

Dumb Ass

September 2006

*“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.”*

Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos 1391

Throughout the centuries, the pope of the Roman Catholic Church has assumed to himself many honorific titles including: *His Holiness The Pope, Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Vicar of Jesus Christ*, and even more recently, *Sweet Christ on Earth*.

With all due respect, I propose a more fitting pontifical title for the current *Successor of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles*, Pope Benedict XVI – **Dumb Ass Pope**.

Elected *Patriarch of the West* at age seventy-eight after a long career as an academic theologian and a high-ranking German cardinal, and followed by twenty-five years of rarefied bureaucratic experience – and sumptuous living – working inside the confines of Vatican City, this former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, penned a few sentences, which he gleefully read to a German audience of academics, and in the process inflamed the religious sensitivities of the entire Muslim world, approximately 1.3 billion people.

Satan's hellhound in the Vatican, some Muslim hotheads called him; we shall break the cross and spill the wine, shouted others; we will continue the holy war of jihad until God gives us the opportunity to slit the throat of the cross-worshipper, cried others; and a huge crowd of demonstrators burned a white-clad effigy of the ***Vicar of the Apostolic See***. Sad to report, a Catholic nun was also murdered and several Catholic Churches in the Middle East were firebombed to protest this religious slur preached by the ***Sovereign of the State of the Vatican City*** – and this is only Day Three of the official outrage.

Dumb Ass, indeed.

Instead of repeating a clever, third-party religious slur from a 14th century emperor against the Prophet Mohammed, this ***Primate of Italy*** should have used his entitlement perch to visit Muslim leadership far and wide asking two questions: what can I, the ***Servant of the Servants of God***, do to bring peace to the world? And, working hand in hand, what can we do together to lift up the poor and the oppressed, whatever their religious affiliation? But alas, instead of a religious life dedicated to voluntary poverty, the practice of nonviolence, and personal sacrifice for the sake of others, ***His Holiness The Pope*** travels about with pomp and circumstance and political agenda. What more could we reasonably expect from the ***Sovereign of the State of the Vatican City***, the wearer of silk garments, medieval headdress, and fashionable eyewear?

Pontifical titles are meant to create the perception, dare I say illusion, that an anointed member from an exalted priestly caste is something more than merely human, not

quite a divine perhaps, but nearly so. Unfortunately, this is precisely the wrong religious message for a world mired in abject poverty, racial and sectarian cleansings, and wars seeking to control natural resources and promote international consumer decadence. Respectfully, my title for the ***Bishop of Rome, Dumb Ass Pope***, does much to reconnect the religious successor of the Jesus of Nazareth to our common humanity – a worthy objective, I think.