



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

While looking for my glasses in Grandpa's office, just the other day, I was forced to study an official communiqué from Beijing, marked, at one corner, 'Very Secret'. Normally, of course, I would not look at Grandpa's communications with his superiors in Beijing, but it was there, right in front of my eyes: I could not help myself. I was forced to look! What is a poor woman to do when faced with a situation such as this? This communiqué, marked on every page, 'Very Secret and Highly Confidential', said that the Interim Government of Iraq had, officially, thanked the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the head Shi'ite of Iraq, for his help in settling the issue of Najaf, where the rebel Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, had formed his al-Mahdi Army, which had been fighting some two thousand US Marines and about one thousand five hundred Iraqi Security Forces. (Those numbers are the official figures, supplied by the Motherland's sources in Baghdad, by the way). On reading this fascinating report, it struck me that religion has been, over the centuries, the reason for many mass killings: Pantheism versus monotheism; Catholicism versus Protestantism; Christianity versus Judaism, etc, etc, etc. History is studded with religious differences, leading to the mass slaughter of innocence abroad. Even in the US, today, one sees religion, playing a very large part in politics. Look at the motto of the US: 'In God, We Trust.' You find it, even written on the paper currency of the country. The Muslims like to exclaim, daily: 'There is but one God and Mohammed, his apostle.' The Jews, still, maintain that this is the year of five thousand, seven hundred and sixty five and, 'Blessed be He, the King of the Universe.' (baruch hashem!) Grandpa believes that Confucianism is the correct path to follow in life: It is his 'religion'. To Grandpa, Confucius is something like a little god, but Confucius is not as big a god as the one for the Jews or for the Christians. For myself, however, I find the teachings of Confucius to be very selfish in their essence (that is the subject of another letter so I shall not dwell on it, today). I find that religion is something akin to a man with a bad leg: He needs something on which to lean if he wants to be fully ambulatory. Religion is a mental crutch, as far as I am concerned, because it affords 'solace' when questions arise to which man, in his ignorance and stupidity, is unable to answer. The Catholics like to say, 'The Mystery of the Trinity', because they do not have all of the answers to certain religious questions. Such dribble! The mind of man is terribly limited in its ability to reason, and, although we have come a long way down the road of learning, in truth, that progress is but less than one step to learning all that there is to learn, understand and correlate. Daily, man is discovering things about this planet and of the other life forms that share this earth with him. He, continually, learns about his physical self and how to cure certain diseases of man, those created by man and those which, due to his ignorance, he inherits from other animals. He learns about other stars and planets in the universe, too. But he has failed – and, probably, will always fail – to learn how to live with his neighbour, that is man and other animal life, without the requirement to become violent when diametrical differences of opinion come to the fore. It is said that war is an extension of diplomacy. Sad, is it not? The Motherland does not endorse any religion, as you know, but I wonder whether or not it will be able to survive, over the long pull, without adopting a religious bent. I have never heard or read of a political system, which did not, eventually, embrace a religious belief. That is sad, too, don't you think? The reason for this is that it is said that religion re-establishes one of my previous contentions: Man needs, and demands, religion on which to lean when answers to questions cannot be found.

It seems to me that man is afraid to admit, openly, that he does not know the answers to the simple questions: How did I get here? Where am I going? What is my purpose in life and to others of my kind? It is very easy to turn to religion for the answers because it is so convenient to embrace dogma – no thinking is required, only follow the teachings of the accepted great religious ones of centuries past, who wrote the Bible, the Q’ran, the Torah, the Zend-Avesta, etc. I am not suggesting that religious teachings are all bad, far from it, but religion should, in my opinion, never be the reason for the death of a single life. One of the people that I know is a Jew, who told me that the teachings of the Jewish faith are not that dissimilar to that of the Muslim faith. Where the difference, really, lies is in certain rites and rituals and the social structure of the two religions. But, at a dinner, one Friday night (which is known as Shabbat to Jews), a Rabbi talked to his dinner guests and, in fact, advocated that the great struggle between the Jews and the Arabs should hot up. This rabbi said, something along the lines, that if an Arab were to hit him once, he shall hit the Arab one hundred times. I am certain that the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has made similar statements to Iraqi Muslims about the non-believers (the infidels) of the United States and of other lands. ‘Come; kiss the ring of His Holiness The Pope!’ ‘Come; kiss the door and doorjamb of the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf!’ ‘Come; make your pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in your life!’ ‘Come to Church every Sunday morning and give thanks to God!’ These are just some of the teachings of today’s great religions of the world.

But, are these teachings very different from the dogma of the Greece mystic, philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras, who gave the world the Pythagorean Theorem: $A^2+B^2=C^2$ (The square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides)? Pythagoras (582—500 B.C.), in about 530 B.C., settled in Crotona, a Greek colony in southern Italy, where he founded a movement with religious, political, and philosophical aims, known as Pythagoreanism. As with the teachings of Jesus Christ, the philosophy of Pythagoras is only known, today, through the teachings of his disciples. The Pythagoreans adhered to certain mysteries, similar in many respects to the Orphic mysteries. Obedience and silence, abstinence from food, simplicity in dress and possessions, and the habit of frequent self-examination were prescribed. The Pythagoreans believed in immortality and in the transmigration of souls. Pythagoras, himself, was said to have claimed that he had been Euphorbus, a warrior in the Trojan War, and that he had been permitted to bring into his earthly life the memory of all of his previous existences. Sound familiar? Jesus, returning to have a chat with his disciples, after being crucified where he is alleged to have uttered his famous last words: ‘Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!’ Lastly, about Pythagoras, he, also, gave the world what he considered to be his seven working rules, if you will. These rules included: Do not eat beans; Do not eat meat; Do not stir the fire with iron; and, Remove the impress of your body when you leave your bed. Some people, today, claim that Pythagoras was insane. I wonder: Was he very different from some of the mystics of today’s world, who teach such nonsense as, if a Muslim captures an American female soldier, he may make her his (sex) slave; and, if a Muslim dies for, or in the service of Allah, he will go to Heaven where he will be surrounded by beautiful virgins, all of whom are for the pleasure of the dead Muslim, who, in Heaven, will, of course, be alive and quite ready to service the virgins.

Man is a strange creature, don’t you think?

Talking about strange creatures, I think I hear Grandpa in the corridor. Talk to you, later.

Love you, all.

The Chief Lady of Hongkong

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