

# OUTSIDE THE CAMP

*"Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endures" (Heb. 13:13).*

The "Camp" is a holy/sacred place. Every religion has this "holy place," where everything is secure, where God dwells, where He has everything under control, because there He exercises His influence completely. The walled church, the institutional church, the fellowship church—all—may be "holy" places, where God's influence stands as guarantor of their goodness and safety. Immigrants clearly hold this view, particularly Roman Catholics who fancy (almost idolize) Italy because the pope is there, and holiness par excellence is thus protected by dogmatic papal infallibility.

Outside there is only evil, reproach, the burden of slaves, sinners, murderers, terrorists. For the professional theologian, clerics, seekers after learning, religious people of every stripe, the "camp," of holy place, is the ground to defend against relativism, secularization and every kind of perversity. Outside the camp there is no salvation, no civilization, no rights or respect for the individual or family. Everything (important) is summed up in the camp and everyone must unite to defend it. The camp involves war, a just war against all evil.

The biblical passage calls us to go outside the camp, out where humanity lives with its attributes of creatureliness and fallibility, where man, who is part of creation, stumbles and slips as he goes along; out where there is dialectic between good and evil on the way towards the city of the future, the "messianic project," the Kingdom of God. We

are called "out," where good and evil find explanation in God, in His Justification and Mercy, in His Word made ever living through His Spirit. We are called to be "outsiders" (reformata reformare) in the "where" of God. Therefore, leaving camp signifies rejecting the religiosity that can even come by reading the Bible solely from within a fixed systematic, designed as it is to conserve the flavor of faith born from serious study of the Bible, instead being trustingly open to the living God joined to us in Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20).

Leaving camp means to follow the where of God which is a wherever. A wherever which is made possible only if there is a starting point: as the cross was for God a negation of natural religion, so worship is the negation of sacredness and holiness centered in a scheme laid down by temples (John 4:13; 21-24). Separation (holiness) lies outside in the wherever of God, who loves those who are unloved, forgives the unforgivable, carries on His shoulders those incapable of going on, and embraces those who are rejected.

Living in an all-inclusive world means also this: learning like a snail the utter poverty of prayer and the reality of worship, in a world of de-sacralized (desecrated) reality and loving it in order to redeem it, because together we are waiting for "the coming of the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21b).

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This prayer letter was written before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Gulf Coast of the United States. Franco and all of the Christian communities here in Italy are praying for this situation, and we feel very near to this great people who are fighting for the Word of God, as well as for justice and peace in the world.