

THE FAILURE OF THE CROSS AND THE END TO CHRISTIANITY?

On September 29, 2015, we received an **email from a former elder** who expressed appreciation for the love and tolerance exhibited by Pope Francis in his recent visit to the United States. In response, we received this email from another visitor:

“Hi...No disrespect but as I read [this recent letter](#) I was floored by what I was reading!!!! This Pope is awful awful awful!! I think former elder did not fully listen to context of Pope’s full message. He missed the Big Part where pope said Jesus failed at the cross!!!! Yikes... Even Catholics are outraged.... Please do homework about this Pope Jesus is being denied ... He is Deity and every knee should bend to our Lord and Savior... Jews deny him .. The Muslims deny him... JW's deny his Deity... Christians are losing their lives as we speak! We are in mess in USA .. They are trying to stamp Christians out!!”

We normally would respond to this email in our **Questions and Responses** section, but we chose instead to respond in an article format so that we can address all the issues raised. And we thank the visitor for his/her frankness and willingness to share his/her thoughts with us.

We are aware of some of the controversy arising from the Pope’s statement that Jesus failed at the cross. We first want to respond regarding the brother’s email, then respond regarding the Pope’s comments, and finally address the concerns about stamping out Christians.

The brother who sent us the email was commenting about the man, not the religion or its doctrines and history. He personally appreciated the Pope’s concern for others and his repeated acknowledgment of the importance of Jesus and his life’s ministry. And he was comparing the Pope’s conduct and message to the conduct and message of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and noting the stark differences. So much good could come to Jehovah’s Witnesses if their Governing Body would demonstrate a similar love and tolerance for people and unambiguous honor and subjection to the simple message of Christ Jesus. So we agree with our former elder brother and share his sentiments about the man, Pope Francis.

As for the Pope’s speech that has disturbed you and many others, we believe the Pope’s words are being taken out of context. Here is what he is reported as having said concerning the ‘failure of the cross:’

“The cross shows us a different way of measuring success. Ours is to plant the seeds. God sees to the fruits of our labors. And if at times our efforts and works seem to fail and not produce fruit, we need to remember that we are followers of Jesus Christ and his life, humanly speaking, ended in failure, the failure of the cross.”

Here is the link to [the full translated speech](#). To us, it appears the Pope was saying: We need to have a more long term view of success. If we feel we are not having success in our ministry endeavors, we should not be too disturbed. Our task is to plant seeds and allow God to make it grow in His own time. Remember that even our leader, Jesus Christ, appeared, from a human standpoint, to fail when he was put to death at the end of his ministry.

This is a true statement that we find no fault with. After Jesus was put to death, his apostles fled and hid out of fear of the Jews, thinking that they might be put to death next. Even the stalwart and fiery Peter denied him three times. (*Mark 14:66-72*) It is beyond dispute that, in the minds of the apostle, and in the minds of the opposers of Jesus, that is, from a human standpoint, Jesus had failed. He had been cut short at the height of his ministry and had not accomplished what his followers had expected. And even when the women told the apostles of his resurrection, the apostles still did not believe them. They were thoroughly defeated. So, yes, the Pope was correct. From a human standpoint, and in the minds of his immediate followers, Jesus appeared to have failed. But his resurrection tells a different and triumphant story.

The message we got from the Pope's speech was that even when things look bleak, the Father may have more positive things in store for us. If we feel we are not making a difference in our ministry efforts, don't be discouraged. It is God who makes it grow, so be patient. This is a marathon, not a sprint. Although the apostles felt failure at Jesus death, they were soon encouraged and strengthened by his 'unexpected' resurrection and post-resurrection 40-day ministry. These same once-defeated men went on to create a movement that changed the Roman world and continues to positively affect 21st century life. In a similar way, the seeds we plant today may not have immediate results, but the Father may have a far reaching objective that we cannot at present perceive.

Of course, we must acknowledge that for many people, it does not matter what the Pope says. To them, his association with the Catholic Church is sufficient reason to lay at his feet all of the sins of the church, past and present, and to refuse to give him the benefit of the doubt. Some are disappointed that the Pope did not say everything they wanted him to say, and they were repulsed at the rituals and pomp associated with his visit. Yes, he suggested that Mary, the mother of Jesus, could somehow intervene for mankind, but he is a Catholic! That's what Catholics believe. But even that statement does not take away the fact that his message was positive, motivating and Jesus-oriented.

Just as it is occurring with all enlightened faith sons of God, the awakening to truth and divine sonship is a gradual process. We progressively abandon error in our quest for truth. What we know today far exceeds what we once believed. In fact, many faith sons are embarrassed at their prior lack of understanding, lack of thinking ability, and failure to discern truth. Even you, if you look back over your religious life, can you not agree that you were once misled but still quite sincere? Can we not learn from this experience? And therefore, can we not be patient with others who are on their own personal journey to truth?

This Pope appears to be on this path. He repeatedly acknowledges that he is also a sinner and asks for others to pray for him. We can respect that. We believe he is an extraordinary individual in spite of his responsibilities in association with the Catholic Church. He has dared to

stand against the errors he perceives to exist in the Catholic institution, and he proposed wide sweeping changes that are reawakening in many Catholics their love for Christ Jesus and the Father. But as for the institution, that is a huge ship to turn. There are 1.2 billion Catholics who have a history lasting nearly 2,000 years. So one speech, or one speaking tour, or even a 2-3 year effort of one man will not bring about the needed changes today. Pope Francis actually believes his tenure with the Catholic Church will be of rather short duration and that he will likely resign in a few years rather than maintain his position until his death. We believe that is because even within his religion, his openness, his tolerance, his love for people and his distaste for the pomp and circumstance associated with 'Popehood' is ruffling feathers in the Vatican.

Until then, he is using his moment in the sun wisely. Perhaps he cannot change the Catholic institution as a whole, but he can effect change in the hearts of Catholics. This is likely all that this one man can do. And during this visit to the United States, he was effective in accomplishing this for tens of thousands of individuals. If he were to reject the blatant errors in Catholic practices and doctrines, he would swiftly be removed from his position and labeled as a heretic or an apostate, as occurs among Jehovah's Witnesses with any who dare question the teachings and practices of the Watchtower organization. The Pope's influence would be immediately and completely destroyed and the good work that he could accomplish in Jesus' name will have come to an end.

Therefore, we appreciate the Pope's efforts and his clear love for Jesus. We keep in mind what Jesus said to John:

"John said to him: "Teacher, we saw someone expelling demons by using your name, and we tried to prevent him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said: "Do not try to prevent him, for there is no one who will do a powerful work on the basis of my name who will quickly be able to say anything bad about me. For whoever is not against us is for us." – **Mark 9:38-40**

We are FOR Jesus. And we accept all who are FOR Jesus, including those with whom we may have doctrinal differences. Doctrinal matters will be worked out in the future. What is paramount now is exercising faith in Jesus because mere doctrinal differences will not cause one to lose his life:

"Now if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will be shown for what it is, for the day will show it up, because it will be revealed by means of fire, and the fire itself will prove what sort of work each one has built. If anyone's work that he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward; **if anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved; yet, if so, it will be as through fire.**" – **1 Corinthians 3:12-15**

So despite the differences we may have with Catholic doctrine and its long history of abuse, we can appreciate a man who loves Jesus and works good toward his fellow man. We can

easily apply the ‘fruits of the spirit’ toward this lover of Christ and display ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, mildness, faith and self-control.’ (*Galatians 5:22-23*) In our ministry to further the plain and open teachings of Jesus, we can, along with our brother the former elder, honor a man who likewise seeks to lead people to the authentic Christ.

To your last point that some people are trying to stamp out Christianity in America, we believe the Pope’s visit can alleviate such concerns. The huge turnout in support of the Pope, the continuing media coverage, and the Pope’s welcomed speeches throughout the city of Philadelphia and in the United States Congress demonstrates that Christianity in America is strong and hungry for real leadership and the simple message of the carpenter’s son. Yes, there are factions that oppose Christianity and religion as a whole, but they are in the minority. We hear more from the opposition only because Christians are choosing not to publicly engage in that way. But religion in America is not going away and it will not be silenced.

Religion will, however, be refined and gradually purged of superstition and outmoded and inaccurate concepts. Religions that refuse to progress with the rest of society will suffer a significant loss of members and will eventually become extinct. But religion as a means of expressing one’s spiritual relationship with the Father and their fraternal relationship with their fellow man will continue to grow stronger and stronger. What Jesus foretold will without a doubt come true. When the good news of the kingdom permeates the entire earth, the enlightenment that ensues will bring an end to suffering and injustice of all kinds. (*Matthew 24:14*)

So there is no need to worry that the opponents to religion will prevail. They will not. The plain and open teachings of Jesus will be triumphant without requiring aggressive and/or destructive divine intervention because his actual unadulterated teachings are powerful, true, good and just and will appeal to the majority of mankind when they are exposed to them. We recall these words recorded by Zechariah:

“Not by a military force, nor by power, but by my spirit,” says Jehovah of armies.” (*Zechariah 4:6*)

Instead of worrying or being fearful, make it your goal to do what Jesus asked, namely to preach what he plainly and openly taught. (*Matthew 28:19-20*) Love the Father with your whole being and love your neighbors as yourself (*Matthew 22:37-40*), especially those related to you in your faith in Christ Jesus. (*Galatians 6:10*)

We know that Christians associated with end times based religions, and those who consider themselves religiously superior to others, don’t share our optimism. Perhaps they will just have to die off, like the faithless Israelites in the wilderness (*Joshua 5:6*), so that a new generation of faith sons can change the world by means of the enlightening message of the good news of the kingdom.

“Elaia Luchnia”