

Pope Francis Elevates an Interfaith-Healing Archbishop

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald (no relation)

The disquieting story is [here](#):

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, former head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, has been made a cardinal by Pope Francis.

The Walsall-born White Father, who is now based at the church of St Vincent de Paul in Liverpool, told The Tablet he was surprised by the appointment, which came “without any warning.”

The move has been taken as an affirmation by the Vatican of Archbishop Fitzgerald’s tireless work to build relations with people of other faiths, particularly Muslims.

His “tireless work to build relations” is not “with people of

other faiths,” but, as Internet searches about him make clear, only with Muslims. He has studied theology in Tunisia, taken a degree in Arabic and Islamic studies in London, taught Islam to Muslims in Kampala, and written three books on interfaith dialogue, including *Signs of Dialogue. Christian Encounter with Muslims*.

The Archbishop, who was appointed to the Council under John Paul II, was effectively exiled from the Vatican under Pope Benedict XVI, who moved him from his senior post in Rome to Egypt, where he served as the Vatican’s nuncio until 2012. The decision that coincided with a hardening of the Vatican’s position on Islam and the aftermath of Benedict XVI’s controversial 2006 Regensburg lecture on Islam.

When he was Papal Nuncio in Egypt from 2006 to 2012, did Archbishop Fitzgerald not notice any of the attacks on Copts, and their churches, by Muslims? He apparently got along swimmingly with Muhammad Tantawi and his successor as Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb. Was he aware of the deep antisemitism of both Tantawi and El-Tayeb? In 2010, when Fitzgerald was still in Egypt, the leading newspaper Al-Masri Al-Yawm published articles about Tantawi’s doctoral dissertation – “The Abominations of the Jews Can Be Seen Everywhere and Throughout History.” Did Fitzgerald, the Arabic-speaking expert on religious dialogue, not see those articles? And El-Tayeb made similarly bloodcurdling remarks about Jews, but this did not prevent Pope Francis from issuing a joint declaration with him. Is it possible that the Pope was relying on Archbishop Fitzgerald for his knowledge of El-Tayeb?

Pope Francis recently wished a “Happy Ramadan” to “all Muslim brothers and sisters.” Has anyone in the Vatican noticed that no senior Muslim clerics have ever offered similar wishes to Christians at Christmas? He has issued a call for reform in “the way theology is taught in Catholic schools, saying

students must learn about dialogue with Judaism and Islam” and wants to establish “the relationship between Catholics and Muslims as brothers, with a common mission to promote peace.”

Does Archbishop Fitzgerald agree with the Pope’s belief in a “common mission [of Catholics and Muslims] to promote peace”? In his long study of Islam, in his years of teaching Islam, he surely read the Qur’an and the most authoritative Hadith collections very closely. What did he learn about the Muslim notion of peace with non-Muslims? What did he learn about the doctrine of Jihad and the pax islamica that will descend only when Islam everywhere dominates, and Muslims rule, everywhere?

We Muslims and Christians are called to open ourselves to others, knowing and recognizing them as brothers and sisters... this way, we can tear down walls raised out of fear and ignorance and seek together to build bridges of friendship [...]

Does Archbishop Fitzgerald think the “walls” between Muslims and Christians merely reflect “fear” and “ignorance”? He’s studied Islam for decades, and even taught Islamic theology to Muslims. He surely knows the Qur’an backwards and forwards. As Christians learn more about, and become less “ignorant” of, the Qur’an, does he think that they will be ready to “tear down walls...and seek together to build bridges of friendship,” or will they, rather, be even more alarmed by what they learn? What does Fitzgerald make of such Qur’anic verses – he knows them all – as 2:191-193, 3:110, 3:151, 4:89, 5:51, 8:12, 8:60, 9:5, 9:29, 47:4, 98:6? There are over one hundred verses in the Qur’an that command Muslims to fight, and to kill, and to smite at the necks of, and to strike terror in the hearts of, non-Muslims. What should reasonable people make of those verses? What should Christians make of the Qur’anic command that Muslims must not take Christians and Jews as friends, “for they are friends only with each other”? What should they make – what does Archbishop Fitzgerald make? – of the verse

(3:110) that tells Muslims they “are the best of peoples” and describes non-Muslims as “the most vile of created beings” (98:6)? What should non-Muslims make of the hadiths in which Muhammad claims that “war is deceit” and that “I have been made victorious through terror”? Anything? Nothing?

When he retired to Jerusalem in 2012, where he lived for seven years, did he ever engage in interreligious dialogue with Jews? Or did he confine his interfaith outreach to Muslims?

Archbishop Fitzgerald, who is 82 and therefore not eligible to vote in a papal conclave, said that he hoped to continue his work among people of other religions in Liverpool, and said that if being a cardinal helped this, “so much the better.”

His interest has been almost exclusively in Christian-Muslim relations, where he is a tireless promoter of endless dialogue – dialogue that has gone on for two decades between Muslims and non-Muslims, without any discernible signs of improvement in relations. Christians are at present the most persecuted believers in the world, and their persecutors (and murderers) are almost exclusively Muslims. As for the endless interfaith meetings and conferences and assemblies, these appear to consist of Christian mea culpas (the Crusades! Colonialism! The State of Israel!) being graciously accepted by Muslim clergy, without them feeling any corresponding need to offer their own. **Fitzgerald has said that “Christians esteem Muslims for the way they worship the one God and practice prayer, fasting and almsgiving. There are things we can learn from Muslims, but if we think we have everything and others don’t have anything at all to offer us, we won’t get anywhere, so “willingness to learn from the other” is the precondition for dialogue...”**

But where is the “willingness” of Muslims to learn from Christians? Archbishop Fitzgerald has no examples of that to

report. How could Muslims have anything to learn from those who have distorted their original scriptures, and are the very people whom Allah describes as “the most vile of created beings”? There is nothing Muslims can learn from Unbelievers; that would make no sense, since Islam is perfect, and the Qur’an is immutable. The “willingness to learn from the other” (i.e., from the Unbeliever) does not exist in Islam.

When he refers to Christians who “esteem Muslims for the way they worship the one God,” does he not ask himself if the Muslim Allah, a violent and aggressive deity, has anything to offer that is similar to the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity? He says they esteem “the way...they [Muslims] practice prayer.” He fails to mention what those five daily prayers contain. Robert Spencer notes that “In the course of praying the requisite five prayers a day, an observant Muslim will recite the Fatihah, the first surah of the Qur’an and the most common prayer in Islam, seventeen times. The final two verses of the Fatihah ask Allah: ‘Show us the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast favoured; not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.’ The traditional Islamic understanding of this is that the “straight path” is Islam – cf. Islamic apologist John Esposito’s book *Islam: The Straight Path*. The path of those who have earned Allah’s anger are the Jews, and those who have gone astray are the Christians.” So 17 times a day, an observant Muslim will curse the Kuffar, and Archbishop Fitzgerald knows that perfectly well, but is not about to divulge that disturbing fact.

As for Christians holding Muslims in esteem for their “almsgiving,” Fitzgerald no doubt means Zakat, the charitable giving required of Muslims. He surely knows, but does not say, that Zakat is to be given only to fellow Muslims, unlike Christian charitable giving, which is made available to all. Like Pope Francis, Archbishop Fitzgerald has made himself a Defender of the Faith – that faith, alas, is Islam.

Archbishop Fitzgerald is greatly admired by Msgr. Labib Kobti, a Palestinian Christian who is virulently anti-Israel. They no doubt saw much of each other, as Catholic clerics, during Fitzgerald's seven years in Jerusalem. Kobti runs the Palestinian Christian website "Al Bushra"; that website may be judged by its most recent stories:

MSF: Over 1,000 patients in Gaza suffering from 'severe infections' from gunshot wounds sustained in Great March of Return

After setting fire to olive fields in West Bank village, Israeli settlers return to chop down trees

Palestinian Christians: Israelis torturing non-Jewish children

'We are not defeated': Palestinian family defiant after Israel demolishes restaurant

Fitzgerald on his elevation to Cardinal:

*Judging from the messages of congratulations that I am receiving from different people, and not only Christians, it seems that people who are engaged in interfaith relations are greatly encouraged. They see this appointment as a sign of hope at a time when work in interfaith relations is often called into question, but when in fact it is more necessary than ever," he added. "There are many indications that Pope Francis considers interfaith relations as something important. For instance, when he prayed at the Western Wall during his visit to Jerusalem he was accompanied in this prayer by a rabbi and an imam. Also, more recently, **we have seen the very cordial relations that have developed between the Pope and the Imam of al-Azhar giving rise to the joint document on human fraternity that they signed in Abu Dhabi. There is, too, the fact that he has included in his list of new cardinals the present President of the Pontifical Council***

for Interreligious Dialogue as well as the Archbishop of Rabat in Morocco."

Both are great believers in interfaith dialogue with Muslims.

Archbishop Fitzgerald is also known for his work in ecumenical relations....

Canon Pailing, who runs the Faith Leaders' Group in Liverpool City region, said that Archbishop Fitzgerald's experience in Christian-Muslim relations had been a blessing for the city.

Has Cardinal Fitzgerald's "experience" this year in Liverpool included the cases of Muslim grooming gangs in the Liverpool City region? He has never spoken about those gangs, which have ruined the lives of tens of thousands of English girls. Perhaps he thinks it wouldn't be politic; it might offend the very people with whom he most wants to engage in a "dialogue." Better not to raise the issue at all. Wasn't that what Mohamed Atta assured his plane passengers: keep quiet, and nothing bad will happen?

Canon Pailing:

*It can't be understated [sic] how important this appointment is for Liverpool, and I think particularly in the context of the work the Archbishop does. It is an honour for our city having him here. **Having someone who's been given this as a recognition of the pioneering work he's done with Christian-Muslim relations shows that, actually, this is the future of the world, this is about globalisation, and about understanding that one [sic] of us exists on our own.** In Liverpool itself, which is a community that's changing very quickly, to have that validation of the importance of this work is going to be really important in the years ahead. It will bring a greater spotlight to communities working together.*

There is a kind of grim fatalism in Canon Pailing's praise. Fitzgerald's "pioneering work" is all about "Christian-Muslim relations," which is "the future of the world." What can this possibly mean except that Muslims are now in Europe, in ever-increasing numbers, in what is no longer Western Christendom, in communities that "are changing very quickly" – that is, becoming ever more islamised; the work of Christian clergy is to accept this demographic change, convincing themselves of its inevitability, and work on those interfaith relations with Muslims. There is no attempt to suggest that this "future of the world" could be successfully resisted, and that Christians, who are being persecuted by Muslims in many parts of the world, need to work on making common cause with others – Jews, Hindus, Buddhists – who are similarly threatened by Islam, rather than engage in what have proven to be fruitless efforts at "dialogue" with aggressive Muslims.

His "pioneering work" in Christian-Muslim relations consist in interfaith outreach, where Fitzgerald repeatedly misrepresents Islam as a religion of "peace" and "tolerance" and its clerics in useful "dialogue" with Christians. These remarks are no different from many coming from Pope Francis, whose views on Islam have long been noted at this site, such as his bizarre insistence in *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he **asserts that "authentic Islam and a proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence."**

But Fitzgerald's statements on Islam are even less excusable than those of the Pope. Pope Francis, after all, remains largely ignorant of Islam, while Archbishop Fitzgerald has spent much of his life studying and teaching Islam, even to Muslim students, and has lived for long periods in Muslim countries and in Muslim milieus. He's not ignorant. He's a prevaricator.

As a newly-elevated cardinal, Fitzgerald will be even more powerful, in perfect sync with Pope Francis on Islam, and will remain wedded to "interfaith dialogue" with Muslims, despite

the total failure of that “dialogue” to produce any visible results. Meanwhile, European countries continue to allow millions of Muslims to enter and settle behind what Muslims are taught to regard as enemy borders, the lines of Dar al-Islam; there are now 44 million Muslims in Europe (including European Russia). Hundreds of churches that have fallen into desuetude, with ever-decreasing numbers of parishioners, have been repurposed as mosques.

From the Catholic Church, there has been no evident sense of alarm. Instead, the Church of Cardinal Fitzgerald and Pope Francis is celebrating what should cause it to despair. Too many of the clerics exhibit that “*buonismo*” (goody-goodness) that so enraged Oriana Fallaci, the baseless belief that everyone, of every faith, wants peace and tolerance, and only ignorance and fear prevent some people from recognizing this. It’s an updated variant of the bomfoggery – “brotherhood of man, fatherhood of God” – that used to be soothingly preached by the humblest parish priest.

Perhaps after the next attack on Copts in Egypt, or after the next appeal to the Vatican from persecuted Christians in Nigeria, or Pakistan, or Iraq, begging for support, Cardinal Fitzgerald will have a conversion on the road not to, but leading away from, Damascus and the Muslim East. In that Middle East, strange things are happening every day. Saudi journalists praise Israel for its military actions against Iran and Hezbollah. The Egyptian ruler, General El-Sisi, tells an American television audience that he collaborates militarily with the Jewish state. Hamas is attacked as “too moderate” by Islamic Jihad. The U.A.E. pulls out of Yemen.

In such a topsy-turvy world, why should Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald not surprise us all, by ceasing to put his faith in the fruitless “dialogue” with Muslims that has brought Christians nothing but heartache, and only delayed the day of recognizing the violent essence of Islam? If Cardinal Fitzgerald were to raise his voice on behalf of those

persecuted Christians – something he has never done before – one can imagine what that would do to lift Christian spirits, and dampen those of triumphalist Muslims who have been counting on people like Michael Fitzgerald to keep the “dialogue” farce forever afloat. It’s not likely, but hope is a Christian virtue, and one never knows, do one?

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