

POPE BENEDICT XVI AND THE REGENSBURG LECTURE: THE REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM AND THE “CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS” IN THE ITALIAN MEDIA

Abstract

As those of other Western countries, Italian media often employ the term “clash of civilisation” [conflitto di civiltà] to refer to the relationship between “Islam” and the “West”. The Muslim world is simplistically described, and perceived, as a monolithic reality. Its representation by media ranges from that of an irrational to that of an intolerant religion.

The expression “clash of civilization” was especially used in September 2006, after the Pope’s *lectio magistralis* at Regensburg University caused vigorous protests to take place in the Muslim world. Benedict XVI seemed to present the Christian God as the only rational divinity, and Islam as an irrational religion. After international Muslim communities asked for an official apology, the Pope held a meeting with the ambassadors from Islamic States to the Holy See, and the representatives of the Italian Muslim communities, to explain his words.

This paper analyzes the way in which this event was presented by the Italian media – including right-wing, mainstream and Catholic media - with the aim of understanding the official reaction of the Vatican (as reported by the *Osservatore Romano*), the Italian Catholic Church (as reported by *Avvenire*), and the Italian public opinion.

Key words: Islam, Media, Politics, Newspapers, Religion.

Introduction

„Objectivity does not exist, but honesty does“²

„Faithful as it might be, a piece of news is never the exact reproduction of reality – it is a registration, a narration, an evaluation or interpretation of reality“.³

1 martiambro@hotmail.it;

2 Beuve-Mery Hubert, founder of *Le Monde*, in Morresi Enrico, *Etica della notizia*, Casagrande, Bellinzona, 2003, p. 163.

3 Papuzzi Alberto, *Professione Giornalista*, Donzelli, Roma, 2003, p. 11.

The media play a crucial role in helping to maintain good relationships between Islam and the West. A precise and clear knowledge of the events is necessary to enable the public to understand different ideas, and to reach reciprocal knowledge; conversely, an inexact and unfaithful description of an event could lead to the formation of inaccurate ideas about a dispute, and about the parties involved.

Using this approach, it is interesting to analyze the role Italian media played in a precise historical moment: when Pope Benedict XVI gave a *lectio magistralis* at the University of Regensburg, Germany in September 2006. The Pope dealt with topics concerning the relationship between reason and faith, and talked about the necessity of entertaining a dialogue with other religions. In expressing his ideas, Benedict XVI cited Koranic verses and excerpts from the work of Theodore Koury, a scholar in religious studies, which referred to the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleolog.

These expressions triggered protests in several Muslim communities around the world. The media played a decisive role in this situation, because the polemic discourse about the Pope's statements centred on the impact they had in mass communication. This paper analyzes the ways in which this lecture was presented by the Italian media – including right-wing, mainstream, and Catholic media – with the aim of understanding the official reaction of the Vatican (as reported by the newspaper *Osservatore Romano*), the Italian Catholic Church (as reported by *Avvenire*), and the Italian public opinion. For this research, Catholic newspapers were used, in addition to three other Italian mainstream papers: *Il Corriere della Sera* (the most widely spread newspaper in Italy), *La Repubblica* (more left-wing oriented) and *Il Giornale* (the newspaper which most closely reflects the views of the current right-wing government). This paper does not aim to express any form of judgement concerning the events that transpired, but aims to highlight the inconsistency of the subsequent reports of the events, and to link these references to the construction of an Islamophobic discourse.

1. The Pope in Munich: the first discourse

In September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI travelled to Germany to visit the local Catholic communities, and, on September 10th, he delivered a speech in Munich. In this speech, he focused on Asian and African populations, who admire the technological innovations of West but are scared of the West's lack of religion. Even if in the Pope's speech there was no reference to the so called "clash of civilisations", an analysis of the different reports published by Italian newspapers reveals that some of them construed the Pope's argumentations as referring to a „clash of civilizations“.⁴

4 Allam Magdi, I predicatori d'odio non hanno alibi, *Corriere della Sera*, 11 September 2006, p. 30, Milano.

The *Corriere della Sera* published two articles on the comparison between Islam and Christianity that can be defined as Christian-centred. One of these two articles was written by the famous journalist Magdi Allam. Referring to 9/11, Magdi Allam describes Islam as a potential threat to the West and uses the word "hate preachers" to identify people who use Islam with the aim of inflicting violence. The other article, written by Vittorio Messori, refers to Muslims as people who want to remove Christian symbols, such as the crucifix, from schools and public buildings.⁵

If we analyze the articles published in *Il Giornale* about the Munich speech, we see that there are no strong attacks on Islam, though there are some references to Islam as a religion that does not find it easy to accept criticisms⁶. The newspaper respected the nature of the Pope's speech, as did *La Repubblica*, which presented the speech as promoting dialogue in an area that religions often overlook. The *Osservatore Romano* – the Holy See's newspaper – simply published the entire speech, without editorial or columnist comments, while *Avvenire* published articles on the relationship between faith and reason. This newspaper also informed its readers of the enthusiastic welcome on behalf of the German people given to Benedict XVI, with other articles respecting the Pope's intentions and making no reference to the clash of civilisation⁷. In conclusion, it seems that the *Corriere della Sera* was the only newspaper, among those analysed, that published articles offering a particular image of the Muslim world. In doing so, it seemed to be using the Pope's words to reinforce the idea of a clash between Islam and Christianity and to introduce an Islamophobic discourse.

2. September 12th 2006: the lectio magistralis in Regensburg

On 12th September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI gave a lecture at the University of Regensburg. The lecture dealt mainly with the role of theology in modern knowledge, and with the relationship between faith and science, religion and culture, and Christianity and modernity. In presenting his arguments, the Pope referred to Professor Theodore Koury, a German Lebanese theologian. He quoted from Koury's reflections on the byzantine emperor Manuel II „the Paleologue“ and used a passage that caused intense reactions in parts of the Islamic

5 „Islam is also united by the horror for the crucifix that, in the West, immigrants want to take off from the wall of schools and public buildings“. (Messori Vittorio, Musulmani, le prove da superare, *Corriere della Sera*, 11 September 2006, p. 30, Milano). To be correct, yet on the 26th of July 1996, some Italian Mps – Mele, De Zulueta, and Debenedetti – posed a question time to the interior ministry and the ministry of coordination of civil rescue, against the exposition of crucifixes in public buildings. Many other question times on this argument will be posed in the next years.

6 Torielli Andrea, L'Islam odia chi disprezza Dio, *Il Giornale*, 11 September 2006, p. 2, Milano.

7 Rondoni Davide, La libertà contro il cinismo, *Avvenire*, 12 September 2006, p.1, Milano. Starting from September 12th, *Avvenire* will base his editorial line on a complete support to the Pope.

world. Benedict XVI insisted that surely the emperor knew that in the sura 2, 256, you can read: «no obligation of faith». According to the experts, this is a sura of the early period, when Mohamed was without power and under threat. But of course the emperor also knew the dispositions that were developed subsequently and fixed in the Koran, about the holy war. Without dwelling on particulars, such as the difference of the treatment between the ones that have the «Book», and the «unfaithful», in a surprisingly offhanded way that astonishes us, he said to his interlocutor: „Show me what is new about Mohammed’s teachings, and you will find only bad and inhuman things, such as his instructions to spread the faith he preaches by using the sword“.⁸

If these phrases are quoted out of context, they turn out to be particularly controversial and open to manipulative interpretations. It is precisely on these phrases that the newspapers based their articles in following days, giving rise to a polemic that continued until the end of September. The Pope was thus forced to provide further explanations to Islamic communities around the world.

A comparison of the newspapers selected shows great differences in the treatment of the Pope’s arguments on the day after the conference. The Pope’s speech appeared in its entirety only in the two Catholic newspapers, and was not published in the *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica* and *Il Giornale*. In the latter newspapers, journalists reposted the *lectio magistralis*, but these newspapers only supplied fragments of the Pope’s argumentation, and gave particular relevance to the sentences on the comparison between the West and Islam and on the Koranic sura. In particular, *Avvenire* and *Corriere della Sera* were the only two newspapers that immediately alluded to the paradigm of the so-called clash of civilisation⁹.

8 The Pope used this dialogue to analyze the Jihad, and the relationship between faith and reason:

„The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is in contrast with God’s nature and soul’s nature (...). „God - he says - is not pleased by blood - and not acting reasonably is contrary to God’s nature (...). To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death“. The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God’s nature. The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: „For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality (...).“

Then, the Pope continued his argumentation talking about the relationship between faith and reason, and he reconstructed the three phases in which there would have been the three “de-Hellenization” of the Christian culture. He underlined that there is only a possible way to fight the menaces come from a wrong use of scientific conquests: „We reach the target only if faith and reason are united in a new way (...).“ Therefore, the theology, seen as “a question of faith on reason”, must have his importance in university and in the wide science discourse (...). Only acting like this we become able to hold a real cultural and religious dialogue – of which we have a very urgent need (...).“ (Pope Benedict XVI’s speech, published on *Osservatore Romano* on September 14th, pp. 6-7).

9 The day after the speech, and days before Islamic protests, *Avvenire* published the clarification of Padre Lombardi, with the intention to avoid possible incorrect interpretation of Benedict XVI words about Islam. This choice seems to recognize the possibility to have misunderstandings and protests coming from Muslims (Muolo Mimmo, *La precisazione*, *Avvenire*, 13

It is also important to highlight that one of the first commentary articles by a Muslim appeared in the first page of *La Repubblica*. The article, written by Khaled Fouad Allam, professor of Islamology at the Universities of Urbino and Trieste, emphasized that the sura quoted by the Pope is a medinese sura and not a meccan one¹⁰. Once again, and moreover *before* news arrived of protests in Muslim countries, *La Repubblica* stressed the importance of using correct sources and appropriate words. The *Corriere della Sera* approached the dispute from a different point of view, i.e. the difficulties that journalists face in dealing with Benedict XVI's statements.¹¹ Thus the article explains that it is impossible to summarize the Pope's speech without altering its meaning. This complexity, and the necessity of avoiding superficial treatments; do not seem to apply to the Islamic religion, as articles published in the following days revealed.

3. The analysis of the Regensburg speech and the Islamic protests

The Pope's words triggered significant protests from sectors of the Islamic world. All the analysed newspapers except *Avvenire* and *Il Giornale* talked about this and in several articles in *Corriere della Sera*, the priority seemed to have been that of demonizing the so-called "opponents", who simply do not accept any criticisms from the West. The publication of these articles seemed to stress the difference between the two faiths and the impossibility of undertaking inter-religious dialogue. Therefore, while newspapers pointed out how important it is to comprehend the various nuances of the Pope's statements, and how wrong it is to offer partial and marginal understandings of his speech, the same newspapers referred to the Islamic religion through stereotypes and without considering its multiple aspects. They used a "metonymic" approach, considering "a part of the whole", holding the entire Muslim community responsible for actions that were perpetrated by a specific minority¹².

Examining the newspapers, one can note that, while the *Osservatore Romano* limited itself to reproducing the Pope's speech and the Vatican Secretary of State's clarifications, the other newspapers supplied reports and editorial arti-

September 2006, p. 5, Milano).

10 This argument, which for non-Islamic public could seem a minor detail, is extremely significant: the so-called Meccan suras correspond to the beginning of a Koran revelation, and „they paint a prophet which has not yet the awareness to form a community“. The Medinese suras are longer and more complex than the Meccan ones, and they have structured Islam according to a legal, social and politic point of view. Therefore, according to the classical theology, the sura quoted by the Pope would be abrogating the sures that incite to violence, instead of ascribing to neo-fundamentalists. (Fouad Allam Khaled, *Il Corano letto dai Fanatici*, *Repubblica*, 13 September 2006, p. 1, Milano).

11 Messori Vincenzo, *Semplicità e sciabolate*, *Corriere della Sera*, 13 September 2006, p. 38, Milano.

12 For example, the title "Proteste dall' Islam per le frasi del Papa: ostili e provocatorie" (Protests from Islam for Pope's sentences: hostile and provocative) by Luigi Accattoli, *Corriere della Sera*, 15 September 2006, p. 2, Milano, does not seem to make a distinction between moderate and fundamentalist Muslims.

cles about the event. The only newspaper that seemed to maintain an analytic approach on the Regensburg speech is *La Repubblica*, which also included news of the protests. *La Repubblica* published an editorial article written by its columnist, former director and founder of the newspaper Eugenio Scalfari on September 17th. Scalfari reached the following conclusions in his article: Benedict XVI more than likely committed a major communication mistake, siding with an euro-centric view of the world that does not favour dialogue¹³.

In the days after the speech, *Avvenire* seemed to be joining the call against Islam, making few distinctions with respect to the different aspects of this religious faith. *Avvenire* was also the first newspaper to talk in negative terms about Al-Jazeera, underlining the importance of the media in the construction of public opinion. This newspaper criticized the Qatari television, accusing it of demonizing the West and creating hostile mobs¹⁴, defining this television channel as “the new prophet”¹⁵. In another article which appeared in *Avvenire*, an interview with Magdi Allam, there was a tendency to present the Islamic front which opposed the Pope’s speech as a “compact” one, and a propensity to consider hostile Islamic sectors as the sole interlocutor the West would have to dialogue with, leaving aside the so-called “moderate” Muslims¹⁶.

Only the article written by Giulio Albanini, which was published on September 16th, reaffirmed the concept that “there is a reasonable Islam”, and that it is also important to promote the dialogue through cultural cooperation, allowing for reciprocal knowledge between the two faiths and cultures.¹⁷

The front-page title of *Il Giornale* on September 17th mentions the “war” that the Muslims allegedly declared on the Pope after the Regensburg event¹⁸. In this case too, there is no clear distinction between moderate and fundamentalist Islam – there is, instead, a representation of a religion based only on violent characters that are not, in fact, typical of this faith. The only sections where disapproval of Pope’s words can be found is an interview to Abdelmajid Charfi, a professor at the University of Tunis, in which this scholar says that the Pope should define clearly the difference between Islam and fundamentalism, so as to avoid the reinforcement of fundamentalists’ instances and to avoid further

13 Scalfari Eugenio, Il rischioso enigma di Benedetto a Ratisbona, *Repubblica*, 17 September 2006, pp. 1 and 35, Milano.

14 Eid Camille, I mass media arabi infiammano le piazze, *Avvenire*, 16 September 2006, p. 5, Milano.

15 Eid Camille, Al-Jazeera, il nuovo profeta, *Avvenire*, 16 September 2006, p. 2., Milano. In this article, the Muslim education is represented as dominated by tv. According to the journalist, his key role is to supply information based on “synthesis” and on insufficient depth argumentations. This analysis can have a more or less plausibility, but – if the examination’s parameters are these - we can see that the condition of Arab media is not so different from the Italian information media scene, which is considered quite low-quality. To know more information about the situation of Italian media in this period: Freedom House, Map of Press Freedom, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=6986&year=2006> (accessed 13.01.2010).

16 Paolucci Giorgio, Rabbia e Ragione, *Avvenire*, 16 September 2006, p. 3, Milano.

17 Albanini Giulio, L’Islam ragionevole c’è, bisogna dargli forza, *Avvenire*, 16 September 2006, p. 2, Milano.

18 L’Islam ha dichiarato guerra al Papa, *Il Giornale*, 17 September 2006, p. 1, Milano.

difficulties in interreligious dialogue.¹⁹

From the analysis of the titles and articles published in the following days ("Al-Qaida's threat: we will conquer Rome"²⁰, "With Muslims a real dialogue is impossible"²¹, "Islam put a gag even on the Pope's mouth"²²) it can also be noted that the representation of a violent and radical Islam remained constant and hindered the resolution of the dispute.

Another newspaper that discussed Muslim protests was *La Repubblica*²³. Reading the distinct articles we note a sense of regret for Benedict XVI's difficulties in undertaking interreligious talks: according to different pieces, the attacks against the Pope are not directed at him as the Catholics' representative, but as speaker of the words he pronounced. Indeed, positive references to Giovanni Paolo II appear, a Pope who was held in good consideration by numerous Muslim religious leaders, and whose actions were aimed at promoting an exchange of ideas between the two faiths.²⁴

Muslim dissent regarding the Pope's speech was also considered in the *Corriere della Sera*, which however insisted on the opposition between Islam and West. For example, next to the article "Islam protests against the Pope's statements: hostile and provocative"²⁵, one of Benedict's statements was reproduced in italics, as pronounced by the Pope in Ratisbona: "The holy war of Islam is unreasonable. Not to act according to reason is against God; violence is in contradiction with the soul's nature. God is not pleased with blood". The graphic position of these sentences helps to convey the idea that the most important reason why protests and demonstrations are taking place is that the Pope declared violence to be in contradiction with God's nature. This gives an image of Islam as accepting violence. Only by reading the entire article can one find a brief explanation of the protests, which were said to originate from the Pope's

19 In Charifi's opinion, the Pope's words would reveal his idea of a violent Islam. According to Charifi's view, the Pope should have condemned the fundamentalists only, and not to the entire Muslim community. (Il Giornale editor office, «Io, musulmano moderato, vi spiego perché è un errore», *Il Giornale*, 17 September 2006, p. 3, Milano).

20 Al-Qaeda minaccia: conquisteremo Roma, *Il Giornale*, 19 September 2006, p. 1, Milano.

21 Mathieu Vittorio, Con i musulmani è impossibile un vero dialogo, *Il Giornale*, 19 September 2006, p. 12, Milano.

22 L'Islam mette il bavaglio anche al Papa, *Il Giornale*, 18 September 2006, p. 1, Milano.

23 Here are some titles: "The anger of Islam on Ratzinger, he has to apologize for the sentences about the Prophet", "From Pakistan to Palestine, crowds into streets against the Pope" (Politi Marco, *L'ira dell'Islam su Ratzinger, si scusi per le frasi sul profeta*, *La Repubblica*, 15 September 2006, p. 16, Milano; Scuoto Fabio, *Dal Pakistan alla Palestina, folle in piazza contro il Papa*, *La Repubblica*, 16 September 2006, p. 8, Milano).

24 Politi Marco, Lo strappo di Ratzinger, *La Repubblica*, 18 September 2009, p. 1, Milano. In this article, Benedict XVI is opposed to his predecessor Giovanni Paolo II, which gave a lot of importance to the interreligious communication. In Politi's opinion, Benedict XVI demonstrates a feeble will to maintain the dialogue among religion: even if Ratzinger declares he wants to maintain the interchange of cultures, in reality he would be very worried about the Koran, and he would not have the intention to maintain the dialogue.

25 Accattoli Luigi, Proteste dall'Islam per le frasi del Papa: ostili e provocatorie, *Corriere della Sera*, 15 September 2006, p. 2, Milano.

reference to an anecdote in which Mohamed is defined as the one who only brings “bad and inhuman things”.²⁶

All Italian newspapers seem to agree – even if *La Repubblica* holds slightly different views – in representing Islam in a very simplistic way, portraying it as a violent faith constantly protesting against Christianity. Islam is also presented as rooted only in the Middle East and intending to attack the heretics of the West.

4. The Pope’s apologies as represented by newspapers

Because of the violent demonstrations that took place in countries with a Muslim majority, Benedict XVI tried to address the problem by publishing an official statement in the front page of the *Osservatore Romano*, in English, French, and above all, Arabic, in which he explained the words he had pronounced at the University of Regensburg.²⁷

In this article, the Pope claimed that he had no intention to offend anyone, and that he wished to continue with peace and interreligious dialogue. *La Repubblica* showed, through articles by Fabio Scuto, that the apology was not regarded as sufficient by some sectors of the Muslim world, and that many representatives accepted them “with reservations”, holding the Pope’s message as not entirely “sincere”²⁸. In the same newspaper, an article by Guido Rampoldi analyzed the editorial line of Al-Jazeera. This well-known Italian journalist stressed that Western and Eastern media talk about clashes and demonstrations referring to the “Muslim world”, when in reality the demonstrators are part of a typical “segment of the ruling class [consisting of] religious groups, fundamentalist nomenclatures, some government members who are not necessarily radicals (...)”²⁹. The *Corriere della Sera* reproduced the declarations of spiritual leaders of Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, who regarded Pope Benedict’s apologies as not entirely satisfactory³⁰.

26 *Ibidem*.

Another example of a strong and evident attack to the Muslim world comes from a Magdi Allam’s editorial, “The truth of the History” (*La verità della Storia*). Allam talks about an “international Unitarian Islamic front” which “demonstrates, unequivocally, that the Sin’s root is a blind hate ideology which prevails among Muslims outraging faith and obfuscating mind” (Allam Magdi, *La verità della Storia, Il Corriere della Sera*, 15 September 2006, p. 1, Milano).

27 Benedict XVI, Il mio discorso all’Università di Regensburg era ed è un invito al dialogo franco e sincero, con grande rispetto reciproco, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 18-19 September 2006, p. 1, Città del Vaticano. This first apology represents a step forward to restart talks, but because of the complexity of the Pope’s lectio magistralis, maybe it would be more useful to publish an entire translation of the discourse. In this case, the discourse could have been read without problems by Italian non-speakers. Another Arab translation will be published on September 25-26th, referring to the Pope’s speech held in front of diplomatic representatives in Castel Gandolfo.

28 Scuto Fabio, Ma per le piazze non basta, minacce contro la Santa sede, *La Repubblica*, 17 September 2006, p. 3, Milano.

29 Rampoldi Guido, Crociata che agita l’arcipelago jihadista, *La Repubblica*, 18 September 2006, p. 1, Milano.

30 Zecchinelli Cecilia, «L’Islam mondiale: «Un primo passo, ora scuse vere», *Corriere della Sera*, 18 September 2006, p. 5, Milano; Cremonesi Lorenzo, «Il pontefice adesso ha chiarito tutto. Nessuna offesa per la nostra religione», *Corriere della Sera*, 18 September 2006, p. 5, Milano.

Even if the article's title was "Global Islam: «A first step, now we want real apologies»", it is immediately evident that the adjective "global" refers in fact to only a few countries³¹. *Il Giornale* criticized the Pope for "bending" to Muslim requests³². *Avvenire* partly agreed with *Il Giornale*, emphasizing Benedict XVI's "freedom of expression" and giving a complete approval of his speech in Regensburg, seen as a step towards interreligious dialogue. Much attention was paid to Benedict XVI's apology. The Pope's regret for the numerous demonstrations was brought to the foreground, and what was also highlighted was the Pope's dissociation from the quotation about the Prophet Mohamed³³. *Avvenire* also highlighted the negative and partial interpretation given by some western media, which were alleged to have presented the Pope in negative terms. *Avvenire* concentrated on the "propaganda" of Arab media, defining it as an "unjustifiable campaign of disinformation".³⁴

From this analysis of newspapers, we can see that the apologies divided the Muslims. Some of them appreciated the Pope's effort³⁵, while others asked for further apologies. Benedict XVI thus decided to hold a meeting in Rome with the representatives of the whole Muslim world to restate the necessity of inter-religious dialogue.

5. Italian Muslims and world Muslims: the convocation of nuncios in Rome

The position of Italian Muslims on the Regensburg accident was described by newspapers in a very superficial way. Only with the Pope's response to the protests did the newspapers begin to consider Muslim views. *Avvenire*, starting on September 17th 2006, published regular pieces expressing the views of the Ucoii (Ucoii is the Union of Italian Islamic Communities and Organizations). Here the organization showed its availability to continue the dialogue with the Chris-

31 Talking about Islam with a global approach and identifying it with some countries or with the Middle East only is an inaccuracy that we can see often in the Italian media scene. It contributes to supply the reader with wrong information about the real Islamic presence and distribution in the world.

32 Magli Ida, Mandato d'arresto per Benedetto, *Il Giornale*, 18 September 2006, p. 1, Milano.

33 Geninazzi Luigi, Il rispetto dev'essere reciproco, *Avvenire*, 17 September 2006, p. 1, Milano. The newspaper publishes also some discourses that Ratzinger pronounced during a meeting with the representatives of German Muslim communities on August 20th 2005 in Kobl. The intention probably is to underline that Pope has a real will to maintain the exchange of ideas with the Islamic people (Extract from a Benedict XVI's discourse: Musulmani e Cristiani, insieme per le sfide del nostro tempo, *Avvenire*, 17 September 2006, p. 5, Milano).

34 Tarquinio Marco, Un vero dialogo, altro che intimidazioni, *Avvenire*, 19 September 2006, p. 1, Milano.

35 Newspaper talks about the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's declaration, too. The president of Iran, leader of an Islamic Republic, defended the Pope's position, and his speech was shown by media on September 20th. "The Pope is a man of peace and he deserve respect" Ahmadinejad said. The newspapers do not give a great importance to this declaration: it was only a pretext to attack West and to underline that Pope's Benedict was under Us control (Geninazzi Luigi, L'avvio di schiarita, *Avvenire*, 20 September 2006, p. 1, Milano).

tian community, all the while reaffirming the necessity of being more careful when speaking about sensitive subjects and problematic issues in the context of international relations³⁶. Numerous interviews with members of the institutional group that represents Italian Islam were published by this newspaper. The Ucoii leaders approved of the Pope's words, and even complained about Arab media, which manipulated the speech³⁷.

This position was confirmed in the interviews with leaders of the Muslim League, who spoke of "political motives" behind the dispute³⁸. *La Repubblica* also attached great importance to the Ucoii speech and yet published statements by Sami Salem's which were full of regret for the Pope's words.³⁹ Because of the continuing tensions between Muslims and Christians, the Pope decided to organize a meeting in Castel Gandolfo for September 25th, inviting the ambassadors and representatives of Islamic communities of the 22 countries in which the great majority of the population believes in Allah⁴⁰. According to *Avvenire*, this formula "intends to privilege the cultural value of the initiative, to enhance the dialogue, boosting it through a very clear diplomatic gesture"⁴¹. The meeting, which took place immediately before the beginning of Ramadan, was met with favourable reactions by Muslim representatives⁴², and was broadcast live by Al-Jazeera. According to *Avvenire*, however, the Arab television continued to blow on fire of polemics, while Al-Arabiya, the direct competitor of Al-Jazeera, was appreciated for its moderate position on Regensburg accident⁴³.

The importance of the meeting was also reaffirmed by the *Osservatore Romano*, which published in its front page the speech that Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the Ambassadors of Muslim countries, together with an Arabic translation⁴⁴. *Il Giornale* continued to stress the opposition between Islam and

36 Ucoii, *Avvenire*, 17 September 2006, p. 5, Milano.

37 Paolucci Giorgio, Anche noi siamo col Papa, *Avvenire*, 20 September 2006, p. 3, Avvenire.

38 Lavazza Andrea, Incendio pilotato per motivi politici, *Avvenire*, 17 September 2006, p. 3, Milano.

39 Salem is the imam of the great Mosque of Rome. He said that he complained about Ratzinger's discourse, because it reinstated the relationship between Islam and West as they were in past times. (Politi Marco, Ratzinger è stato frainteso, reazioni inqualificabili, *La Repubblica*, 19 September 2006, p. 2, Milano).

40 The countries are: Kuwait, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Pakistan, Qatar, Indonesia, Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liban, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, Senegal, Algeria, Morocco, Albania, Arab countries League, Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Iran, Azerbaijan. Members of the Consulta Islamica – the Institutional Group for Islam in Italy –, the Imam of the Mosque of Rome, the director of the Office for the world Islamic league and the general secretary of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Italy were also invited to the meeting.

41 Mazza Salvatore, Dal Papa nuova mano tesa all'Islam, *Avvenire*, 23 September 2006, p. 5, Milano.

42 Ruggiero Giovanni, Un incontro per voltare pagina, *Avvenire*, 20 September 2006, p. 5, Milano.

43 Eid Camille, Ma Al-Jazeera soffia ancora sul fuoco, *Avvenire*, 20 September 2006, p. 5, Milano. Al Arabyia is defined as a moderate broadcast. It was build on a strong advertisement base, it enjoys of financial funds coming from important international brands, as Procter&Gamble. Its themes are agreed by moderates regimes of the Persian Gulf (Della Ratta Donatella, *Al-Jazeera. Media e società arabe nel nuovo millennio*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2005, pp. 107-137).

44 Il dialogo interreligioso e interculturale: una necessità per costruire insieme un mondo di pace, *L'Osservatore Romano*, p. 1,

West, publishing an article that paid no attention to the Islamic representatives' positive reaction. Once again references to the Islamic community appeared of a simplistic and generalised character⁴⁵. *La Repubblica* focused on Al-Jazeera's audience and reproduced the Pope's address to the Muslim ambassadors in its entirety⁴⁶. According to this newspaper, the majority of Al-Jazeera's audience expected "real" apologies from Pope⁴⁷.

The role that the media played in this matter was also discussed by Mohamed Nour Dachan, a representative of Ucoii, who expressed his satisfaction with the Pope's speech. Yet, in an interview published in the *Corriere della Sera*, he urged media representatives to stop using pictures of flags being burnt if the whole matter was to be resolved⁴⁸. The *Corriere della Sera*, however, remained faithful to its editorial line, presenting Benedict XVI as the one who acted correctly and needed not to look for a compromise with Islam. He was represented as a defender of freedom of expression⁴⁹ and of the principle of the religious reciprocity.⁵⁰

On the same day, in the internal pages of the newspaper, the introduction to a book about Islam and Christianity was published in the form of an article. The book is by Alain Besançon, an expert of religions, and was published in November 2006. Besançon expounds the differences between the two faiths, and dismisses any prospective rapprochement between Muslims and Christians on a religious level⁵¹. Once again, despite the fact that the speech given at Castel Gandolfo was appreciated by Muslim ambassadors, the newspaper added fuel to the fire.

The only a positive note was the description of Ucoii. Though this organization continued to have reservations about the Pope's speech in Regensburg, it was presented by Italian newspapers as a "moderate" (according to Western parameters) Islamic organization, which tries to use diplomacy to solve problems and re-establish good relations between the two religious faiths. In contrast, the Consulta Islamica, another Italian Islamic organization, was sympathetic to the

Città del Vaticano.

45 Fabbri Roberto, «Aspettavamo le scuse ma non sono arrivate», *Il Giornale*, 26 September 2006, p. 6, Milano. In this case, there is a denial of Muslims' appreciation for apologies.

46 Guolo Renzo, Ma non basta parlare con i governi musulmani, *La Repubblica*, 26 settembre 2006, p. 1, Milano; Ratzinger Joseph, Il rispetto reciproco tra le diverse religioni, *La Repubblica*, 26 settembre 2006, p. 1, Milano.

47 The journalist uses an opinion poll made by Al-Arabya to underline this matter. The tv asked what relationship Muslims should have to keep in front of Benedict XVI's words, and it showed that there was a great division on how to act (Dusi Elena, "Diretta e forum su Al Jazeera, pubblico diviso su giudizio", *La Repubblica*, 26 settembre 2006, p. 10, Milano).

48 Piccolillo Virginia, «Siamo onorati. La via di Ratzinger è quella giusta», *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 settembre 2006, p. 9, Milano.

49 Allam Magdi, Quelle donne eleganti davanti a Benedetto, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 settembre 2006, p. 1, Milano.

50 Massimo Franco, Sullo sfondo la reciprocità religiosa, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 settembre 2006, p. 8, Milano.

51 Besançon Alain, Maometto e Gesù, i confini del dialogo, *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 September 2006, p. 11, Milano.

Pope's views. It supported Benedict XVI and was inclined to accept the thesis of a possible communication mistake. This is probably due to the fact that Consulta Islamica is a political organization, set up by the minister Giuseppe Pisanu in 2005. Its members are chosen by Berlusconi's government, as *Il Giornale* underlines⁵², and they are probably quite benevolent towards the Church. Therefore the description of the main Islamic Italian community's reactions does not seem to be of great importance in the representation given by Italian media. Even if the opinions of Muslim representatives were present in the media, references to the Italian community's feelings were on the whole quite superficial. The newspapers' attention was entirely focused on the so-called "Muslim world", i.e. on the statements of Islamic fundamentalists in other countries.

Conclusions

My analysis shows that Italian newspapers covered the Regensburg accident constantly for the whole month of September 2006. Each newspaper presented its point of view, even if we can see that the *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale*, and *Avvenire* maintained an editorial line which showed Christianity and Benedict XVI as unassailable and irreproachable elements, opposed to the violent, aggressive, anti-western Islam interested in destroying Christianity. Some of the articles published in *La Repubblica* criticized the Pope's position; while the *Osservatore Romano* simply acted as the press office of the Vatican State.

Leaving aside the Pope's questionable choice of words, the newspapers turned out to have presented the global Muslim community as interested in annihilating the Catholic religion, and in conquering the West, in a climate of constant "clash of civilisation". Another element that emerged from my research was the media construction of this episode: the presentation of a stereotypic Islam in Italian newspapers, on the one hand, and the demonstrations that took place in some countries, on the other hand, are simply an effect of bad media coverage. According to some journalists' opinion, on the Muslim side there existed a tendency to denounce the Pope every time he spoke critically about Islam. Even if this were the case, it is equally true that most of the articles published in the *Corriere della Sera*, *Avvenire*, *Il Giornale*, did not show any intention to scale down the polemics. They did not show any significant attempt at understanding Islam and creating a bridge towards it. The collocation of these articles to internal pages and the choice of titles and terminology are elements that become crucial in such cases. They can help to produce, or not to produce, an objective approach to facts, and they should certainly avoid adding to the widespread incomprehension and misunderstanding. In this case, newspapers used generalisations and coarse approximations. This is not, however, uniquely an

52 Introvigno Massimo, Papa Ratzinger prende l'Islam in contropiede, *Il Giornale*, 27 settembre 2006, p. 12, Milano.

Italian problem: it is a worldwide problem affecting the Arab media as well. All media seem to base their work on journalistic standards which aim to summarize information, to turn politics into a show, and to offer infotainment instead of encouraging understanding. Summarizing similar subjects involves various risks, and in the case of the Ratisbona speech, summaries clearly led to reciprocal incomprehension, intensifying the stream of protests led by fundamentalists in Muslim countries.

Apart from the role of media and communication, the main problem is the presence of different media realities. As Donatella Della Ratta explained in her 2005 book on Al-Jazeera⁵³, as long as we continue to distinguish between Western and Eastern media without realizing that the media scene is unique but with different points of view, the clash of civilisation will continue, and the dialogue among faiths will continue to be the result of unsatisfactory compromises.

53 Della Ratta Donatella, *Al-Jazeera. Media e società arabe nel nuovo millennio*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2005.

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ПАПА БЕНЕДИКТ XVI И ПРЕДАВАЊЕ У РЕГЕНСБУРГУ: ПРЕДСТАВЉАЊЕ ИСЛАМА И „СУКОБ ЦИВИЛИЗАЦИЈА“ У ИТАЛИЈАНСКИМ МЕДИЈИМА

Резиме

Као и они у другим западним земљама, италијански медији често користе израз „сукоб цивилизација“ (*confitto di civiltà*) говорећи о односу „ислама“ и „Запада“. Муслимански свет се описује поједностављено и доживљава као монолитна реалност. Његово представљање од стране медија варира од ирационалног до нетолерантног. Израз „сукоб цивилизација“ нарочито се користио у септембру 2006. године, након што је папин *lectio magistralis* на Универзитету у Регенсбургу изазвао енергичне протесте у муслиманском свету. Изгледало је да Бенедикт XVI представља хришћанског Бога као једино рационално божанство, а ислам као ирационалну религију. Када су муслиманске заједнице у свету тражиле званично извињење, папа је одржао састанак са амбасадорима муслиманских земаља при Светој столици и представницима муслиманских заједница у Италији, како би појаснио своје речи. Овај рад анализира начин на који је поменути догађај представљен у италијанским медијима – укључујући десничарске, „мејнстрим“ и католичке медије – с циљем разумевања званичне реакције Ватикана (према *Osservatore Romano*), Католичке цркве у Италији (према *Avvenire*) и италијанске јавности.

Кључне речи: ислам, медији, политика, новине, религија.

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