



Slouching Toward Suicide

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During his visit to Germany, Pope Benedict XVI stunned the world on Sept. 12 by issuing a subtle, discreet yet formidable challenge to Islam -- a challenge that drew praise from various observers.

The pope's rhetoric, however, contrasts with his failure to confront a more fundamental problem: the Catholic Church's willingness to concede its own worship space to Muslims, without regard for the consequences.

In Europe and the United States, Catholic authorities have encouraged the transformation of Catholic schools and churches into Muslim schools and mosques. One order of friars is helping Italian Muslims build a mosque right next to its monastery. In Belgium, meanwhile, the Catholic bishops let illegal Muslim immigrants live and worship in churches to force the government to grant amnesty.

Those same Catholic authorities would not grant similar concessions to Protestants or Eastern Orthodox, whose theologies are infinitely more similar.

Given the violent, anti-Semitic and anti-Western ideology permeating contemporary Islam -- as well as decades of massive Muslim immigration to Europe -- the implications are obvious.

"While Western Europe is turning Muslim, its Christian churches are committing suicide," wrote The Brussels Journal's Paul Belien in May.

The Norwegian author Fjordman expressed the situation less dramatically but no less accurately for the same outlet in September: "The ideological civil war within the West is not just between secularists and religious people; it runs straight through the Church itself."

The Catholic Church's problem has its roots in an ecumenism that borders on syncretism and a sense of compassion that crosses into indulgence. Pope John Paul II set the example by praying in a Damascus mosque during his 2001 trip to the Middle East.

Cardinal Bernard Law, the former archbishop of Boston, followed the late pope's example at a suburban mosque in 2002. As the Boston Globe reported on Nov. 25, 2002, "Law removed his shoes. Then, as the imam chanted the sunset prayers, the bishop knelt with his forehead just inches from the carpet and offered praise to Allah."

Afterward, Law partook of the meal that breaks the day-long Ramadan fast. "I feel very much at home with my fellow fundamentalists here," Law said, "who are convinced that God must be at the center of our lives."

Law's basic attitude appears to be prevailing as Catholicism declines in the West. In Detroit, Our Lady Help of the Christians Catholic Church held its final Mass on Oct. 29. The Archdiocese of Detroit sold the church's property to the Islamic Center of North Detroit, which plans to convert the complex into a mosque, an Islamic community center and a school for the neighborhood of Bangladeshi immigrants.

The archdiocese had leased another one of its properties to Muslims, the Detroit News reported Oct. 27, but did not disclose the location. The church, built in 1923 for Polish immigrants, was serving just 124 families when it closed.

The same month in Italy, the Capuchin Franciscan friars agreed to help the Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy (UCOII) build a mosque in Genoa immediately adjacent to one of its monasteries. The order agreed to exchange the land for an abandoned factory that the union had planned to convert into a mosque -- and even agreed to build the new mosque's foundation.

One of the deal's most vociferous opponents is Magri Alam, an Egyptian immigrant to Italy who became a conservative journalist and a passionate critic of radical Islam.

In the Oct. 16 edition of the Milan daily *Corriere della Sera*, Alam wrote that the UCOII encourages "an extremist version of the Qu'ran, where Christians, Jews and Westerners are criminalized, as well as women and other Muslims who don't submit to their rule."

The union's president, Mohammed Nour Dachan, has refused to sign a document in which Muslims pledged to accept Italy's constitution, denounce terrorism and recognize Israel's right to exist. His organization also demands Islamic schools, Islamic banks and clerical

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supervision of textbooks, as Front Page Magazine reported in its article, "How Will Rome Face Mecca?"

In Glasgow in 2003, Catholic officials approved attempts by Muslims to turn St. Albert's School into an Islamic institution. More than 90 percent of the school's 360 students were Muslim.

"We are in favor of Muslim schools," an unidentified church spokesman told Edinburgh's The Scotsman on Nov. 23, 2003. "We support faith schools across the board. In the case of St. Albert's, we see a school in which for 95 percent of the children, the festival of Eid has more significance than Christmas or Easter. It is de facto not a Catholic school."

The Catholic Establishment's indulgent sense of compassion manifests itself most powerfully in its attitude toward immigrants. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, the Archbishop of Westminster in London, demonstrated that attitude in his May 1, 2006 sermon at Westminster Cathedral: "In migrants, the Church has always contemplated the image of Christ who said, 'I was a stranger and you made me welcome' (Matthew 25:35). Their condition is, therefore, a challenge to the faith and love of believers who are called on to heal the evils caused by migration and discover the plan God pursues through migration even when there are obvious injustices. God's appeal, made so forcefully in both the Old and the New Testaments, is for fraternity -- for there to be new bonds of friendship forged between newcomer and native.

"The Church does not approve of illegal immigration...But nor can the Church ignore the plight among us of those who are here without legal status...We stand in solidarity with you too." The Church, said Pope John Paul II in his migration day message, "is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and welcomed as brothers and sisters."

"It is one of the central tasks of Christians -- a constant theme of the Old and New Testaments -- to offer hospitality to the exile and the stranger, seeing in him and her, the face of Christ. Faith in the presence of Christ in the migrant leads to a conversion of mind and heart, which leads to a renewed spirit of communion."

The Catholic Establishment is so infatuated with creating such a spirit that it refuses to ask immigrants even to show a fundamental respect for others, let alone to assimilate into their new societies and obey the laws. Perhaps this is most true in Belgium, where the bishops encourage illegal Muslim immigrants to take over churches in virtually every diocese.

Since the late 1990's, Belgium's bishops have turned their churches into immigrant centers as part of a campaign to intimidate the government into granting amnesty. Such a campaign in 2000 forced the government to legalize 50,000 immigrants.

In March, Belgian Home Secretary Patrick Dewael granted residency permits to 60 Muslim squatters at St. Boniface Church in suburban Brussels after all 118 squatters went on a hunger strike. Then came the deluge. By mid-May, more than 30 Catholic churches throughout Belgium were occupied by illegal immigrants, the vast majority of them Muslim. About 300 Africans occupied Antwerp's Magdalena Chapel; other churches had more than 700 squatters living inside.

The squatters also conduct Muslim services in the churches; a banner bearing the word "Allah" in Arabic hung in Our Lady of Perpetual Succor Church in Brussels.

Pictures from the same church showed squatters' tents -- gifts from Catholic relief agencies -- filling floor space in the sanctuary, computer tables standing near the pulpit -- and a group of people lighting a fire on the church floor.

Our Lady of Perpetual Succor has not been the only site for such activities. Father Herwig Arts, a conservative author, described the scene at Antwerp's Jesuit chapel for the daily Gazet van Antwerpen in 1998:

"(Immigrants) removed the tabernacle, (and) installed a television set and radios, depriving us of the opportunity to pray in our own chapel and say Mass. It has upset me very much. For me, the place has been desecrated. I feel I cannot enter it anymore."

Yet the Belgian bishops do not care about such trivia as the desecration of their own worship space.

"Everybody is entitled to a good place in our society. Also illegal fugitives," said Monsignor Luc van Looy, the bishop of Ghent.

"Solidarity cannot be limited to one's own nation," added Cardinal Godfried Danneels, the archbishop of Brussels and Belgium's leading prelate.

As The Brussels Journal reported on May 5, "Father Arts was severely criticized for his comments. Today he remains silent, as do all Catholic priests..."

Even the Vatican supports the bishops. Monsignor Karl-Josef Rauber -- the Holy See's nuncio, or diplomatic representative, to Belgium -- told the leftist daily De Morgen on May 10 that "the Church has always sided with the weak." But public criticism forced Rauber's office to retreat slightly. On May 11, the Brussels daily De Standaard published this quote from Rauber's office: "The nuncio cannot interfere in this

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issue. However, whatever the Belgian bishops say, the nuncio supports them because the bishops are wise men."

Ironically, the nuncio and the bishops are violating official church policy as expressed in paragraph 61 of the 2004 document, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (The Love of Christ towards Migrants):

"To avoid misunderstandings and confusion, and considering the religious diversity that we mutually recognize, and out of respect for sacred places and the religion of the other too, we do not consider it opportune for Christian churches, chapels, places of worship or other places reserved for evangelization and pastoral work to be made available for members of non-Christian religions. Still less should they be used to obtain recognition of demands made on the public authorities."

Without papal enforcement through canon law, however, such a policy is merely ink on paper.

"Benedict XVI understands that Catholicism is in trouble in Europe," Tom Bethell wrote in the October edition of *The American Spectator*, "but has not yet shown that he has the courage to do anything about it."

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