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## Analysis: Papal cannon misfires

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The Pope's temporary lapse of infallibility was a theological cannon/canon

shot heard around the world. From Turkey, where the ruling party likened the pontiff to Hitler and Mussolini, to Tunisia, where even moderates were in high dudgeon, and from the mosques of London to Lahore, imams were fanning global flames of angry resentment. Seven churches were sacked in the West Bank. Morocco and Iran recalled their ambassadors to the Vatican.

The detonator was a major address Pope Benedict XVI gave at Regensburg University in his native Germany in which he cited an obscure 14th century Byzantine emperor who had castigated some of the teaching of Muhammad the Prophet as "evil and inhuman," especially his command to spread the Muslim faith "by the sword."

The book the Pope quoted recounted a conversation between Byzantine Christian Emperor Manuel Paleologos II and a Persian intellectual on fundamental truths of Christianity and Islam - and jihad, or holy war. "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new," said the emperor, "and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

Using his weekly Angelus blessing at the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo outside Rome, the Pope tried to douse the firestorm throughout the Islamic world. He was "deeply sorry" Muslims were offended. But that wasn't good enough. "We need a clear and direct apology to all the Muslims of the world," said Jihan Halafawi, director of the Political Bureau of the radical Muslim Brotherhood, "because, in his aggression, he clearly knew and meant what he said."

The Pope was not defining a doctrine about faith and morals where infallibility reigns. But it was more than off the cuff - and less than a papal bull. Benedict was also a little wide of the mark. Any foreign policy adviser could have informed the Pope that what he planned to say would be seen by Muslims as a force multiplier for extremists, along with Danish cartoons lampooning the Prophet; the occupation of Iraq; Abu Ghraib prison pictures; Israel's war on Hezbollah; and the U.S.'s support for Israel against Hezbollah.

The prophet was no stranger to the sword. The Battle of Tours (France) in 732 was arguably one of history's most important. Charles "The Hammer" Martel finally defeated a pillaging and proselytizing army of 600,000 marauding Muslims - and saved Europe from Muslim expansionism and Islamization that had conquered Spain. Martel's army slaughtered the would-be conquerors down to the last man.

Christians also lived by the sword. Witness the nine crusades, or religious wars, from the 11th to the 13th century, almost all of them abject failures. Only the First Crusade achieved its objective. The capture of Jerusalem on July 15, 1099 made the streets of the old city run ankle deep with Muslim and Jewish blood.

For two days, Christian soldiers massacred every living creature that was not their own, an estimated 40,000 men, women and children. Jews huddled in their synagogue whose exits Christian soldiers blocked before setting fire to it.

The Muslim warrior Saladin conquered Jerusalem by stealth and without carnage some 90 years later in 1187. But the crusades and the story of Jerusalem in 1099 are drilled into present day jihadis as they are proselytized for suicide missions.

Pope John Paul II took the unprecedented step of apologizing for the violence in the Crusades in the name of Christianity. Islam's promise of 72 virgins to suicide bombers is very similar to church leaders in the era of the crusades that promised eternal paradise in return for martyrdom against Muslims.

The Spanish and Roman inquisitions, and the tortures they engendered, stained Catholicism for over 300 years. Galileo, the father of modern physics, was tried for heresy, forced to abjure the truth, and sentenced to life under house detention in 1633. His conviction the earth and other planets revolve around the sun was a violation of church doctrine that decreed the sun and other planets revolve around a stationary earth. But the Vatican didn't lift its censure from Galileo's work till 1822. And Pope John Paul II didn't reinstate him to full respectability until 1983.

By way of an unprecedented apology, Pope Benedict said, "the citation from a medieval text doesn't express in any way whatsoever my personal opinion." In that case, why bother dusting it off for a major speech in his native country? So what was the reason for quoting something that was said by an unknown in an obscurantist phase of history? "It was meant to be," explained the Pontiff, "an invitation to frank and sincere dialogue" between Islam and Christianity.

The entire world is alarmed by mass murders in the name of Islam. The Muslim world urgently needs a Martin Luther or Martin Luther King to lead the overwhelming majority of moderate Muslims out of the bloody wilderness where the fundamentalist admirers of al-Qaida have led them astray. Regrettably, the Pope's unfortunate sally widened the gulf between the two faiths.

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