

50. *Remember Bichr*

It gives me great joy to know that you need only hear the name of God spoken, or see it written, to experience deep within your soul a mysterious movement of adoration. It is proof that the virtue of religion is alive within you. This is the spiritual inclination to honor and revere God, and to work for his glory. But you should also realize that it is an invitation to diligently cultivate this virtue, which is the foundation of all religions. This is so true, that religions are designated by the very word that serves to denote this virtue.

There is a close bond between the virtue of religion, and love. Who was it who said, "To love is to honor"? This is already true in our human relations. All the more is it true in our relations with God. True love for God is impatient to acknowledge his supreme excellence, and to proclaim it so that every creature may render him honor and glory.

Some Christians, of course, use the pretext of filial love to explain the fact that, when they are in the presence of God, they do not experience the reverential awe that the virtue of religion begets. They treat God with a familiarity that borders on insolence. You can be sure that, far from having exceeded the "law of fear" as they imagine, they have not even begun to be religious.

Be an assiduous reader of the Old Testament, especially of the prophets, those champions of the transcendent holiness of God. Their words have extraordinary power to bring forth the virtue of religion (which the Old Testament calls the "fear of God") and make it grow and ripen. You will discover that simultaneously there will develop within you an ever bolder filial trust. Indeed, the more a Christian "fears" God, the more he loves him. And the more he loves him, the more he "fears" him. This only seems to be a paradox.

I want to leave you with an anecdote, which for centuries has taught young Moslems to respect the Name. I am sure you will sense its profoundly religious tone:

"One night, Bichr the barefoot tramp was wandering about in a drunken stupor. He happened to find a piece of paper on the ground, already trampled on by the feet of many passers-by. On it was written: 'In the name of God, the clement, the merciful...'. He picked up the piece of paper and wrapped it in a bit of cloth, attaching to it a tiny parcel of musk, and respectfully placed the little packet in the cleft in an old wall.

"That same night a devout personage of the city had a dream, in which he was commanded to go and tell Bichr: 'Since you have picked up our Name that was lying on the ground, since you cleaned it and perfumed it, we, too, shall honor your name in this world and in the next.' "