

Pope suggests witness as alternative to ideology

“Having faith is not a matter of having knowledge: having faith means receiving God’s message brought to us by Jesus Christ, living it out, and carrying it forward,” Pope Francis said Feb. 21. Francis, giving the homily at morning Mass, was drawing a contrast, showing how the worldly knowledge of “ideology” is opposed to the life of Christian faith.

The Pope’s warning about “ideology” is especially relevant to the fact that Christians now live in a world transformed by economic globalization into a “global culture.” Consider the fruit in our grocery stores as just one example of this powerful transformation. Look at how many places our fruit comes from: Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Turkey, Morocco, Colombia, South Africa, and so on.

In the context of this new “global culture,” Christians are called upon to focus on what I have called a “mediating, ecumenical goal.” By this phrase, I mean that Christians must bear witness to the message of mercy and peace that we have received from Jesus Christ. Witness is borne in precisely the way we interact with the surrounding culture.

A terrific example of Christians focused on this “mediating, ecumenical goal,” and on playing their “mediating, ecumenical role,” is provided by the monks portrayed in the widely acclaimed 2010 French film, *Of Gods and*



Global Theatre
C.S. Morrissey

Men, based on a true story. These monks, surrounded by a largely Muslim population in Algeria, bore quiet witness to peace and harmony.

To those around them, they illustrated what I have called “interdisciplinarity and contextuality.” In an openhearted and generous way, they shared their di-



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verse gifts and talents with everyone they encountered. With intelligence and sensitivity, they adapted themselves to their cultural context, in order to bear witness.

The movie, *Of Gods and Men*, tells the story of how, swirling around the monks, challenges to their peaceful witness were presented by terrorists and government authorities. In the same way, Christians today, wherever they are, thanks to “global culture,” are similarly sur-

rounded by a diverse array of cultural currents.

But having faith means that Christians are called to resist buying into any kind of ideology that is on offer in the world. For example, there are the ideologies of various terrorist groups; the ideologies of various government authorities; the ideologies of the media elites; and the ideologies of a thousand other organizations obsessed with their pet ideas and schemes. A vast marketplace for ideas has opened up in “global culture.”

Indeed, if you thought the grocery store had a dizzying array on display, then just look at the bewildering variety of cultural projects that the Internet serves up to tantalize the human mind. But in this chaotic and complex world, Christians are called by the Gospel to play a unique role.

Pope Francis contrasts the mediating activity of Christian peacemaking with all the ideologies that the world has on offer. That’s why he said in his homily there is something gravely wrong with “Christians who think of the faith as a system of ideas, as an ideology.”

“Christians who think of faith as a system of ideas, ideologically: there were such as these even in Jesus’ own day. The Apostle John says of them, that they were the antichrist, the ideologues of faith, of whatsoever [ideological] stamp they might have been,” said Francis. “At that time there were [also] the Gnostics, but there will [always] be many [like] See AUTHENTIC – Page 8



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Olivier Perrier and Philippe Laudenbach, foreground; Lambert Wilson, Olivier Rabourdin, Jean-Pierre, Jacques Herlin, and Jean-Marie Frin star in a scene from the movie *Of Gods and Men*.

Authentic faith not any kind of ideology

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this] – and thus, those who fall into casuistry or those who fall into ideology are Christians who know the doctrine, but [are] without faith, like demons. The difference is that the demons tremble.”

The Pope then drove his point home: “these [ideological] Christians, no: they live peacefully,” without authentic faith, and yet they do not even tremble. These “ideological” Christians are complacent and undisturbed by their lack of authentic faith.

But authentic faith, said the Pope, cannot be any kind of ideology. Faith “is not [merely] to possess knowledge,” he said. Faith is, by its very nature, irreducible to an ideology. Thus, the Gospels show us many people who “encountered Jesus Christ and not abstract truths,” said Francis.

“Faith is an encounter

with Jesus Christ, with God, from which faith is born, and from there it brings you to witness. That is what the Apostle [James] means: a faith without works, a faith that does not involve one’s [whole] self, that does not lead to witness, is not faith,” said the Pope. “It is words – and nothing more than words.”

The Pope concluded his homily with a wonderful prayer. It best fits those who seek to play a “mediating, ecumenical role” in service of peace and justice for our “global culture.” To abandon the allure of all ideology, Francis said we should pray earnestly for “the grace to have a faith that bears fruit and that leads to proclamation and to witness”.

C.S. Morrissey is an associate professor of philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College. □