



## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*This will be my last letter from The Crystal Serenity: My journey across the world is ended. I shall be glad to get back to my people; glad to get back to the real world; glad to shop at real shops in Hongkong. You have no idea how many grouches there are on this beautiful cruise ship. In addition, there are a great many passengers, who are not Asian, but who could use a good dose of Asian manners. When, last Sunday, I attended the Sunday Brunch in the Crystal Main Dining Room, I felt like a pig, going to the trough for food. It was not very enjoyable. The other morning, I ran into the on-board RR – Retired Rabbi – and we talked about this and that. Religion, when talking to an RR, is guaranteed to be one of the topics to be discussed. I had made a startling observation: Asian religions are not known to have been, and are still not known to be, jingoistic and/or bellicose in nature. I have never heard of Buddhists, declaring war on Catholics, or Taoists, declaring war on a Buddhists, or advocates of Confucius, picking a fight with advocates of a locally accepted deity. But, compare that with Middle-Eastern religions and Western religions: The Catholics have been fighting with the Protestants in Ireland for the past two hundred years or so; the Thugs of India have been killing the Brahmans of India for many years; and the Sikhs have been fighting all the other religions for centuries. In regard to Sikhs, they all carry daggers as part of their religious uniform, you know. They are ready to make use of their weapons when called upon so to do. And the Puritans have, always, advocated bellicosity when it comes to defending their way of life, which is based on fundamentalistic Christian values. Of course, over the many centuries, everybody has hated the Jews, who have always been known as trouble-makers, rightly or wrongly (remember Masada, the ancient ruins on a mountain top in the desert, about thirty miles south-east of Jerusalem, the scene of the last stand made by the Jewish zealots in their revolt against Roman rule (AD 66-73)). The original thirteen tribes of Israel (or was it twelve tribes?) did not do very well, actually, because there are only about fifteen million Jews in the world today. When you compare that number with the one billion one hundred million Catholics in the world today, one can see which religion has been more successful and prolific. It seems that the Catholics like to have it off more than the Jews. It may be something to do with the diet of the Jews? Anyway, during my talk with the RR, I made a statement that it was very clear that Asian religions are tolerant of other Asian religions and/or Western religions, the Asian religions, generally speaking, consider the Western religions to be divisive, in any event. The RR nodded his assent. And then he added that it boils down to one Western religion, thinking that it is the only true religion: If you are not with us, then, you are against us. You may recall that US President George W Bush used similar terms when he was planning his country's attack on Iraq in March 2003. It was reported that he went to see the heads of certain countries and said that they were either friends of America or they were not. In other words, you are either for me or against me; you are either friend or you are a foe. There is no middle road as far as the US Government is concerned. President George W Bush is a Christian from the deep South of the United States, you must understand. This is not to suggest, of course, that he did not have the best intentions in the world, during his round-the-world roundup of supporters for his military campaign, but it does go to show one how intolerant Americans can become when they have a bee in their bonnets. Getting back to the Jews on The Crystal Serenity, I must tell you that they are all very unbiased, impartial and objective. And they, all, stay together, declining, for the most part, to integrate with non-Jewish passenger. I did not push this matter too strongly with the RR, but I noted that he appreciated my observations. Religion is wonderful and it has been the chief reason for intolerance in the world since it was first invented by the Egyptians. The good thing about religion is that, once a person accepts it, it can mean the end of thinking. One can achieve peace of mind by accepting religion instead of pondering the imponderable. A mental crutch, if you will, is available to all who do not have the capacity to think, deeply.*

*Talking about mental crutches, I am anxious to learn how Grandpa is faring these days, now that he no longer has to suffer the arrogance of Hongkong people: The non-believers.*

*Love you, all, and I shall write you from San Francisco, California, my new home base.*

*Chief Lady*

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