

Fr. André Brombart, a Belgian Assumptionist, launched a blog in French in 2010 and has recently been placing it online in English at http://a-heedful-idiot.blogspot.com . The most recent entry follows. Fr. André gives the following biographical information about himself: "Born in 1942. Belgian mother (Catholic tradition); Jewish father (who lost all his family members in the Shoah). Studied law. Legal advisor of a company for 12 years. Baptised as a Catholic in 1980. Religious vows in 1983. Priestly ordination in 1987." From 2005-2011, he served in Rome as an assistant general for the Assumptionist Congregation. He is currently back in Brussels where he is member of the Maranatha Christian Community and helps out at the Church of the Madeleine in downtown Brussels.



All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord

In the aftermath of the devastating tsunami that hit the northeast coast of Japan, a friend sent me a poignant message. This elderly widower has the habit of praying the Divine Office each day. On Sunday morning of the "first week", the Office consists of two psalms (62 and 149) and the Song of Creation from the Book of Daniel (Dan 3: 57-88). In this song, all the elements of nature, plants, animals and humans are invited to praise God, "praise and exalt Him above all

for ever" ... Here's what my friend wrote :

"*This morning, the Office proposes the Song of the Three Young Men : 'All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord... O all ye spirits and winds...' Freeze-frame' : impossible to continue in such a mood this morning. Isn't this pure evil falling for the second time on innocent victims ? (and I do not intend to judge President Truman for allowing the use of nuclear weapons). Isn't this a disaster of the same kind as that of the innocent child, for which Ivan Karamazov cannot forgive God? On this first Sunday of Lent we are already at Good Friday.* "

How, indeed, could we "praise the Lord" for all his works, when our heart is still filled with these terrifying images, and our spirit tortured by the thought of all these drowned victims ?...

We know how the issue - the enigma - of God's "silence" in front of the outbreak of evil has always been a stumbling block, a kind of "proof" of God's non-existence. The great believer that Dostoevsky was, doubtless refers to his own internal debate when he writes the famous pages of *The Brothers Karamazov* known as "Grand Inquisitor". But we know that there is no answer to that question. Or at least, there is no other answer than that given by God himself in the kenosis and the death-resurrection of Christ.

So I can understand, respect, and even share, my friend's reaction. On second thought, I remembered a passage from Roy Schoeman's book, *Salvation is from the Jews* that I mentioned in a previous post. Schoeman quotes a deeply moving excerpt from the autobiography of Mel Mermelstein, a seventeen years old Jew who survived Auschwitz *(By Bread Alone: the Story of A-4685)*
. Having returned to his village after being released, Mel tells how he had just learned his parents' and sisters' death :

I walked towards the gate where my uncle was waiting for me. Shocked, my eyes filled with tears. I sat in the grass and covered my face with my hands. My uncle placed his hand over my head and said, "God wanted it so, and holy is His judgment." I raised my head slowly in disbelief to hear the words he had uttered.

"I know... I know, Moishele. Listen, before you ask, before any question, repeat after me: Boruch Dayen emess ". I repeated these words meaning: "Blessed be the righteous Judge."

These words, traditionally spoken to announce a death, seemed quite inappropriate. But when I had pronounced them, relief began to overwhelm me.

"Do you want me to bless God for this unbearable pain? Do you want me to call 'just' this hideous injustice?" I do not remember the exact words I used, but the impression of having been fooled still persists. To believe that God could be present somewhere in Auschwitz was too much.

"Moishele, Moishele, please..." My uncle was crying now. "Your questions are legitimate, but you're not the first to ask them. 'As we bless God for the good that He sends us, should we bless Him for evil'? These are words written in the Talmud. These are words that go beyond our understanding, but if we do not pronounce them there is no hope for us. Bitterness, yes, but despair not. The Jewish way is to bless and hope, bless and hope until hope and blessing overcome pain and even bitterness, and human beings learn to go on."

My uncle went on saying: "God is just, God is good. But people who sometimes forget it let themselves be led by evil; they lose the sense of the image of God in themselves, and then they become beasts of prey".

"Perhaps, he said, we translate the prayers: 'Blessed is the righteous God who judges.' He does not forget. Sometimes it's as though he needed time to absorb everything he saw, to react and give the reward. But you will see, Moishele, you are still young. You'll see. He does not forget!"

May we always rekindle the hope of our fellow human beings, as the "liquidators" of Fukushima's plant are doing so today, risking their lives..... or - what is more achievable for us - by putting a hand of compassion on the head of those who are destroyed by suffering.

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