

The Failure of Pope Francis

by Rebecca Bynum (February 2015)

If the Pope will not speak for Jesus, who will?

Does not the Papacy exist to represent Christ on earth, to point to him and give the world his words? Yet, on January 15, 2015, just one week after the horrendous massacre of cartoonists at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris, Pope Francis (whose predecessors would certainly have been more circumspect) chose cleverness and personal vanity before his primary pontifical duty. [Said the Pope](#), “one cannot make fun of faith” and that anyone who throws insults can expect a “punch.”

“Every religion has its dignity. One cannot provoke, one cannot insult other people’s faith. One cannot make fun of faith. There is a limit. Every religion has its dignity ... in freedom of expression there are limits.”

The right to liberty of expression comes with the “obligation” to speak for “the common good,” Pope Francis said, cautioning against provocation.

To illustrate his point, he referred to Vatican aide Alberto Gasparri who was standing nearby on the plane. “If my good friend Dr. Gasparri says a curse word against my mother, then a punch awaits him,” the pontiff said.

The Vatican later clarified the Pope’s remarks to suggest they were designed to express understanding of the murderers’ motives and were not actually defending the murders themselves which the Pope had previously condemned. Then, on January 18th, [the Pope offered further clarification, saying](#) that “in theory,” violence contradicts Jesus’ teachings, but in practice, people must be prudent enough not to needlessly provoke others – unless they want to risk a harsh response. In this the Pope was surely echoing the [words of Muslims](#) who have been demonstrating around the world and calling for more violent attacks against those who “insult” their prophet.



An estimated 800,000 people demonstrated against the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons in Chechnya.

None demonstrated against the murders.

Source: Reuters, January 19, 2015

Everything Jesus said and did in his life was startling, original and beautiful. Would he have countenanced such remarks, essentially excusing base, animal behavior, even murder? Could the Pope possibly be setting himself *against* Jesus by displaying this kind of unreflective attitude? Perhaps this is a harsh appraisal, but it is a question, nonetheless.

What the Pope seems not to understand is that it is the very existence of Christian culture and Christians themselves which are an affront and provocation to true-believing Muslims. The very idea that free thought and expression are gifts from God is held as blasphemy to the pure Islamic "faith."

As individuals, Jesus taught us to "resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." He taught us to return good for evil and never allow injury to one's personal pride (itself a deadly sin) to provoke intemperate action. This is the benchmark of civilized behavior. The Pope seemed to be saying that if sufficiently provoked, he himself would react in an uncivilized manner, and thus any violent reaction in response to a perceived insult received tacit Papal approval. Clearly, no amount of clarification can repair this grievous error.

As recorded in the gospels, Nicodemus was a leading member of the Sanhedrin who sought a secret meeting with Jesus so as not to rouse the ire of his colleagues.

Said Jesus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered and said unto him, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"^[1]

Little should it be wondered then, that the master of the Church today should stumble on Jesus's spiritual teachings and seek to meet a crucial controversy by relying on his own lights. The Pope did this without consulting or deeply pondering the words of Christ, who clearly differentiated between spirit and flesh, whereas Islam most emphatically does not do so.

And did not Jesus also declare, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword"^[2]? For Jesus is not a unifier, rather he is (at least during the

present age), the great divider. He forces moral decision and the choosing of sides. But he also said, "he who is not against us is for us,"^[3] which is exactly the opposite attitude to that of Muslims who seek to force Islamic conformity through vengeance, cruelty and war in accordance with the teaching of their prophet. Jesus was broad-minded and merciful in all his dealings, yet he never compromised his ideals.

Jesus revealed the true nature of the Father in Heaven through his life and teaching. Should not the Pope take more seriously his responsibility to testify as to the truth of Christ's message? Should he not contemplate the Master's words and proclaim the truth as *he* proclaimed it? Jesus was not afraid to divide men over the truth; why then should the Pope be seemingly so afraid to do so?

Let us be clear. These attacks were perpetrated by human beings who were thoroughly convinced by their "religious" teachings that by this act of mass murder, they were carrying out the will of God. People are looking to the Pope to answer the question: How can this teaching be *true*? It is not enough for the Pope to hide behind some all-purpose display of tolerance as proof of his own spirituality. He must confront the teachings of Islam as Jesus would have done and would do through his representative, if that representative had ears to hear his voice.

The Pope should declare forcefully that man's whole duty to God consists in loving him with his whole heart, mind and soul and loving his neighbor as himself. The idea that one must participate in *jihad* as a duty to God is a dangerous illusion achieving nothing but the certain destruction of the souls of those who engage in it.

The truth which must be stated with clarity and force is that the murderers were NOT doing God's will – and this despite what the attackers thought they were doing and despite what they were undoubtedly taught by their religious mentors. The truth is this teaching is *immoral*. This is what the world needed to hear the Pope say. The will of God is a living, spiritual reality, to be sought by living, spiritual men. The great question is always, what is God's will? The Pope's place in the world and his place in history depends on his ability to seek out and explain the answer to that question which goes to the very heart of human morality.

Jesus would never allow violence in his personal defense. Even at the time of his arrest, he commanded, "Peter put up thy sword."^[4] The Master lived his teaching. He was not a hypocrite. Jesus would have clearly explained the truth about God's eternal, loving nature; that God has no human enemies, only erring children and that love of one another is the true measure of the spirit. He would have exposed the tragic error of those who believe God desires violence in

his defense and violence in the establishment in an earthly kingdom of forced conformity. Pope Benedict had the courage to make this clear in his [Regensburg lecture](#), which remains the most important Papal address of the 21st century.

Pope Francis has clearly failed in his trust and failed his flock in this, the most important question facing mankind today.

[1] John 3, 6-11.

[2] Matthew 10, 34.

[3] Mark 9, 40.

[4] John 18, 11.

Rebecca Bynum's latest book is