

# POPE SPARKS MUSLIM BACKLASH; VITRIOL AND VIOLENCE ENSUES

When Pope Benedict XVI gave his scholarly address before a learned audience at Regensburg University, he had no idea it would lead to a massive uproar among so many Muslims. Ever since giving his September 12 address, the pope has been bombarded with criticism, much of it patently unfair.

In the course of his lengthy remarks, Pope Benedict cited a 14th century Byzantine emperor: "Show me just what Muhammad 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."

The pope made it clear that these were not his words, and that he was using them only to highlight what has often happened in history when faith and reason are uncoupled. But it was to no avail: his most strident critics ripped his words out of context and vilified him.

In response, many Muslims erupted in violence. In Somalia, Muslims were urged by a cleric to "hunt down" the pope and kill him. "Whoever offends our Prophet Muhammad should be killed on the spot by the nearest Muslim," said Sheik Abubakar Hassan Malin. His violent words bequeathed violence when a nun was shot outside a children's hospital in the nation's capital. Not to be outdone, a senior Turkish official compared the pope to Hitler.

The Mujahideen Shura Council referred to the pope as "the worshipper of the cross," and pledged to "break the cross and spill the wine" in the "house of the dog from Rome." The group, which posted its call to violence on the Internet, also said that God will enable Muslims "to slit their throats, and make their money and descendants the bounty of the

mujahideen.” Seven churches were firebombed in the West Bank and Gaza by gun-wielding Palestinians, using lighter fluid to burn the churches. And in many parts of the world, Muslims took to the streets chanting “Death to the Pope,” burning him in effigy.

The Muslim uproar did not die down quickly and is likely to reappear when the pope ventures to Turkey on November 28. Those who have been highly critical of Pope Benedict also include many non-Muslims, as well as devout secularists. He has also been lambasted by ex-Catholics like Rosie O'Donnell, and has been the subject of much abuse by pundits in the media. The Catholic League, of course, defended him non-stop.