

Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. “The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes” (Mk 1:22). Jesus is the Word of God. He is truth. He liberates from sin. The people in the synagogue hear Jesus and the authority of his wisdom resonates with them. It inspires the imagination. It calls them to holiness. It reaches deep into their hearts and draws them closer to God.

The people in the synagogue had also experienced the exact opposite. They had heard scribes and Pharisees who bound them and tied their hands with regulations that missed the spirit of the law. The scribes and Pharisees constantly challenged the authority of Jesus until such time as they asked for an executive order from Pontius Pilate to have him crucified.

In Mark’s Gospel (1:21-28), the man possessed by an unclean spirit also challenges the authority of Jesus. He defies Jesus. He rejects the Gospel and the truth. Sadly, our secular world is very much like the man with the unclean spirit. Truth is rejected. The Gospel is dismissed. And Church tradition is viewed as an imposition of arbitrary rules out of touch with reality. Let me offer two examples:

- First, Genesis teaches: “When God created human beings, he made them in the likeness of God; he created them male and female” (5:1-2).
 - In a far-reaching executive order, the new president redefined sex to mean sexual orientation and gender identity. The implication is that biology is bigotry. The order means boys who identify as girls must be allowed to compete in the girls’ athletic competitions much to the dismay of young women who can no longer compete on an even field. Men who identify as women must be allowed in women-only spaces no matter how uncomfortable their presence is. Healthcare plans must pay for gender-transition procedures despite multiple court rulings that allow for religious exemptions. The text of the order is “based on a lie, that ‘gender identity’ enables a male person to ‘be’ a woman.”¹¹
- Secondly, the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (1:5). Life is a sacred gift from God. “From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life... Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable” (CCC 2270-2271).
 - In another executive order, the president overturned the Mexico City Policy designed to promote life. The U.S. Bishop’s decried this executive order that promotes abortion overseas. “It is grievous that one of President Biden’s first official acts actively promotes the destruction of human lives in developing nations. This Executive Order is antithetical to reason, violates human dignity, and is incompatible with Catholic teaching... We urge the President to use his office for good, prioritizing the most vulnerable, including unborn children... To serve our brothers and sisters with respect, it is imperative that care begin with ensuring that the unborn are free from violence, recognizing every person as a child of God. We hope the new administration will work with us to meet these significant needs.”

Where did we go wrong? Pope John Paul II tried to address the problem almost three decades ago when he wrote *Veritatis Splendor*. “The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God

(cf. Gen 1:26). Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord. Hence the Psalmist prays: 'Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord' (Ps 4:6; VS #1)."

Pope John Paul II was responding to the threat of moral relativism that asserts 'What is true for me may not be true for you?' God calls us to seek the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Society tells us that we can define truth for ourselves.

We are very misguided in thinking that we can find truth by silencing God and the voice of the Church. "Before feeling easily justified in the name of our conscience, we should reflect on the words of the Psalm: 'Who can discern his errors? Clear me from hidden faults' (Ps 19:12). There are faults which we fail to see but which nevertheless remain faults, because we have refused to walk towards the light (cf. Jn 9:39-41; VS 63)."

Sometimes we hear it phrased a different way: "Who am I to impose my religious beliefs on another?" Yes, we must respect the religious liberty of each individual. However, when truth becomes subjective, when there is an effort to redefine the moral order that God has set in place, then we find ourselves on a very slippery slope. We are brought back to the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Adam and Eve who questioned the divine order set forth by God. Satan tempted humanity by twisting the truth into a lie. "The snake said to the woman: 'You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil'" (Gn 3:4-5).

The temptation in society today is to eat the fruit from the tree of subjective truth. Not the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but the slippery self-defined truth that is ever changing and ever shifting. Pope John Paul II taught, "It is never acceptable to confuse a 'subjective' error about moral good with the 'objective' truth rationally proposed to man in virtue of his end, or to make the moral value of an act performed with a true and correct conscience equivalent to the moral value of an act performed by following the judgment of an erroneous conscience" (VS 63).

The fundamental task of the politician is to serve the common good which often requires protection for the most vulnerable. Pope Benedict cautioned, "Man can destroy the world. He can manipulate himself. He can, so to speak, make human beings and he can deny them their humanity. How do we recognize what is right? How can we discern between good and evil, between what is truly right and what may appear right?"ⁱⁱ

Throughout history, religion has played a role in helping to shape laws with God as the ultimate authority on what is right and wrong. God's hand wrote the 10 commandments on stone tablets for Moses. God writes those same commandments on every human heart. A proper exercise of conscience involves listening to the human heart for the truth that God has already placed there.

God also writes truth into life giving cultures. We respect the voice of elders because they pass on wisdom and identity. Our Alaskan Native cultures have grown in knowledge from one generation to the next never forgetting the truth, beauty, and goodness of their most sacredly held traditions.

History also teaches us that societies and cultures collapse and crumble when they embrace lies. Where God is set aside, where man defines truth for himself, history has a way of teaching us that untruths cannot sustain us. Apartheid in South Africa, Communism in the Soviet Bloc, the moral decay of the Roman Empire. Every culture has its faults but let us not overlook what has sustained us in our own religious and cultural heritage.

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Belief in our loving God, has given rise “to the idea of human rights, the idea of the equality of all people before the law, the recognition of the inviolability of human dignity in every single person and the awareness of people’s responsibility for their actions. Our cultural memory is shaped by these rational insights. To ignore it or dismiss it as a thing of the past would be to dismember our culture totally and to rob it of its completeness.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The Human Person “has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled.”^{iv}

Jesus taught as one having authority. Let us recall the source of that authority revealed at his Baptism and again at the Transfiguration. From the cloud came the voice of God the Father, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him” (Mk 9:7).

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/in-far-reaching-executive-order-biden-redefines-sex-74944

ⁱⁱ vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Ibid