

JONES AND GOMEZ: TWO RADICALLY DIFFERENT MINISTERS

Perusing the recent spiritual landscape makes me mutter with Charles Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...”

The epitome of the latter is Pastor Terry Jones, leader of the Dove Outreach Center in Gainesville, Florida. His ill-considered and ultimately failed “International Burn a Koran Day” drew worldwide criticism -- and rightly so. Raw impudence such as his is ugly and deserves to be resisted. Anything less would be foolishness.

Now, I disagree with Islamic fundamentalism; that is my right, and a product of my Christian belief that Jesus is the way to my (our) relationship with God and, ultimately, Heaven. However, at no time did Jesus instruct followers to burn the books of other belief-adherent. Instead, He armed followers with the unlikely weapons of lavish love and unflinching faithfulness.

Can you imagine Immanuel announcing to His followers, “You will be known by your love...but if that doesn’t work, burn their books. Yes, that’ll show ‘em.”

Jones has backed down. Good. Such behavior has no place in the ranks of Christian ministry.

Consider in contrast a genuine light shining in the darkness – this darkness nearly one kilometre beneath the face of the Earth, where 33 Chilean miners have been trapped since Aug. 5.

“The miners have each taken on roles within the underground world ... naming a priest, a doctor, a poet, a television presenter and a foreman within the group.” (SP, Sept 4, 2010)

If Jones is the picture of foolishness, my underground pastoral colleague is the portrait of wisdom. His name is Mario Gomez. “He has taken on the role of spiritual leader and urges the men to pray daily in the makeshift chapel he has created in a corner of the subterranean chamber...His job is aided by 33 mini-Bibles lowered into the mine with the daily supplies of food and medicine.”

Gomez’s parish is tiny, but his ministry is monumental. He whispers encouragement in the midst of despair. He speaks of hope in the face of disaster. He calls to prayer as questions persist. He reminds parishioners that the presence of God extends even to the bowels of the Earth.

Such is the labor of a genuine minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; one who innately understands that faith is not proven in the burning of Korans, but rather in one’s persistence in the face of adversity.

A grandstanding manipulative pastor stands on a manicured church lawn, adorned in suit and tie, performing interviews and demanding his brand of justice. Meanwhile, a humble miner kneels in a shadowed sepulcher – made sacred by faith -- leading grime-covered congregants in worship.



The comparative faces of ministry are extremely different. Jones revels in foolishness and anger while Gomez chooses the way of wisdom and peace. Both profess to represent Christ, but one alone receives the nod of affirmation from the Master who announces via St. Paul, “God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these ‘nobodies’ to expose the hollow pretensions of the ‘somebodies’?” (1 Corinthians 1:27 – The Message)

I have the feeling one of those God-chosen “nobodies” is Gomez. I’ll let God determine which category Jones fits into -- but I have my suspicions.