

Flowers Speak

June 2, 2012

God is infinite Being, infinite Truth, infinite Goodness, infinitely just and infinitely merciful. So teaches his Church, and the idea is grand and beautiful, so I have no objection. But then I learn that his Church also teaches that for just one mortal sin the soul can be damned for all eternity to sufferings harsh and cruel beyond all imagination, and that is not so nice. I begin to object.

For instance, I was never consulted before my parents decided to bring me into existence, nor was I consulted on the terms of the contract, so to speak, of my existence. Had I been consulted I might well have objected to such an extreme alternative between unimaginable bliss and unimaginable torment as the Church teaches, both without end. I might have accepted a rather more moderate “contract,” whereby in exchange for a shortened Heaven I would have faced the risk of only an abbreviated Hell, but I was not consulted. An endlessness of either seems to me to be out of all proportion to this brief life of mine on earth: 10, 20, 50 even 90 years are here today, gone tomorrow. All flesh is like grass – “In the morning man shall flourish . . . in the evening he shall fall, grow dry and wither” (Ps. LXXXIX, 6). Along this line of thought God seems so unjust that I seriously wonder if he really exists.

The problem obliges us to reflect. Let us suppose that God does exist; that he is as just as his Church says he is; that it is unjust to impose upon anybody a heavy burden without that person’s consent; that this life is brief, a mere puff of smoke compared with what eternity must be; that nobody can be in justice due for a terrible punishment if he has not been aware of committing a terrible crime. Then how can the supposed God be just? If he is just, then logically every soul reaching the age of reason must live long enough at least to

know the choice for eternity that it is making, and the import of that choice. Yet how is that possible for instance in today's world, where God is so universally neglected and unknown in the life of individuals, families and States?

The answer can only be that God comes before individuals, families and States, and that he "speaks" within every soul, prior to all human beings and independently of them all, so that even a soul whose religious education has been null and void is still aware that it is making a choice each day of its life, that it alone is making that choice for itself, and that the choice has enormous consequences. But once again, how is that possible, given the godlessness of a world all around us like ours today?

Because the "speaking" of God to souls is far deeper, more constant, more present and more appealing than the speaking of any human being or beings can ever be. He alone created our soul. He will continue to be creating it for every moment of its never ending existence. He is therefore closer to it at every single moment than even its parents who merely put together its body – out of material elements being sustained in existence by God alone. And the goodness of God is similarly behind and within and underneath every good thing that the soul will ever enjoy in this life, and the soul is deep down aware that all these good things are mere spin-offs from the infinite goodness of God. "Be quiet," said St. Ignatius of Loyola to a tiny flower, "I know who you are speaking of." The smile of a little child, the daily splendor of Nature at all times of day, music, every sky a masterpiece of art and so on – even loved with a deep love, these things tell the soul that there is something much more, or – Someone.

"In thee, O God, have I hoped, let me never be confounded"
(Ps. XXX, 2).

Kyrie eleison.