming more suspicious of Muslims, allowing attacks by Muslims to limit our “dialogue,” and rejecting that which binds us “in mutual support, recognition, and friendship”[!], why, then the terrorists will have won.”

“In the 2007 document A Common Word Between Us and You, 138 of the Islamic world’s most respected leaders asserted the following”:

“To those who nevertheless relish conflict and destruction for their own sake or reckon that ultimately they stand to gain through them, we say that our very eternal souls are all also at stake if we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony. . . . So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.”

This is not Muslim-Christian dialogue, but Christians whistling in the dark.

As Robert Spencer pointed out at the time, the phrase “a common word between you and us” comes from the Qur’an, where the full context shows quite a different intent: “‘a common word between us and you’ comes from beyond the Qur’an citation provided in that document’s epigraph. If they [the Catholic bishops] had looked it up in the Qur’an, they would have found that the full passage is not a call for mutual understanding and mutual respect; rather, it is an exhortation to Christians to convert to Islam.”

And Spencer provided in full that self-incriminating passage: “Say: ‘People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but Allah, and that we associate no others with Him, and do not some of us take others as Lords, apart from Allah.’ And if they turn their backs, say: ‘Bear witness that we are Muslims’ (3:64).”

Spencer explained: “Since Muslims consider the Christian confession of the divinity of Christ to be an unacceptable association of a partner with God, this verse is saying that the ‘common word’ that Muslims and the People of the Book

should agree on is that Christians should discard one of the central tenets of their faith and essentially become Muslims.”

Especially egregious among Catholic clergy, in his confused and delirious defense of Islam, has been Bishop Robert McManus of Worcester, Massachusetts, who even cancelled a scheduled talk by Robert Spencer, explaining: “Spencer’s talk about extreme, militant Islamists...might undercut the positive achievements that we Catholics have attained in our inter-religious dialogue with devout Muslims.”

At the time – February 2013 – one would have expected Bishop McManus to provide a list of those “positive achievements” that Catholics had “attained in inter-religious dialogue.” He failed to do so. And more than three years later, after some “negative achievements” – attacks on Charlie Hebdo, and the Hyper Cacher kosher market, Bataclan and Brussels, and Orlando, and San Bernardino, and Nice among them – McManus once again was reminding us of the “positive achievements that...Catholics have attained in [their] inter-religious dialogue with devout Muslims,” achievements so obvious that they never need be described. Bishop McManus keeps repeating the same praise of “dialogue,” without allowing reality to break in: “This dialogue has produced a harvest of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation throughout the world and here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.” Again, one would like Bishop McManus to provide a list of five, or three, or two, or even one example, of that bounteous harvest of “mutual respect, understanding and cooperation” throughout the world between Muslims and Christians, that he believes has been reaped thanks to clerics like himself.

Then there is Pope Francis, who back in November 2013 said that “the Koran is a book of peace” and “Islam is a peaceful religion.” In May of this year, he seemed to have awakened from that deep dream of peace, when he told the French newspaper La Croix that “the idea of conquest is inherent to the soul of Islam.” This was, from him, a welcome admission.

Unfortunately, he did not stop there, but felt compelled to add a tu-quoque (or rather, a me-quoque) directed at the world's Christians: "it is also possible to interpret the objective of Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus sends his disciples to all nations, in terms of the same idea of conquest." But Jesus's disciples were not engaged in warfare, *qitaal*, as were Muslims conquering lands for Islam, but, rather, in spreading the Gospel mostly through preaching and persuasion; the Pope seems to have been suggesting a similarity of Muslim and Christian methods where there is none.

That is where things depressingly stood when, the other day, a senior Cardinal in Rome, Raymond Burke, [gave an astonishing interview to the Religion News Service](#). He stated that "there is no question that Islam wishes to govern the world" and "criticised Christian leaders who "simply think that Islam is a religion like the Catholic faith." That is not true, Cardinal Burke insists, for if Muslims become a majority in any country they "have the religious obligation to govern that country." Burke says there are already "little Muslim states" within France and Belgium that are no-go areas for the police and are run, essentially, by local Muslims for the local Muslim population. Burke insists that the only way for Europe to withstand the relentless onslaught of Islam is "to return to its Christian roots."

I do not know if Cardinal Burke means that post-Christian Europeans must somehow persuade themselves to become Believers again, or if he means instead that Europeans must again recognize that Europe is a child of Christianity, whatever those on the wilder shores of multiculturalism may claim, and that the failure to do so has weakened Europe's sense of itself and its ability to withstand this relentless Muslim onslaught that has no end. But it is Burke's bold diagnosis, and not his putative cure, that matters most. His text and tone are different from what we are used to hearing from present-day Christian clerics, so few of whom are inclined to

publicly recognize unpleasant truths about Islam. Surely Europeans ought not be too quick to deny the Christian roots of Western civilization or, when they don't deny those roots outright, to accommodatingly pretend that Islam too, is owed so much. Just remember that shameful rewriting of history by Jacques Chirac, when he insisted that "Europe owes as much to Islam as it does to Christianity."

I wonder if Cardinal Burke, so highly placed in Rome, would have made his welcome remarks without discussing the subject with others still higher up in the Vatican, perhaps even with the Pope, and whether his statements might even have received the Pope's tacit approval, a way to have the outspoken Cardinal Burke (one of the Church's "conservatives") express what Pope Francis now wants expressed, but for the moment doesn't think he should be the one to do it. This, of course, is only a hope, likely forlorn, for the Pope's "humanitarian" insistence that European countries take in still more Muslim immigrants, and his chastising of those – like Poland, which he will be visiting this week – that don't, seems fixed in amber. But, on the off-chance that Cardinal Burke's statements constituted a trial balloon for a harder Catholic line on Islam, may it long remain on high to receive the attention it deserves. Let's now see how the other clerics respond, whether they remain eager to distance themselves from such remarks, or whether Cardinal Burke's observations embolden others, and reduce the mcmanuses to a suitable silence.