

DO YOUR JOB PART 5

“To be true followers of Jesus includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.” So proclaimed Pope Francis on January 1, 2017 in a globally distributed Papal document. Popes have given lip service to peace and justice platitudes to no end over the centuries, and in recent times have even had a supportive word to say for the option of nonviolence. However to the best of my knowledge a Pope has never said, since the days before Constantine, that embracing Jesus’ teaching of nonviolence is not optional, but rather is essential, to being a true follower of Jesus. This is an extraordinary statement and moment in the Church. Yet, to date I have not heard, nor heard of, a single sermon being given at a Mass by a bishop, priest or deacon on this Papal teaching. I have not seen nor heard of a single commentary on this extraordinary declaration by the Pope in a single diocesan newspaper or in a single Catholic magazine.

If the Pope means what his words self-evidently say, namely, that the only way to be a true follower of Jesus is to embrace—which means to accept and to struggle to live—His teaching on nonviolence, the implications of this for the institutional Catholic Church and for individual Catholics are seismic and sweeping. The institutional Catholic Church and at least 95% of all Catholics today live in a religious consciousness and with a conscience that violence and war can be activities in which they are morally permitted to engage when called upon by the state to do so, or at other times. Pope Francis’ January 1, 2017 statement eliminates participation in violence from the domain of being a morally permissible choice for a Catholic or for the institutional Catholic Church. It closes down Catholic Just War Theory in any of its iterations as a morally permissible option for Catholics. Nonviolence as an essential element of true discipleship represents an about face, a tectonic alteration of the content of Catholic consciousness, conscience and behavior from the thoughts, words and deeds that found their moral approval in what was called Catholic Just War Theory.

Whatever else nonviolence may mean in the person, teaching and life of Jesus, it means rejecting the use of violence without reservation, without any “ifs,” “ands” or “buts.” Nonviolence with a “but” in its definition is simply justified violence. The person who says, *“I am nonviolent, but if Albania is set to attack the U.S. with nuclear weapons, I am not going to wait to use violence against it until I wake up and find a mushroom cloud in my backyard,”* is simply articulating the point at which he or she will justify the use of violence. That “but-point” may be different for different people, however, it is axiomatic and glaring that nonviolence with a “but” is not logically or practically nonviolence and is certainly not embracing what Jesus’ taught as nonviolence by His words and deeds in the Gospels.

Suppose the Pope had taught in his January 1, 2017 message, *“To be true followers of Jesus includes receiving Holy Communion only on the tongue and not in the hand?”* If he had written that, the pulpits of the Catholic Church would be ablaze with admonitions telling Catholics this must be followed and informing them of the obvious behavioral consequences of it. Diocesan newspapers, Catholic magazines, religious education programs and other forms of Catholic media would be glutted with information about what the Pope proclaimed pertaining to a requirement that must be met *“to be a true follower of Jesus.”*

Bishops, priests and deacons would be continually expounding with gusto on what the Pope taught about the manner of receiving Communion on the tongue and its relationship to being a true follower of Jesus—as well as the theology behind why receiving Communion in the hand was now absolutely forbidden in the Catholic Church. No Catholic after January 1 would dare to try to receive Holy Communion in the hand and every little Catholic child preparing for his or her First Holy Communion would be instructed with vigor that to even try to receive Communion in the hand would mean he or

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she was no longer a *true follower of Jesus* and therefore, *ipso facto*, would be receiving Holy Communion unworthily and hence committing a mortal sin. No amount of Church money or energy would be spared in order to make sure that this teaching of the Pope on being a *true follower of Jesus* entered into every nook and cranny of the Catholic Church world-wide and into every Catholic's conscience.

Yet, when the Pope teaches, "*To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence,*" the response of bishops, priests and deacons is as if he had said nothing. Why? And, why will this continue to be the response of Catholic bishops, priests and deacons? There is a reason, a 'why,' for this silence. Chosen silence is a human act that communicates to others truth or falsehood, good or evil. Chosen silence serves some master. Will the answer to this 'why' disclose something good or something awful about the institutional Church and its ruling personnel? Will the answer verify that bishops, priests and deacons are doing the job that Jesus commissions them to do or will it expose that they are doing the job that someone other than Jesus wants them to do?

(To be continued)

-Emmanuel Charles McCarthy