Subject: "Now we\'re talking" - October 22, 2006 - davidwarrenonline.com  
  
  
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> SUNDAY SPECTATOR  
> October 22, 2006  
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> Now we\'re talking  
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> An extraordinary thing happened a week ago. Thirty-eight Muslim scholars   
> and chief muftis, from across the Muslim world, jointly replied to the   
> Pope's speech at Regensburg (and more have associated their names with   
> this document, since). It was presented to the Vatican's envoy at Amman;   
> the full text in English is available through the Islamica magazine   
> website, the Catholic website, Chiesa, and elsewhere. I look through the   
> list of signatories, and they are a "who's who" of the learned leaders of   
> a faith that has always aspired to be led by its most learned.  
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> One of the points the Pope has made, about the difficulty of engaging in   
> dialogue with Islam, is to know who speaks authoritatively for it -- as,   
> for instance, the Pope can speak for Catholic Christians. The document   
> answers that question. In effect, the signatories reply, "Here we are."   
> Here, for Muslims as well as Christians to read, is an authoritative   
> contemporary statement by men who DO speak for Islam. Not for "moderate   
> Islam", whatever that could mean, but for the living religion itself. And   
> they speak in forthright contradiction of the welter of idiotic fatwas   
> issuing from Afghan caves, the Sunni Triangle, and the North London   
> Central Mosque.  
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> And the significance of what they said went beyond -- far beyond -- being   
> a formal reply to the Pope's remarks at Regensburg. Truly with reason and   
> restraint, they defend the honour of the Islamic faith as it has come down   
> through 14 centuries of interpretation and experience -- that faith in its   
> breadth, and not in the narrowness of postmodern psychopaths, trying to   
> reconstruct the conditions of 7th-century Arabia.  
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> The signatories renounced and condemned violence against Christians in the   
> name of Islam. They accepted without qualification the Pope's   
> post-Regensburg clarifications, and both accepted and applauded his call   
> for dialogue. They unambiguously denounced and rejected all terrorist   
> interpretations of the word "jihad"; they insisted on the priority of   
> Surah 2:256  of the Koran ("There is no compulsion in religion"), stating   
> explicitly that it is not obviated by later Koranic passages or Hadiths.   
> They went so far as to aver that the declaration of Jesus in Mark 12:29-31   
> expresses the essence of all Abrahamic religion -- Muslim, Christian,   
> Jewish.  
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> That is Mark's version of the Gospel message that there are "two great   
> commandments". The first is to love God with all thy heart and soul and   
> mind; and the second, to love thy neighbour as thyself. (And please,   
> secular humanists, note the order in which those commandments are always   
> given: first God, then man.)  
>  
> The signatories agree with the Pope that the dialogue between Christianity   
> and Islam must be founded in reason. They admit, just as Christians admit,   
> there are limitations to human reason, for what is divine goes beyond what   
> humans can know. But what is divine is not incompatible with reason, and   
> within the sphere of human relations, between peoples who do not confess   
> the same faith, reason is the only sound guide.  
>  
> This does not mean that violence is forsworn in all circumstances. As the   
> Muslim signatories note, Jesus himself violently turned the moneychangers   
> out of the Temple precincts. But reason itself determines when violence is   
> the only appropriate defence against unreason.  
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> Islam is thus, in the words of 38 of its most qualified living exponents,   
> not merely "a religion of peace", but more essentially a religion of   
> love -- of love, from and for the one God we all worship; the one true   
> Lord we know by His works, and who is Love in all His actions. For what is   
> done in hatred cannot be done in God's name, and will always be false   
> religion.  
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> Now take this in. In a moment of increasing worldwide violence and   
> tension, Pope Benedict XVI issued a call, echoing his predecessor   
> John-Paul II, for a real dialogue between religions at the highest level   
> of reason. And authoritative spiritual leaders of the Islamic umma   
> responded favourably to this, and declared, in a fine, noble, and open   
> spirit: "Let the dialogue begin!" This is news of very great significance.   
> It should have been the top headline in every newspaper in the world.  
>  
> But our media -- West and East -- report this, when at all, as some kind   
> of sidebar on the terror war; as if the Muslim leaders had merely accepted   
> an "apology" from the Pope for having hurt some Muslims' feelings.  
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> This is why we have religions. Because journalism cannot tell us what we   
> need to know.  
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> David Warren  
>  
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