

DO YOUR JOB PART 2

Contrary to the reigning mythology about Catholic popes and bishops, they are not doing their job and have not been for a long time. To understand the truth and tragedy of this sentence, it first must be stated what the job of bishops is, for without this information it cannot be determined whether bishops are doing their job or not. In fact as opposed to the myths and PR that have arisen around bishops, bishops have a particularized job description, which was given to them by Jesus Himself. It is precisely set forth in Jesus' Great Apostolic Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 to the Apostles, who are the predecessors of the College of Bishops and of hence all legitimate bishops.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Mt 28:16-20).

That is a straightforward statement of the extent and limits of what Jesus is assigning bishops to do for Him, for the Church and for humanity. It contains two tasks: The first is to make disciples and Baptize them. The second is to teach the Baptized to obey all that Jesus has commanded. Admittedly, this *all* has to include for bishops Jesus' invitation to "*Follow me,*" and to obey His "*new commandment,*" while they are teaching others to obey what Jesus taught. In Jesus' life both the word and the deed are teaching instruments and they are logically and morally consistent with each other, e.g. "*Love your enemies*" is taught by word in the Sermon on the Mount and "*love you enemies*" is taught by deed on Golgotha: "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*"

It is this consistency of word and deed, this willingness to trust and live what one is telling others to trust and live that allows people to say of Jesus, "He teaches with authority." Do as I say and not as I do was not the pedagogy of Jesus and is not the pedagogy He commissioned the Apostles and their successors to employ when "*teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.*" They are not to teach like the Pharisees and if they ever did teach like the Pharisee, it would be a tragedy not a perennial, in-house, self-exculpating joke, because they would not be doing their job, which is participation in the salvation of all humanity. They would not be obediently serving God, Jesus or the Church and would not be part of the process that serves the Father's Plan as proclaimed by Jesus for the eternal salvation of souls. The commission all bishops have received from Jesus is clear and uncomplicated—and limited.

Now that we know the specifics of the job description transmitted to all bishops by Jesus, we can conduct a rational and observational examination to determine if bishops have adhered to the job specifications that Jesus laid down and that they agreed to follow when they accepted the job. As far as the commission given to bishops to Baptize people, bishops have done their job. On paper, and there is no reason not to accept what is on paper on this matter, there are now between one and two billion Catholics on the planet at this moment. But as far as teaching the Baptized to obey all that Jesus has commanded, which is the part of the job specs expressly given to bishops by Jesus, this has largely been ignored since the Fourth Century. Bishops have taught, but what they have taught is not all that Jesus taught and commissioned them to teach, indeed, much of what they have taught by word and deed is the logical opposite of what Jesus taught. What power would move bishops to engage in such a defiant and irrational choice is difficult to fathom, since what they are refusing to teach or what they are altering is *the* revelation of the will of God as communicated by God Himself, God Incarnate,

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for the purpose of the eternal salvation of souls, for the eternal salvation of all humanity.

Christianity is an historical religion. Christianity basis its claim on facts of history it asserts as true. If these are demolished, Christianity is nothing but another esoteric, abstract religious mind-game, a mythology conjured-up to cope with evil, suffering, death and fear. But, Christianity is not this. Christianity identifies as historical truth the Jesus of history with His life's history of words and deeds and with His death in a particular manner, time and place as stated in the Four Gospels. Historical truth and faith are inextricably united in the Good News proclaimed by Jesus Christ. This means that interfering with, altering or ignoring the historical truth of Jesus as presented in the Gospels is immoral.

"It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special pre-eminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness of the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior.

The Church has always held and continues to hold that the Four Gospels are of Apostolic origin. For what the Apostles preached in fulfilment of the commission of Christ, afterwards they themselves and apostolic men, under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, handed on to us in writing, the foundation of faith, namely the Four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held and continues to hold, the Four Gospels just named, whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven. After the Ascension of our Lord the apostles handed on to their hearers what He had said and done. They told the honest truth about Jesus. For their intention (Lk 1:2-4) was that people may know the truth about those matters in which we have been instructed" (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 18,19).

To say, as some have, that Jesus of Nazareth never existed is not a statement of faith. It is a statement concerning history. It must be challenged and shown to be true or false by historical evidence, not by theological arguments. To say that Jesus of Nazareth rejected violence and enmity and taught a love of neighbor that includes love of the neighbor who is the enemy—even the lethal enemy—is not a faith statement. It is a statement of historical fact based on the historical evidence that exists about Jesus of Nazareth. The dean of Catholic Biblical scholars in the mid-twentieth century, the late Rev. John L. McKenzie, confirms this historical truth about Jesus when he unambiguously states, *"If Jesus did not reject any type of violence for any purpose, then we know nothing of him...No reader of the New Testament, simple or sophisticated, can retain any doubt of Jesus' position toward violence directed to persons, individual or collective, he rejected it totally."* One of, if not the most respected Biblical scholar researching and writing in the twenty-first century on the historical Jesus, the Catholic priest Rev. John Meier, in his magisterial four volume, twenty-five years in the writing, *A MARGINAL JEW*, and after thirty-two pages of analysis and explication (p.528-551) says that nowhere in the huge amount of material that ancient parallels provide, in the Old Testament or in intertestamental writings "do we find the terse, direct, disturbing command, *'Love your enemies.'* This command goes back to Jesus...We award it the palm of authenticity." No ecumenical councils, no infallible papal documents, no consensus of theologians is needed to authenticate this as the truth. It is a historically verifiable truth and fact about Jesus of Nazareth, whether He is thought to be the

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Messiah and God Incarnate or just another guy from Nazareth.

When Jesus commissions His Apostles and by theological extension bishops to "*teach them to obey all that I have commanded you,*" He is giving them a job description that requires that they present history truthfully. What Jesus taught is a matter in the historical record, whether one believes it is the Will of God and the Way to eternal life or outright foolishness. Whether one desires to spend his or her life teaching what Jesus taught is a personal decision rooted in faith. But what Jesus taught is not. That is known history. If a person chooses to take a job to teach what Jesus taught, whether he or she is doing their job can be evaluated quite easily because what Jesus historically taught does not change from day to day or from place to place. For better or for worse it is what it is as recorded in the Four Gospels.

If a person were to teach the opposite of what Jesus taught, he or she would be teaching the opposite of what the historical record shows that Jesus taught. He or she would be teaching historical untruth as the truth of the historical Jesus. A waterfall of justifications based on faith or on philosophical speculations about what is the good, the true and the beautiful and what is "realistic" could be offered for doing this, but none of them could change the fact that this is proclaiming an illusionary Jesus who never existed in history teaching what is being said He taught.

If a pope or any other bishop is not adhering to the explicit commission given to the Apostles and hence the bishops by Jesus and is not "*teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you,*" the response to such a dereliction of divine duty is not to ask why is he doing this. The response on the part of everyone in the Church, including all other bishops, should be Paul's response to Peter at Antioch, "*I opposed him to his face because he was clearly wrong*" (Gal 2:11). It should be to tell such a bishop or bishops in no uncertain terms to stop doing it—to do the job Jesus assigned to him or them, or else get out of the episcopal ministry.

Two questions: Where in Jesus' Great Commission to the Apostles, and hence to Bishops, does He even hint at giving them, directly or indirectly, a commission to employ, personally or through surrogates, the power of violence, the power to hurt or harm any human being, Christian or non-Christian? Where in the Apostles' job description given by Jesus, and hence in the bishops' job descriptions, is there any explicit or implicit suggestion that they are called to or that they are permitted to rule the Christian community or assembly by creating institutional structures that require violence in order to exist and in order to function?

(To be continued)

-Emmanuel Charles McCarthy