

Catholic bishop condemns plan to burn Quran
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To forestall any fallout here from the intention of an evangelical church in United States to burn a copy of the Quran to mark the September 9/11 attacks, Catholic bishop Dr Paul Tan Chee-Ing today issued a strong condemnation of the plan.

In a statement issued in Johor Baru by the head of the Malacca-Johor diocese, Paul Tan, a Jesuit-trained prelate, said:

"Let it be known that although we do not belong to the Evangelical Church, I as the Catholic bishop of Malacca-Johor diocese, condemn completely such an immoral act."

"We have no right to denigrate the beliefs of other religions. Mutual respect and acceptance are the stepping stones of harmony," he added.

The pastor of the Dove World Outreach Centre, a tiny evangelical church in Florida, had announced a plan to burn a copy of the Quran to mark the September 9/11 attacks by Muslim terrorists on the twin towers in New York.

The plan has drawn wide condemnation from religious and secular leaders from America and Europe.

Freedom of speech

Some critics held that just as the freedom of religion provisions in the US Constitution protected the controversial plan to build a Muslim centre in Manhattan, two blocks away from where the World Trade Centre once stood, the freedom of speech guarantee in the same document protected the pastor's intended action on the Quran.

"Heresy yes, insurrection no" was the aphoristic summary of a famed dissent on what the freedom of speech provisions in the US Constitution implied. The dissent was written in the early 1920s by Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Holmes' argument was a few years later accepted as the consensual wisdom of the court. It afforded protection to the US Communist Party to exist unmolested but drew the line on violent means for the achievement of their goals.

As recently as the 1980s, the free speech guarantee was interpreted by the Supreme Court to protect the burning of the US flag.

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