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“On Faith” — Controversy Over The Pope’s Visit to Turkey

Wednesday, November 29, 2006



The “[On Faith](#)” question at *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek* magazine this week concerns Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Turkey. Here is the question:

Pope Benedict XVI is in Turkey this week. What did you think of his remarks about Islam at Regensburg, and do you think he, and the Christian church in general, can help Muslims take on their more violent and extreme elements?

In [my column](#), I argued that an evangelical Christian cannot answer this question without confronting the basic question of the papacy. As I stated:

What should the Pope say in Turkey? Again, this is a very hard question for an evangelical Christian to answer. In the first place, this raises once again the issue of the papacy. The evangelical rejection of the papacy is not just a rejection of historic papal abuses. To the contrary, evangelicals oppose the papacy as an institution. It is an unbiblical office that, even in its current form, seeks to claim both a spiritual and a temporal authority. Both are rejected by evangelical Christians. The Pope is received in Turkey as a head of state. The papacy’s response to the furor over the Regensburg remarks was typical of the practices of state diplomacy. By the time the Vatican was finished clarifying (without apologizing) the message was not clear at all.

Put simply, the Pope’s visit to Turkey—along with the media attention and hype—is further evidence that the mixing of temporal and spiritual authority will not work. A minister of Christ should speak clearly about the Gospel and about the reality of Islam. The central Christian concern about Islam should not be the undeniable threat of Islamic violence but the fact that Islam is incompatible with the Gospel of Christ. Islam explicitly denies what Christians centrally affirm—that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God who came to save his people from their sins. Thus, the most significant challenge posed by Islam is not geopolitical (though this is real) but spiritual. I do not expect Benedict XVI to say this in Turkey.

My column contains a great deal more, and it has attracted almost 100 responses as this article is posted. Let me know what you think.

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