

A reader, having seen my observation in the last posting regarding this subject, forwarded this article by Stephan Salisbury. It echoes one of my fears regarding the hatred engendered by the Islamic cultural center planned for lower Manhattan. Salisbury is the cultural writer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. His most recent book is *Mohamed's Ghosts: An American Story of Love and Fear in the Homeland*.

Waiting for the Demagogue

Here we come to the real source of unease over what's now going on — the realization that we've seen something like this developing before, only it wasn't diaperheads and terrorism inflaming the country. It was dirty commies and Jews then.

Sixty years ago, on February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy rose before a Republican women's club in Wheeling, West Virginia, and delivered the famous speech in which he waved a sheet of paper and claimed that on it were the names of — there is dispute — 57 or 205 known communists "working and shaping policy in the State Department." In doing so, he put his incendiary, eponymous stamp on the most oppressive period of the Cold War, and as it turned out, the nation was ready for the message.

McCarthyism did not emerge on that cold day solely from the fevered imagination of the Wisconsin senator. There had been a drumbeat of anti-Communist red-baiting, hearings, speeches, treason charges, and grandstanding coming from Washington for years. The House Committee on Un-American Activities, anti-communist informer Whittaker Chambers, ambitious congressman Richard Nixon, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, President Harry Truman — all did yeoman's work in preparing the soil for McCarthy and his reckless accusations of "20 years of treason!"

There are some substantial differences between then and now. Most importantly, McCarthy operated from within the political system, using his subcommittee chairmanship as a vehicle for pseudo-investigations and attacks. When his Senate colleagues turned on him following a particularly reckless campaign against the U.S. Army, McCarthy was stripped of his chairmanship and his power. A true demagogue, he had no organization to speak of, only those who feared him and those who followed him.

By contrast, while some extreme anti-Muslim sentiment is in evidence in Washington, the real juice for an anti-Muslim movement is now bubbling up outside the Beltway, much as virulent racist hysteria has, in the past, bubbled up from the grassroots. In that regard, it's worth noting that about a third of America's five to eight million Muslims are African American.

... There are virtually endless potential flashpoints embedded along the road ahead, nor are the issue and its passions purely dependant on what happens in Manhattan, where a recent poll showed a majority of residents favor construction (although a majority of all New York City residents do not).

... The proliferation of, and acceptance of, such talk, particularly from major political candidates, may be preparing the American ground for the emergence of a leader who can synthesize the demonizing and scapegoating of Muslims, fears augmented by severe economic anxiety, the maturing of extreme rightwing activism, and a widespread and growing contempt for official Washington. If that happens, the nation — and American Muslims — could face something far worse than McCarthy, who held sway in a golden era of rising expectations and general economic growth.

Mosque controversies will be the least of it then.

This story, by Robert Scheer, originally appeared at
http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/ground_zero_for_tolerance_20100817/

Ground Zero for Tolerance

Are the Republicans terminally stupid or are they just playing the dangerous fool? In either case, the irrational attack on Muslims everywhere by the GOP's leadership is not only deeply subversive with regard to the American ideal of religious tolerance but also poses a profound threat to our national security. ...

Demonization of the Muslim religion is what this brouhaha is all about. Talk of the sensitivity of the victims of 9/11, ignoring those who were Muslim, is just camouflage. It is as absurd as it would be to blame all religious Jews for the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, killed by one gunman from a fanatical Jewish fringe group, or to ban the erection of an Orthodox synagogue anywhere near Rabin's grave. As irrational an act of scapegoating as blaming all ethnic Germans for the acts of Nazis, many of whom claimed to be God-fearing Christians.

Yet that is the logical implication of the comparison that Newt Gingrich made when he likened the proposed erection of a Muslim community center two blocks from the World Trade Center site to putting a Nazi sign next to the Holocaust Museum. On his website, Newt goes further in identifying all Muslims with terrorism: "There should be no mosque near Ground Zero in New York so long as there are no churches or synagogues in Saudi Arabia. The time for double standards that allow Islamists to behave aggressively towards us while they demand our weakness and submission is over."

Consider the full implication of that call for an international cold war against Islam by the former GOP House speaker. Someone should remind Newt that both Republican and Democratic presidents have regarded Saudi Arabia as an ally in the war against terrorism and toward that end sanctioned the sale of very sophisticated weaponry to the kingdom and the sharing of intelligence with its military. So too with the Muslim-dominated government of Pakistan with which we have been allied for a half-century, not to mention our current Muslim allies in power in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a leader in Congress, Gingrich supported those

policies, but now in his zeal to misrepresent President Barack Obama's perfectly sensible stand that we are not at war with the Muslim world, he abandons not only his record but also any pretense of logic.

But even if one accepts that the Wahhabi version of Islam dominant in Saudi Arabia helps fuel violent spinoffs of the Osama bin Laden variety (although bin Laden would be summarily executed in his native land), what does this have to do with a Sufi Muslim community center proposed for lower Manhattan? As the highly regarded religion writer William Dalrymple pointed out in a *New York Times* Op-Ed piece, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, the leader of the group hoping to build the New York center, is a moderate Sufi, and he and his movement's espousal of universal brotherhood have been a target of violence. The Taliban was so threatened by the Sufi message of universal love that it attacked a Pakistani shrine to the great seventeenth-century Sufi poet-saint Rahman Baba. "I am a lover, and I deal in love," Dalrymple writes in citing Baba's revered Sufi verse, which continues, "Sow flowers,/ so your surroundings become a garden./ Don't sow thorns; for they will prick your feet./ We are all one body./ Whoever tortures another, wounds himself."

This is an excerpt from Bill Hughes' reflection on this Sunday's Catholic mass readings.

This theme of God's unquenchable desire for the wellbeing of humankind is repeated in the fourteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel in the Parable of the great dinner. Many guests were invited but found excuses for not attending. The disappointed host then instructed his servants: "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame." (Lk 14, 21) When this was done and there was still room, the servants were told, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled." (Lk 14, 23.24)

If Luke thought the cautions against self-righteousness and complacency were important for his generation of believers, it must be said that they are important for any and every generation of Christians. Only we can limit the scope of God's redeeming grace. Our age is not unlike the early years of the Christian community as it moved out of Palestine. Cultures are in contact with one another today as never before and sometimes are in conflict. Elitism is as much a temptation today as it was in days gone by whether it is based on race, wealth, success, skin color, or religion. People are marginalized today because of indifference, self-righteousness, and prejudice as they were when Jesus challenged his contemporaries by reaching out to the publicans, sinners, the blind and the lame. We must beware lest as believers we put limits on God's redeeming grace by attitudes, customs, structures which exclude people who are different. We need the reminders in Luke's Gospel: the banquet hall is spacious and open to anyone willing and able to enter through the narrow gate.

Vynette Holliday begins her examination of Matthew's Gospel by placing us in the mind of a contemporary of Jesus. The full article is available at http://www.catholica.com.au/gc0/vh/005_vh_160810.php

Questioning the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth

Matthew begins by telling us his purpose in writing his account of the life of Jesus. It is firstly to present the genealogy of "Jesus Christ". We often pass over the term "Jesus Christ" without according it proper attention.

We know that the word Christ is the English term for the Greek Χριστός (Khristós). It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ (Mashiach) meaning "Anointed one".

Why is the word Khristós never translated into English? In the case of proper names like Jesus, a Latin/English transliteration of the Greek Iēsou, we should of course adhere as closely as possible to the original but Khristós is not a proper name: it is a descriptive title.

In every case in the Hebrew Scriptures, Mashiach is translated into English as "anointed". In the New Testament, however, where it refers to Jesus, its Greek equivalent Khristós is left untranslated and simply Anglicised? Why?

This deceptive measure has caused millions of Christians to believe, even today, that "Jesus Christ" is a double-barrelled name. But imagine what would have happened if the translators had done their job properly and the Greek word Khristós had been properly translated into English as "anointed".

The words "Jesus Christ" invite no question, but the words "Jesus anointed" immediately pose a question for the reader — anointed by whom and for what purpose? Translators have successfully masked the premise upon which every book of the New Testament is based.

Every time the word "Christ" appears as a descriptor of Jesus, the writer is affirming his belief that Jesus is the anointed one of God, the Hebrew Messiah.

If the term had been translated into English we would not be using phrases like "the total Christ" or "the cosmic Christ": we would instead be using phrases like "the total Anointed one" or "the cosmic Anointed one", again posing the question that should have been asked all along — anointed by whom and for what purpose?

... The New Testament writers state over and over again that the Jewish Jesus is the Messiah according to the Hebrew Scriptures. If so, then it follows naturally that non-Jewish, Hellenist-inspired doctrines such as the Virgin-Birth/Incarnation/Trinity are simply not true, and are not to be found anywhere in the New Testament, as we shall presently see.

Roger Karban shares a reflection on Sunday's readings.

... In their recent book *The Invisible Gorilla*, psychologists Chris Chabris and Dan Simmons point out a disturbing fact: in any given situation, we humans can only depend on seeing the things on which we're actually focusing our eyes. Though things on which we're not focusing often pass through our field of vision, we almost never notice them. (The book's title refers to a famous experiment the authors conducted. They asked people to count the number of passes one specific basketball team made during a game. While they were doing this, a girl in a gorilla outfit walked the length of the court, even weaving between players. Most pass-counters never saw the gorilla!)

The authors conclude there's little we can do to improve our ability to notice the "unexpected." We can only admit that no one ever sees everything, and be conscious of the fact that we never have a complete picture of what goes on around us. There's constantly something out of focus.

Without having read Chabris and Simmons' book, our sacred authors agree with their thesis. One of our biblical writers' goals is to train their readers to focus on things invisible to many other viewers.

Both Third-Isaiah and Luke focus our eyes on an aspect of God's actions most "religious folk" rarely notice: God is constantly saving and working with the very people we presume are beyond such actions.

... Luke's Jesus is much clearer on the subject of our ability to see the "outs and ins" around us. "There will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you (Jews) see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. People will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

It's easy to brush off such an unexpected development by saying, "it all depends on how you look at it." Yet we can never forget that God and our sacred authors are constantly disciplining us to "look at it" from their focus, not ours.

Father Richard McBrien is the author of the following article, which was published on <http://ncronline.org>.

Popes of the 20th Century: John XXIII

I began writing this weekly column in early July, 1966. It was long before all of my undergraduate students and all but a handful of my graduate students were born. In that first year, the week of November 4th to be exact, I did a column on the theology of revelation and how Pope John XXIII, who had died three-and-a-half years earlier, had embodied that theology in his own life and ministry.

The column described the late pope as “one of the most dramatic and most effective revelation-events of our time.”

What is a revelation-event and how do individual persons become an expression of it?

A revelation-event is any happening by which God becomes a tangible reality in the lives of ordinary people.

St. Paul gave us the basic formula: “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). In other words, Christ must find concrete expression in others if he is to be understood and embraced.

But even a great saint like Paul is far removed from us. Pope John XXIII is more meaningful than St. Paul for those who lived through the Second Vatican Council and the years following it.

“Imitate John, and you shall imitate Christ,” I wrote. “Imitate his spirit of warmth and love, his openness to all peoples, of every race, nation, religious belief and non-belief. Imitate his concern for the humble and the neglected, for the ‘cast-offs’ of our society. Imitate his spirit of resignation to God’s will in the face of suffering and certain death.”

“Why is it,” I asked, “that the life and ministry of Pope John XXIII struck such a responsive chord in the hearts of all mankind, believer and non-believer alike?”

...Why is it that people...were touched by the example of the Good Shepherd visiting the sick, the orphans, and those in prison? Why is it that people...found inspiration and hope in the sickness and suffering and dying of John XXIII?”

“The contemporary theology of revelation,” the column concluded, “is eminently pastoral and practical. [We] must be ever more sensitive to the presence of God in the people and in the reality around [us].”

Pope John XXIII was such a person.

Nowhere was the Second Vatican Council’s purpose articulated more clearly or more forcefully than in the opening address of the pope who convened it.

This council, Pope John XXIII insisted, was not being held to condemn errors in the Church or in the world at large, as Pope Pius IX had done in his *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864, or as Pope Pius X had done in his anti-Modernist decree of 1907, or as Pope Pius XII had done in his encyclical *Humani generis* in 1950.

“The post-French Revolution Pisan Church had reached the end of its line,” my column for the week of November 5, 1982, pointed out.

“The Church was now summoned by a new, positive, hoped-filled voice of leadership to correlate the Church’s ‘sacred patrimony of truth’, as Pope John XXIII called it,

with 'the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate'."

"The substance of the ancient doctrine...is one thing," the pope declared, "and the way in which it is presented is another."

This was not the time for negativism and condemnations, he warned, even as he was surrounded by "prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand...."

"That grand Johannine vision still lives in the Church," I wrote in that column more than 28 years ago. It lives on "in the hearts and minds of [many] of its active members...."

I reminded readers in my column for the week of August 21, 2000, that John XXIII is "widely regarded as the most beloved pope in history." Indeed, many of the bishops at Vatican II had petitioned Pope Paul VI to proclaim John a saint then and there. But because Paul VI was concerned about the feelings of the council's defeated minority, he declined to do so. Instead, he announced that John XXIII's cause for canonization would be linked with that of Paul VI's own mentor, Pope Pius XII—an idea, as we now know, that was doomed from the start.

When John XXIII died on the evening of June 3, 1963, virtually the whole world mourned. Even the Union Jack was lowered to half-mast in the bitterly divided city of Belfast.

In the early Church John XXIII would have been proclaimed a saint by popular demand.

The pity is that many younger Catholics today never knew him.

Call to boycott Mass may be start of 'revolution in Catholic Church'

by Patsy McGarry, Religious Affairs Correspondent for The Irish Times

A REVOLUTION "may already have started" in the Catholic Church in Ireland, the Humbert Summer School was told in Castlebar, Co Mayo, last night.

US religion commentator Robert Blair Kaiser said in the keynote address that news reports last week of 80-year-old Jennifer Sleeman's call for a boycott of Sunday Mass on September 26th in protest at the Vatican's treatment of women suggested that "this grandmother from Cork" may "already have started a revolution".

"She obviously believes what I believe, that you can have a voice and a vote in your own church, and still be Catholic and, at the same time, Irish," he said.

Author of 13 books, many on Catholic Church reform, as correspondent for Time magazine, Kaiser was awarded an Overseas Press Club award for his coverage of the Second Vatican Council.

Speaking last night on the topic Catholic Church Reform: No More Thrones, he said that “until the Copernican revolution, monarchs exercised absolute control over their subjects by divine right. But when the peoples of the world, informed by a new cosmology, put the divine right of kings into history’s dust bin, they forgot to toss the divine right of popes into the garbage, too.

He emphasised: “I am not attacking our Catholic faith. I am talking about the special and corrosive tyranny that popes have been exercising over Catholics everywhere . . .”

Ireland’s first cardinal Paul Cullen in the 19th century and archbishop of Dublin John Charles McQuaid in the 20th century “established the clerical culture in Ireland that Judge Yvonne Murphy identified as the root cause of the Irish scandals that have sent you and your nation reeling”.

He said that “for a thousand years, popes have promoted a clerical church instead of a Jesus church, that the fathers of Vatican II worked for four serious years to give the church back to the people, and that popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI spent the next 30 years repealing their labour, and allowing corruption to reign, a move that has left our church, which is Christ’s body on earth, broken”.

“Can you help create a people’s church?” he asked. “Yes! You can if you want to. In this context, I like to quote Pope John Paul II. In 1978, he travelled to Warsaw and told millions of Poles: ‘You can take back your country if you demand it.’ You could be saying the same thing: ‘We can take back our church if we demand it.’

“The Poles were fighting against long odds – the military might of the Soviet Union itself. But they won their battle.”

He said that “news over the past decade about our crumbling, abuse-of-authority church may tell us that change is already happening, happening faster than anyone thinks”.

Responding, Irish Catholic deputy editor Michael Kelly said that clericalism in the church “was at the heart of the sex abuse scandal”. By “clericalist” he meant “an elitist mind-set, together with structures and patterns of behaviour corresponding to it, that take it for granted that clerics are intrinsically superior to the other members of the church and deserve automatic deference. Passivity and dependency are the laity’s lot.”

Cathy Lynn Grossman writes for the Washington Post.

Who, exactly, is a 'Christian'? Obama? You?

With all the hooah over the 18% of folks who told a Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life survey that President Obama is Muslim and 34% who said Obama is Christian, the 43% who are unsure what he believes have gotten less attention.

Even Rev. Franklin Graham, who was with his father Billy Graham, when the president reaffirmed his Christian faith and initiated prayer with and for the aging evangelist, appeared to doubt Obama's word in a CNN interview Thursday. It would appear that the younger Graham completely forgot -- or rejects -- Obama's words about being redeemed by Christ as his savior, spoken during the Saddleback Civic Forum in 2008.

And CNN's John King forgot that Franklin Graham has been publicly angry at Obama since a fracas over the National Day of Prayer in May -- making Graham not exactly a neutral source on the Obama-belief-o-meter rating.

So, what does it take to be called a Christian and who's doing the labeling? An interesting discussion of that point comes from Michael O'Loughlin, blogging at *America* magazine's *In All Things*. He writes:

There are still pockets of Evangelicals who don't consider Roman Catholics to be Christian; I remember being asked once if I was a Christian, to which I replied yes, only to have my interlocutor correct me. I was in fact Catholic, not Christian. There are also some Catholics who don't believe that some mainline Protestants to be fully Christian (our own Church refuses to call Protestant churches what they are: churches). So even within our own Christian family, there is not a consensus as to who is actually Christian and who is not.

Since most Americans do call themselves Christian and most Americans don't attend church any more often than Obama (who likes the chapel at Camp David), and many disconnect their beliefs (all good people go to heaven) from their denomination's doctrines (which define that "good" very distinctly) -- just exactly who is Christian remains a question.

As I reported on an earlier Pew survey about Americans' beliefs:

U.S. adults believe overwhelmingly (92%) in God, and 58% say they pray at least once a day. But the study's authors say there's a "stunning" lack of alignment between people's beliefs or practices and their professed faiths.

One of the largest and longest standing debates at the Faith & Reason Forum is over whether Mormons are Christian. There are conservative evangelicals who see Catholicism as a cult, or confuse the failures of the humans who run the Catholic Church with its spiritual teachings. And there are Jews for Jesus that drive Jewish Jews frantic, pointing out that the core of being "Christian" is that your faith is centered on Christ.

In short, not only do many people not know Obama's religion, they may not know their neighbor's -- or their own.

Graham, in his interview with King, said, that while people may be born into Judaism or Islam but that Christianity is a choice in someone's heart:

If you're willing to accept that and believe that and let Jesus Christ be the lord of your life, God will forgive your sins, he'll heal your heart and that's the only way you can become a Christian.

And so, if the president has done that, then I would say he's a Christian if that's what he has done.

Of course, this leaves wide open whether children born to Christian parents are Christians, too. Quite possibly, Franklin Graham is ruling many of them out -- and maybe you, too.

Is the Church the People of God, as it was defined by the Second Vatican Council? Or is it only that part of the People of God that subscribes to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church?

What do you think?

Please continue to forward articles and your comments to tony@tonyercolano.com.