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WHAT IS GOD'S RELIGION?

This dossier continues with the presentation of Fr. Fernando Ventura, OFM Cap, delivered during the 2011 General Chapter in Sao Paulo, Brazil. In this text, Fr. Fernando begins by posing some provocative questions about our notions of God and religion. He goes on to remind us that the challenge of the Gospel is the building of a "common home", a place where finally "Love can be loved". He concludes that we can only have a relationship with God when we have a relationship with others, and that we must go from being people of religion to being people of faith.

What is God's religion? In whom does God believe? Do we have a God who is an atheist?

We have a God who believes in us. I am God's religion. We are God's religion. This is a punch in the stomach, but we still don't have it clear. Catholics have the crazy idea that God is Catholic ... Protestants, that God is Protestant ... Muslims, that God is Muslim ... Jews that God is Jewish. And, it is for this reason that we have been killing each other for centuries. This is why all religions have their hands stained with blood ... without exception!

A common home

The challenge of the Gospel is this, Francis' challenge is this: a common home ... a place where finally "Love can be loved" ... without fear of words, without fear of emotions. Because this house sometimes becomes the mother-in-law's house, it becomes a "sick" home because we are all "fed up" with each other. And there is no one who will put up with us!

Let us be aware of our place in the universe: the third rock from the sun ... Mercury, Venus, Earth ... a small dot in the universe ... a grain of sand. But we are, and we have our place, and we need to change this piece of the earth where we live. It is up to us to touch, and it is up to us to discover that the new name for ecology might be "solidarity", and that the new name for ethics might be "fraternity".



A phrase can change many lives. What is the phrase that can change many lives? Could it be **"I love you"**? It sounds easy, but it's not at all. However, it's clear that a little sugar can change everything. Often, we live as Narcissus, one who lived in love with his own self alone. So many people in the world ... in love with ourselves, with our religions, with our philosophies, with our neuroses.

"Trouble" in our fraternities

We continue searching for paradise, but we remain in our hideouts. We continue having "trouble" in our fraternities, eating each other up. And, in our communities, we do the same thing, and we call it "fraternity". We are in love with ourselves, living solitary lives in the midst of history. And, we do not realize something so simple: before Moses, this God at Horeb presents Himself as YAHWEH, I AM. God says to Moses: *"I am the one who is being"*. Here, it is important to note the grammar. Above all, we must touch life, the life of relationship to its limit. God says to you: I need you in order to be. Here, the verb "to be" is in its transitive form. Here, we see the conversion of God towards us. Here we discover the depth of that **I AM** ... discovering where our sin is, and that it is so ORIGINAL that it is not original at all. Because I say to my brother in his face, "I AM", and you can go to hell! The fact is that we have an unfortunate notion that we can sin against God. How vane of us!! You sin against your brother or sister. And, if you don't understand this, then you don't understand that you can only have a relationship with God when you have a relationship with others. Everything else is empty religion. It's the hysterical foolishness of hysterical people, who live crouching in fear before God, and live like chickens in a poultry house, in front of others. And, regrettably, we have many people like this in our communities.

God's marital status

Let us reflect on the first words of the Bible ... in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; the earth was empty; darkness covered the abyss; and the Spirit of God "hovered" over the surface of the water. This is the beginning. This is how the adventure begins.

What do you think is the marital status of the Spirit in Genesis? He is alone. He is unmarried. This is the first sentence of the Bible. Now, let's take a leap. We will land in the last book of the Bible, almost on the last sentence of Revelation (22, 17). "The Spirit and the bride say come." The marital status is now "Married." A single God in Genesis ends up married in the Apocalypse. And married to whom? With all of creation!

What is the opposite of "polygamy"? *Monotony*! We don't have a *monotonous* God, but a God who is polygamous ... a God who is married with all of creation ... with all peoples, with all cultures, religions, philosophies ... and, if we don't understand this, we don't understand anything. If we don't understand this, we will continue to be sectarian. We will continue to be Talibans of religion, no matter how Catholic we may be, no matter how many blessings we may have. This is the time to go from being people of religion, to being people of FAITH.



This is the leap. Only Francis has taken that leap so far. We continue to be afraid to think. We continue to be afraid to have doubts. We continue to be afraid to ask questions. We continue to be afraid of losing our balance. And that's why we don't walk. We don't walk because we are afraid of losing our balance. Walking requires that we lose our balance; we can only move forward if we balance on one leg and then on the other. Imbalance is the condition for progress. This is not an imbalance based on nonsense but the imbalance of which Paul of Tarsus spoke when he said, "I know in whom I put my trust." This is the condition with which history can advance.

A future paradise

And, as we move forward, we can dream again about this place of grace, of freedom and of love. We remain in a condition of "longing". From the time of Genesis, we either yearn for the past, or desire the future. Paradise, as it is in the Bible, never existed. We are not mourning a paradise lost, but rather crying and shouting for a future paradise. We are here for this reason ... not to lick our own tears, but to wipe the tears of others. This is the miracle that the world awaits.



Not long ago, people were running after the images of virgins that would weep blood. And they were shouting in celebration of this miracle! Bands of hysterical and historical people! We do not realize that the miracle of

our time is not the plastic images that cry glue, but rather the miracle that our brothers and sisters will stop crying.

This result is nothing more than death ... and death among whom? Cain and Abel ... Here is the biblical scene that explains all the evil in the world ... from the words ... from the names. Cain, in its Hebrew root, means "acquired", the one who has everything, who is everything. Abel, from the root Abal, is the one who is nothing ... the one who does not exist. Now, look at who kills whom. The one who believes he is all powerful kills the one who is nothing. And look at the conversation. God asks two questions in the Bible. "Adam, where are you? (Genesis 3). And, the question he asks of Cain, "What have you done with your brother?" And Cain answers that he is not his brother's keeper. The keeper is not only the responsible one. He is the one who has and guides – not because he is required to do so but because of a love relationship with someone. This is the cause of all the evil in the world: that no one feels that he has to be his brother's keeper ... that no one feels a vital intimacy with anyone. For that reason, we remain alone.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION IN FRATERNITY

1. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), a German philosopher, stated that God is "the outward projection of a human's inward nature". What do you think about this statement when you realize that people are arguing or even fighting about the "right" image of God?
2. Do you agree that we can only have a relationship with God when we have a relationship with others?



3. What are the consequences (especially for Secular Franciscans) of God being "married with creation, with all peoples, with all cultures, religions, philosophies ..."?