

WE KNOW ALL ABOUT IT! A fable

The Clever Goats.

THRUST OF THE FABLE *Faith and Belief.*

- ✓ *We have to approach the mystery of God with humility*
- ✓ *We have to be very wary of "dogmatism" and "authoritarianism" in matters divine.*
- ✓ *This parable will help us to assign to "dogmas" and "doctrinal pronouncements" their true worth.*
- ✓ *We have to realize that there is only one "absolute" and that is God: Holy Scriptures, dogmas, doctrines, creedal formulas, etc., are means no ends to come to the knowledge of God.*
- ✓ *Our knowledge of God will always be imperfect, tentative, and relative.*

THE FABLE

Narrator: Some very intelligent goats heard about the Taj-Mahal of Agra. They said to themselves. "It is not enough to hear about such a marvelous work of art. We have to see it ourselves and make a thorough scientific study of that wonder" Soon, they set out with all their field apparatus on a study trip to the Taj. As they were nearing the city of Agra they saw on the road a sign-post wherein in big letters the inscription "Taj-Mahal" could be read. "Wow" they said, we have arrived! What we were looking for is right in front of us, the Taj in all its beauty and splendor!" Without wasting a minute, they pitched their tents around the signpost. Soon they opened their packing cases and brought out all their scientific gear. The Director of the expedition gave a pep talk to his colleagues:

Director: Friends, the object of our study is right here in front of us. We shall make a close and thorough study of it. Let us put all talents and zeal into carrying out a patient and time-consuming, yet highly rewarding study of the great Taj.

Narrator: The experts and scholars in the group addressed themselves to the task sparing neither time, or effort. After some months of patient and laborious research they finally succeeded in producing an amazing body of scholarly work and resource material for future scholars and historians to delve into. With all that they had studied and written of the Taj- Mahal, whole libraries could be filled!

The research of those expert scholars disclosed prodigious and staggering facts about the Taj-Mahal in the minutest detail and with an astonishing exactitude, such as: The surface of the Taj-Mahal measures 23,221,401 sq. mm, The Taj weighs 221,432,202

mg, The grains of sand used in the construction of the Taj numbered 1,360,541,464. The number of cement particles that went into the structuring of the Taj, were 3,201,432,001, the molecules of water found in the concrete slab, which had not yet evaporated by the action of the sun numbered 23,456,325,405. The age of the Taj was 78 years, 3 months, 2 weeks, 4 hours, 5 minutes, 23 seconds at the time of reckoning. Also disclosed were data regarding the structural and functional qualities of the Taj like resistance to the stress of cyclones, earthquakes and other natural calamities, impermeability to moisture; time-tested structural stability: built-in protection against natural fire and lightning; radiation of cool air under heat conditions etc. etc. At the conclusion of this lengthy and painstaking project the Director said:

Director:

Dear Colleagues, Thanks be to God! We can be proud of our research! We know all that can be known about the Taj-Mahal. No one will ever teach us anything new about it. Our knowledge is unsurpassable! It is complete and perfect! It is infallible and immutable, forever and ever. Amen!

Ideas and Applications of this Parable

- The signpost of the Taj was not the Taj. It just showed the way to reach it...
- In everything we study or investigate, even the divine mysteries, we must look beyond the sign-posts to the reality!
- Someone rightly remarked that "The Holy Scriptures and Dogmas" are like fingers pointing towards God, they show us the way... they are indicators... signposts... We should not stop at them... We have to transcend them ... They are not God or the divine realities.
- We have to hold firmly to the knowledge we have of God, enshrined in dogmas, and formulas of worship, yet we haven't to absolutize our formulas and dogmas wherein that knowledge has been enshrined or cast.
- If we do that, we may turn those doctrines and dogmas into idols! They will become obstacles in our path to God.
- The formulations of the faith (doctrine, liturgy, etc.) are necessary: we cannot do without them. Yet, they are tentative expressions, better "human babblings" of the little we have already experienced and come to know about God.
- However necessary, they are imperfect and only approximate means of approach to the knowledge of God.
- Like part of human language our doctrinal formulations are culturally and historically conditioned.
- Such expressions – dogmas - will keep increasing our comprehension of the divine mystery without ever exhausting it.
- Articles of faith, theological statements and ritual formulas have to be reworded and reinterpreted, to be attuned to the constant changes and discoveries of any particular historic-cultural setup. This is what we mean by "inculturation" or "transculturation".
- We shall never be able to say: like the Goats of the fable:" Our knowledge is unsurpassable! It is complete and perfect! It is infallible and immutable "
- God and divine realities are too immense for our human puny minds, or for any culture or system of thought to exhaustibly comprehend them..

- God cannot fit into created “moulds”.
- Some one very wisely said that dogmas often enough are like “idols” that disguise our “unbelief”.
- By accepting dogmas – a thing we ought to - we necessarily have to admit our radical incapacity to know God in its totality.
- After all, if God is God, he is and he will always be a mystery to the human mind.
- Unawares we “sacralize” and divinize things to lull ourselves with a feeling of “security”.
- Without denying their validity, we are prone to fall in line with the words and commands of the Church and Scriptures, not so much because we know them to be right and true, but because of the inborn need we have to feel right and secure.
- The problem is not with dogmas and rituals but with us; we find it easier to deal with rituals and dogmas than to relate intimately with an almighty and inscrutable God!
- God is neither a dogma nor a doctrine! Worshipping the true God is not a ritual
- Obeying God is more than a matter of faith, is having an implicitly trust Him
- Unconsciously, we try - though we can’t – scale God down to our human level by reducing him to dogmas, rituals and commandments!
- We find it unbearable to stand naked before God. We want to feel decent and presentable, and so we clothe ourselves with beliefs, practices and rituals...
- Without realizing it, we put ourselves first. God takes the second place. He becomes a means for us to find peace and security, not an end in Himself in whom we are, we move and we exist.

N. T. Qutes in Keeng with the Ideas of the Fable

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| Mt 5/36-37 | Let your speech be "yes", "no" Simplicity, candor. |
| Mt 12/1-14 | Do not absolutist custom, rites and traditions. |
| Mt 12/22-32 | Don't be too sure, you may sin against the Holy Spirit! |
| Mt 22 | The whole chapter is about some questions the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law put to Jesus. They already knew the answers. They wanted to catch Jesus. Jesus replies forthrightly, without any dogmatism. |
| Mt 23/6-8 | Do not ask to be called "teachers of the Law!" |
| Mt 23/13-28 | Jesus accuses the Teachers of the Law! |
| Mt 24/36 | Jesus acknowledges that he does not know . |
| Mk 7/1-13 | Men are liable to be misled and misguided. Man's knowledge is subject to surface impressions and prejudices. |
| Lk 18/9-14 | Jesus humiliates those who feel too sure of themselves. |
| Lk 3/1-21 | Nicodemus. He is not sure at all of his teaching. |
| Lk 11/ 1-41 | There is such thing as "Spiritual blindness" |
| Acts 17/ 16-32 | Paul cannot convince the "educated and the learned" by rational arguments |
| 1 Cor 2&3 Chapters | Paul attacks the wisdom of the world, A knowledge based only on reason. |
| I Cor 10/14-15 | Keep away from "idol worship". All absolutes are idols. |

APPENDIX

The development of Doctrine

St Vincent of Lerins

Is there to be no development of religion in the Church of Christ? Certainly, there is to be development and on the largest scale.

Who can be so grudging to men, so full of hate for God, as to try to prevent it? But it must truly be development of the faith, not alteration of the faith. Development means that each thing expands to be itself, while alteration means that a thing is changed from one thing into another.

The understanding, knowledge and wisdom of one and all, of individuals as well as of the whole Church, ought then to make great and vigorous progress with the passing of the ages and the centuries, but only along its own line of development, that is, with the same doctrine, the same meaning and the same import.

The religion of souls should follow the law of development of bodies. Though bodies develop and unfold their component parts with the passing of the years, they always remain what they were. There is a great difference between the flower of childhood and the maturity of age, but those who become old are the very same people who were once young. Though the condition and appearance of one and the same individual may change, it is one and the same nature, one and the same person.

The tiny members of unweaned children and the grown members of young men are still the same members. Men have the same number of limbs as children. Whatever develops at a later age was already present in seminal form; there is nothing new in old age that was not already latent in childhood.

There is no doubt, then, that the legitimate and correct rule of development, the established and wonderful order of growth, is this: in older people the fullness of years always brings to completion those members and forms that the wisdom of the Creator fashioned beforehand in their earlier years.

If, however, the human form were to turn into some shape that did not belong to its own nature, or even if something were added to the sum of its members or subtracted from it, the whole body would necessarily perish or become grotesque or at least be enfeebled. In the same way, the doctrine of the Christian religion should properly follow these laws of development, that is, by becoming firmer over the years, more ample in the course of time, more exalted as it advances in age.

In ancient times our ancestors sowed the good seed in the harvest field of the Church. It would be very wrong and unfitting if we, their descendants, were to reap, not the genuine wheat of truth but the intrusive growth of error.

On the contrary, what is right and fitting is this: there should be no inconsistency between first and last, but we should reap true doctrine from the growth of true teaching, so that when, in the course of time, those first sowings yield an increase it may flourish and be tended in our day also.