

RESPECT FOR ALL

GOD OR YOUR IDEA OF GOD?

Believers as well as atheists sustain that man conceives the divinity "according to his image and likeness"; just as he is and they way he lives: **there exist therefore as many conceptions of God as there are persons.** Within the strictest Catholic orthodoxy, for example, there are conceptualizations so distinct as agustinism and franciscanism, on one hand, and jesuitism and opusdeism on the other hand, not to mention of the conceptions of the desert hermits, the inquisitors or the progressive priests. Be it therefore stressed that: **we do not see things as they are, but as we are. Each one has the God it deserves.** "A good God is the most noble work of man". But there are those who dare proclaim themselves as the only valid interpreters of **the truth, and hold the monopoly of God,** demanding that the rest subject themselves to their theological conception and moral codes. Those wretched conceive a God as wretched, authoritarian and cruel as they are.

Having turned themselves into gods, they intend to understand fully, and by themselves, such a great mystery. Actually, they need **to expand their God** more than anybody else and, in order to do so, they need **a supplement of the soul**, that allows them to be what the term "catholic" originally signifies, that is, **universal**, capable of accepting and loving all men. **Let us not allow ourselves to be fooled by those who believe to know it all.**

INTOLERANCE

Religious intolerance constitutes, in fact, the greatest threat to fraternity and peace among men, families and nations. In effect few are those who dare say that their race is superior to the rest. And even the most chauvinistic persons admit that their country is only a small part of the world, respect other nationalists, and condemn imperialism. But many are those who still proclaim that their religion is the best, **not only for them, but for all**, and are bent to imposing it, belittling the rest. They thus make their pride sacred, they assume the role of the chosen people, the only worthy and moral one: and much too often, they sanctify their nationalism or racism, by waging "holy" campaigns of oppression and wars. As Fr. Juan de Mariana said: "There are no greater animosities than those cloaked under the mantle of religion, for men turn cruel and are like wild beasts"; and, as Pascal affirmed, "never is more evil done and never is it inflicted with greater pleasure

than when it is done in the name of religious convictions".

History reveals the cyclical resurgence of fanatics who abuse religion in order to satisfy their hunger of power and their wicked desire to **religiously** oppress others. But "nothing is more opposed to religion than violence" (saint Justin), because **"a religion that is imposed thru violence turns itself into politics"** (Cardinal Lercaro).

SPAIN AND AMERICA

Let us take a concrete example: the religious intolerance in the clash of civilizations between Spain and America, as reported by its protagonists:

Columbus affirmed that "innocent", "childlike" indians (that is, inferior) did not have any religious ideas. Thus, it was not difficult to convert them to Christianity. Others, with the same purpose of possessing their bodies and minds, affirmed the contrary, like Tomas Ortiz before the Council of Indies: the indians were "donkeys, stupid, crazy, foolish", "they don't want to change their habits nor their gods".

These are the reasons given by the powerful, and made official in the famous order to obey the King of Spain: "If thou does not /.../ I will subject you to the yoke of the Church and His Highness and I will take your people, your women and sons and will make them slaves". As a consequence of the resistance of the natives, the soldiers "burned their homes and took

away their freedom, under the claim that it was better for them to remain slaves than for them to continue living in sin" (Father Diego de Rosales). Believing that the principles of their country were the "natural" principles (Pascal), the conquerors had no difficulty in seeing the wrong in others, criticising the "anti-natural" customs of the natives to justify their own evilness, violations and deaths... to "save them".

When the missionaries began to preach to other indians, these listened politely in the beginning, until they were made to see how absurd their previous beliefs were. Then the missionaries were criticized for their lack of education. Considering that the indians had tolerated so meekly all what was said to them about the Christians' conceptions, it was but proper that the missionaries behaved the way way about the other religion (Lafitau). Let us not forget the protest filed by the local chief about to be killed by the Spaniards, who said that if the Spaniards were bound for heaven he would prefer not to go there (Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas) and those Chilean natives who, as reported by Fr. P. Borges, found difficulty in understanding a notion of God as cruel as that held by Christians.

In America, and sometimes later in Asia and Africa, the native did not take long in realizing the **they were made to look up to the skies in order to deprive them of their lands**. The objective was not actually what was good for them but their goods. Under the guise of "saving" them they were literally, economically

and culturally, belittled, stolen and raped. Little could the good missionaries and settlers do. They were but **a screen that would disguise the oppression** of a people by another.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to what those who, out of fanaticism or other interests, intend to impose their own conception of God as the only acceptable view, and those who see no room for salvation beyond their limited confines contend, it must be stated that **those that are honest**, that is those who live according to their conscience, **are better than those who have brighter ideas about God**.

Those with the same beliefs as ourselves are not necessarily the best. As in the parable of the wounded man in Jericho, those who manifest their solidarity, even if holding different views, may be considered better than the coreligionist. In short, one who claims to be religious, **who loves God, but hates his brother, is a liar** (St. John). Only love can make us truly understand others, beyond differences and limitations and even mistakes in the moral and religious fields: limitations and mistakes which he who loves may acknowledge as his own, and does not classify anybody with a single and definitive religious or moral label, **for man is worth more than his ideas**.

Beware of those who shiled themselves behind symbols (cross, crescent moon, star of David, etc.), and do not hesitate to condemn

others in this and the latter worlds on the grounds of not sharing a common idea of God or having different religious practices. These are the same kind of power hungry people who would send the Polynesians to the burning flames of hell due to their different norms, behaviours, limitations and taboos. Beware of the Pharisees (Jews, Christians or...) than can see the straw in the eyes of the others, but not the beam in their own eyes, and that thank God for not being as the other men.

FINAL NOTE: All Christians should be in agreement with what has been said here. However, moved by their own interests, some people will twist this gesture. Like the Anglican minister who was asked by members of his congregation if someone could go to heaven without belonging to the Anglican church and who after much thought replied, "Yes, but no real gentleman would avail himself of this opportunity".

BEWARE OF ALL FORMS OF FANATICISM!

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