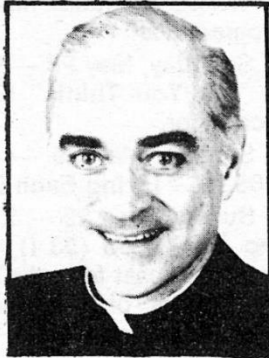


# Gospels in 4 Colors

Have you read about the Scripture scholars who assert that Jesus never said about 80 percent of the words attributed to him in the Bible? One of the latest books on this theme is the Scholars' Version (SV) of the Bible, entitled *The Five Gospels* (Polebridge Press). This is a New Testament translation with commentaries which was produced by 74 scholars who boast that no ecclesial body gave their book an imprimatur. It seems to me that's precisely the problem.



The text is printed in four colors, red indicating the words Jesus actually spoke according to these scholars; pink indicating probability — they say the pink texts sound like Jesus but they're not certain. They doubt if he spoke the text printed in gray and they are certain he never spoke the words printed in black. Black of course is the most predominant color.

How did they arrive at this multi-colored text? They did it by taking a vote. These scholars of different faiths, and some perhaps of no faith, simply voted on each text. Since a democratic process was used, a majority of 38 votes determined the outcome one way or the other. If 35 said they were certain Jesus spoke these words and 39 were doubtful, the passage would be cast in pink, not red. Draw your own conclusions about the validity of such a process.

In my judgment they lost some credibility when they included a fifth gospel, the Gospel of Thomas. The Catholic Church rejected this Gospel centuries ago as heretical because of its Gnostic errors. The Gospel of Thomas has 114 sections, but only about 10 lines are red ink in the

Scholars' version, nearly all of the remaining portions are in black. It makes you wonder, why the Gospel was included in the first place.

In the Gospel of Matthew the scholars accept the fact that Jesus actually spoke many of the words in the Sermon on the Mount. For instance, these words of Jesus are deemed authentic: "Don't react violently against the one who is evil; when someone slaps you in the right cheek, turn the other as well. When someone wants to sue you for your shirt, let that person have your coat along with it. Further, when anyone conscripts you for one mile, go the extra mile; and give to the one who begs from you."

Fortunately, this passage is at the heart of the message of Christ. It's nice to know that even in this unauthorized Bible, the Good News is still intact. God is revealed as one who loves and forgives.

The claim that Jesus never spoke 80 percent of the words attributed to him is not a problem for Catholics. They have a teaching authority to clarify the validity and meaning of each text. Whether a particular sentence contains exactly the same words that Jesus spoke 2000 years ago is not the real issue; after all his language was Aramaic which was later translated into Greek, Latin and then English. There inevitably will be semantic problems in such a sequence of translations, but we have the sense of his message, and we have the consensus of the Fathers of the Church, and the Magisterium, to guide us along the way in our interpretation of revelation.

*[For a free copy of the Christopher News Note, Understanding the Bible, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to The Christophers, 12 E. 48th St., New York, N.Y. 10017.]*