

GROUND ZERO MOSQUE IS MORALLY WRONG

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

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As president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, and as a strong advocate of religious liberty, I am instinctively pulled towards support for building a mosque near Ground Zero. But I am also a veteran of the United States Air Force, as well as a first-hand witness to the destruction and collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. It is the latter credentials that pull me away from supporting the mosque. After much reflection, I have resolved the tension between these two competing sets of identity markers: I am opposed to building the mosque at this site.

If the choice were between supporting the right of the government to forbid the construction of a mosque near Ground Zero, and allowing it to be built, I would not hesitate to side with those who want to build it. But that is not the operative choice. Of course, the government has no right to summarily ban the construction of any house of worship. However, what is at work in this case is the *moral* right of Muslims to choose this particular site to build a mosque.

Let's say that instead of radical Muslims on 9/11, the terrorists were members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). As someone who is both an American and an Irish citizen, I would not support the construction of an Irish center near Ground Zero. Why? Because it would send the wrong message. What makes the case for a Ground Zero Mosque even more problematic is that the murder took place in the name of Islam.

The man behind the mosque, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, says he wants the structure to be built so he can bring people

together. Having palpably failed at this goal already, and having snubbed an offer by New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan to mediate a settlement, one wonders why he persists: his project has done more to divide people than any sinister anti-Muslim plot could ever do. Why doesn't he take a page out of the Catholic playbook and do what the nuns did when asked by the pope to remove the large Cross they erected near the Auschwitz concentration camp? Just move it somewhere else. That's what people do when they have no agenda.

Interestingly, Imam Rauf's name for the building is Cordoba House, named after the Cordoba Mosque that was erected in Cordoba, Spain following Muslim conquest in 784. That's part of their history: after they take over, they build mosques in sites previously occupied by churches and synagogues. It's kind of a Muslim trophy.

More important is Imam Rauf's refusal to admit that Islam is in dire need of reform. He categorically denies this to be true. Which can only mean that he finds it acceptable, under Sharia law, to legally murder a Muslim who converts. Or that he has no real problem with the stoning to death of an adulterous Muslim woman. That's the law in Muslim-run nations, and no amount of spin saying that this is not exactly what the Koran condones can change this reality.

Similarly, why does Rauf not unequivocally condemn Hamas? Hamas is not a sports club, nor is it a fraternity: it is a terrorist organization that takes pride in the intentional killing of innocent Christians and Jews. And for reasons he will not explain, Rauf hesitates to call them what they are.

Some of the supporters of the Ground Zero Mosque say that what Muslims are experiencing today is reminiscent of what Catholics went through in the nineteenth century. But this is nonsense. Anti-Catholicism at that time was visited on Catholics merely because they were Catholic: Catholic children were beaten in the schools for not reading the Protestant

Bible, and their parents routinely discriminated against in the workplace. By contrast, Muslims today enjoy a wide array of rights.

It cannot be overlooked that many of the advocates of building the Ground Zero Mosque have a very curious record of defending religious liberty. For example, neither President Barack Obama, nor New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, has a great record defending Catholic rights. Consider that when Obama went to Georgetown last year, his advance team ordered that a drape be placed over IHS, Latin for Jesus. Similarly, when practically everyone took the side of the Catholic League in the Mother Teresa controversy, Bloomberg could not bring himself to criticize Anthony Malkin for not lighting the upper floors of the Empire State Building in her honor.

We could not help but notice that many of those same newspapers that have never been known to be sympathetic to Catholic causes were strongly on the side of Muslims. And some evinced a smugness that was downright sickening. In this regard, no paper topped the *New York Times*.

With great remorse, the *Times* noted that most New Yorkers do not want the Ground Zero Mosque. "New Yorkers, like other Americans," it said, "have a way to go." In other words, even the urbane men and women of Gotham are acting like those hicks in fly-over country. The benchmark of enlightenment, of course, is the *New York Times*. You know you've made it when you catch up to them. Guess I have a way to go.