

THE INQUISITOR AND THE HERETIC

Intent of the Session:

- ✓ *One thing is "religion" in singular and another "religions" in plural.*
- ✓ *God will judge us according to our conscience.*
- ✓ *As God is the principle of unity, so religion should be.*
- ✓ *Liberty of conscience, should free us from fanaticism and bigotry in religious matters*
- ✓ *Religious tolerance does not mean religious indifferentism.*
- ✓ *In all religions distinguish between pure religious content and cultural wrappings.*

The Story

One day, God was informed that "The `Great Inquisitor" who died all of a sudden and the last "Heretic" whom he had condemned to be burned at the stake, were arriving together to his judgment seat. Both stood together before Almighty God.

Without knowing who was who, God asked the Heretic: "Who do you say I am"?

The Heretic replied: "You are my God, my Lord, my Savior, my all! For your name's sake, I risked my life from birth to death. For your honor's sake I died and for your honor's sake, I am ready to die one thousand deaths more."

Then, God turned to the Great Inquisitor and asked: "Who do you say I am?"

The Great Inquisitor replied: "You are my God, my Lord, My Savior, my all! For your name's sake I risked my life from birth to death. For your honor's sake I am ready to die one thousand deaths!"

Then, God asked the Heretic: "What have you done on earth, tell me?" The Heretic replied: "For your name sake and to defend your honor, I studied the Scriptures, I fought against your adversaries, I proved them wrong, I reproached them. For your greater honor I had them, jailed, tortured and even killed! To tell the truth I had been an honest man. I always acted in good conscience"

Then God turned to the Inquisitor, and asked him: "And you, what have you done on earth?"

The Inquisitor replied: "For your name's sake I studied the Scriptures. I fought against your adversaries, I proved them wrong. I reproached them. For your greater honor, I had them jailed, tortured and even killed! To tell the truth, I had been an honest man. I always acted in good conscience. For your honor's sake I am ready to die one thousand deaths!"

At the end, God was very sad and confused. He could not ascertain who the Heretic was and who the Great Inquisitor. Finally, in disappointment God said: "Well, since both acted in good faith and meant well - though both of you were terribly mistaken - I permit you to enter heaven.

However, I want you to know that you failed utterly to understand the message of my Gospel, nay even the very meaning of religion. I am all love and forgiveness. Neither of you have ever come truly to know me!

Thoughts for Reflection and Discussion

1. What lessons can we draw from the story?
2. How will God judge us? According to our conscience or according to doctrine?
3. Can God be a cause of disunity and hatred? Why?
4. Why, in the history of the world, religion, often enough has been cause disunity? Mention examples. Would you call that true religion? Why? What would you call it?
5. Can rivalries, fights and dissensions be justified on religious grounds? How? Why?
6. Is there any difference between "religion" (in singular) and "religions" (in plural)? Which?
7. Can in any traditional religion exist by itself, in a vacuum, free from all "socio-cultural and political" elements? Why? What are the consequences of this fact for all religions?
8. What's the relationship between "organized Religions" and "cultural traditions"?
9. Can the world religions be purified of their "non- religious" and other extraneous elements? How?
10. Can you point out what is genuinely "Christian" in the so called Christian world?
11. What are the dangers in the religions of "a book", namely, those who claim to have "sacred books revealed by God"?
12. For a religious-minded person what is more important: What he thinks to be the "objective truth" contained in his religion, or his absolute honesty in dealing with God and neighbor? Why?
13. What do we mean by a "religious pluralistic world"?
14. Can we live, in peace with people of other faiths? How?
15. What is the difference between "religious controversy" and "religious dialogue"? What are their respective aims and values?
16. What role has religious freedom in the, world today?
17. Is there any difference between "religious freedom" and freedom of conscience"? Which?
18. What is meant today by "religious revivalism" and "religious fundamentalism"? Are they' beneficial or harmful?
19. Can a "religious revival" be free from "religious fundamentalism"?
20. Should the Government interfere in religious matters? How? How much? Why?
21. What's the difference between a "secular" government and a "secularist" one?
22. Does religious tolerance, necessarily, imply" religious "indifference"? Why?

APPENDIX

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE Vatican II

THE IDEA OF THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON AND HIS RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE KEPT GROWING IN THE WESTERN WORLD RIGHT FROM THE INCEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY UNTILL TODAY.

1. Jesus in his teachings practice upheld the dignity of the Human person.
2. From the time the Gospel was preached the idea of the dignity and inviolability of the human person began taking roots in the conscience of society.
3. Later on from the Renaissance, and much more from the French Revolution onwards, the cultural values of society shifted from:
 - The collectivity to the individual.
 - Absolute monarchy to democracy.
 - Centralism and regimentation to liberty.
 - Tolerance to acceptance.
 - Polemics to dialogue.
 - Privilege to equality
 - Law to conscience.
4. Finally the U.N. on Dec 10th 1948 adopted the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” based on the postulate of the dignity of the human person, and its right to be free. It reads: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”
5. The Catholic Church in the XX Century updated herself and wholeheartedly accepted the new shift of emphasis of modern culture about the dignity and freedom of the each human being.
6. At the Vatican II, the Church issued the Decree and Declaration on Religious Freedom.
7. Namely, the right persons and communities have to be let free to follow their conscience in matters pertaining to religion.

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Does “freedom of conscience“ mean that we are free to do whatever we like, whatsoever we wish?

Not at all, but just the opposite.

- We have always to do, not just what we like but, but only what is right
- What’s right or wrong is finally revealed to us by our conscience.
- God will always judge us according to what we do, following or not following our conscience.

Consequently,

1. Since we are bound always to follow our conscience, we have to be let free to do so.
2. No one on earth, parents, government or anyone else, **may force us to do** anything against our conscience, nor **stop us doing what** our conscience tells us is the right thing to do.

Therefore, all persons – even those in authority - are duty bound to let others free to follow their conscience and not to stop anyone from doing what their conscience tells them they ought to do as long as that does not impinge on other people’s rights.

Practical consequences of the Doctrine of Freedom of Conscience.

We have to be let free in all these matters

1. Conversion
2. Evangelization
3. Salvation outside the church
4. Moral judgments on medical and marriage ethics.
5. Threats, punishments, discipline in upbringing our children.
6. Choice of Vocation. Ourselves and our Children.
7. Choice of partner in life.
8. Religious practices.
9. Reception of sacraments.
10. Non compliance with the laws of the Church and of government.
11. Religious, cultural pluralism.
12. Dialogue with other religions.
13. Education for “responsible freedom”.
14. Relationships between Parents and children.
15. Relationships between authority and obedience.
16. “Conscientious objectors”
17. Dissent within existing structures. Church, Social and political.
18. Obligation to grow responsible, to search, to take decisions.
19. Freedom to make mistakes.
20. Courage to take responsibility of one’s own life
21. Giving up manipulative practices in human relationships.
22. Acceptance of others, not just tolerance
23. Responsible freedom in all we do,
24. Away from compulsions and fears.
25. Ability to live in peace amidst ambiguity and doubt.