

Fr. Alberto Maggi OSM

"A GOD WHO DOES'T EXIST"

Lecture given by F. Alberto Maggi

Unione degli Atei e degli Agnostici Razionalisti (UAAR)
Ancona, May 12th, 2009

Since the moment Dr. Svarca invited me here to meet you - a fact that caused apprehension to some and worry to some others - I started thinking about the subject I would have decided to discuss: *"A God who doesn't exist"*, and my attention was caught by the three following expressions:

- On April 22nd, Rita Levi Montalcini, great woman and great scientist had her 100 birthday, a long lasting time of intellectual and moral honesty on one side, and physical health, on the other. When asked about her belief in God, she answered: *"I envy those who believe. I don't believe in god; I can't believe in a god who rewards and punishes"*.
- After about one week, Michele Serra, a famous and very clever journalist of Repubblica, in his interesting insert *Amaca*, recalling all religious fundamentalism, Christian and not, believing that swine flu represented a punishment from God, wrote: *"One of the proofs of God's non-existence, at least of a wicked and fussy one, is that some of his followers are not rained thunderbolts upon every time they talk bullshits"*. (Michele Serra, La Repubblica, *L'Amaca*, April 29th, 2009);
- Immediately after, I thought about Fr. Livio, the famous speaker at Radio Maria, who stated, in his daily raving commentary, that the earthquake occurred in Abruzzo, was sent by the Lord in order to make people participate in his suffering (it was Holy Week). By hearing these sort of statements we should ask the Lord to make him and the whole staff of Radio Maria participate in his suffering, too ...

A scientist, an intellectual and a priest, three atheists who spoke about god in different ways, but which god have they spoken about? Who is the one they reject, the one to whom they feel indifferent, the one they don't know, or the one they manipulate?

Which God?

In *Gaudium et Spes*, a document of Second Vatican Council, regarding atheism we find: *"yet believers themselves frequently bear some responsibility for this situation. For, taken as a whole, atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion."* (GS 19).

Therefore, according to Second Vatican Council believers are accountable: if many don't believe, it's mostly because they are introduced to a God who is impossible to

believe and because of an inconsistent behavior of Christians, which doesn't display or even hides truths of faith.

It's therefore obvious that when an individual shows himself to be better than a god he is asked to believe in, he tends to reject this God who maybe exists, but doesn't participate in men's life.

What we want to find out here today is which God are we talking about? Who's he? How's he? And who is "the God who doesn't exist"?

Almighty?

One of God's images that is mostly responsible for atheism and indifference is no doubt the one of *Almighty*, that we intend as saying that God can do everything, a kind of unlimited power.

Individuals ask themselves how it could be possible to reconcile the idea of an almighty God and all evils afflicting mankind; it seems there's a sort of contradiction:

- If God is almighty, it means he is not good, for he remains unmoved by daily life issues. Why doesn't he intervene? Doesn't everything depend upon him? Men can only try and accept evils, illness, suffering and death, as an irrevocable decision of God's will (hoping he is not too cruel), while going on stating a faith in a God who is more feared than loved, maybe exclaiming "Thy will be done!" or, like a resigned Job "*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*" (Jb 1.21).

In order to understand and justify the will of this God a strange formula is used: "God doesn't want evil, but allows it to happen" - No one, skilled enough to avoid it, would ever allow evil he doesn't want to happen!

From God of Pagans to that of Jews

Even today, among believers and not, the image of God recalls much more that of pagan divinities than the one that Jesus of Nazareth called *Father*.

God is a noun of divinities of every religion, including those of pagans, who influenced and unfortunately still influence Christian God's image.

In pagan world the relationship with a divinity was not based on love. A pagan never thought he was loved by his god.

The main characteristic of divinities was power and privileges (immortality, happiness) of which they were jealous.

Immortality was a synonymous with god and *happiness* was reserved to him.

Every human happiness that exceeded limits was understood as a sort of arrogance to be punished. That's why pagans feared their god and every action was made in order to avoid punishment.

Pagan prayer was much more a talismanic formula than a faith expression (as sometimes we recite prayers before going to sleep... you never know!), and their religious system was a whole of rites that had to placate god's anger and drive punishment away.

Isn't it this feeling Christians have towards their God? Main proof is the fact that sometimes we hear them saying: *"things were going so well, I felt something bad was going to happen"*, as saying that God realized they were happy and had to give them a big suffering, the famous *valley of tears* where we all have to stay.

For many believers and not, it's much easy to associate God with suffering than with happiness, with pain than with joy (many theologians would not be able to speak of God anymore without the idea of suffering).

Many say *Each one has his own cross*, and nobody can avoid it. Should one try to get rid of it, a bigger one would occur. Or another common sentence: *Everyone has the cross he can put up with!*

I hear believers saying that they are the *lightning conductors* of the Church: God is mistaken for the fearful Jovel!

The way of Bible

Let's analyze then which is the image of God emerging from Bible.

The process that brought Jews to monotheism - a belief in only one Lord, Yahvè - has been long, difficult and thwarted. In the Book of Exodus the revelation made to Moses on the Sinai, saying there was only one God, was the final point of an evolving spiritual tradition that made its way through the heart of Jews with hesitation, changing of mind and betrayals.

Prophets often report veneration of foreign divinities (Jer 44), even inside the Temple of God (Jer 7).

Through this process towards a belief in only one God, many names and images are to be found in only one Lord. The concept of almightiness comes from this process; JHWH contains two divinities, *Zebaoth*, that is heavenly array, considered as to be animated, and *Shaddaj*, the god of mountains. These two names were thought to be mixed in God, who is called JHWH Zebaoth (the Lord of army) for 279 times, and Shaddaj (maybe *mountain* or *country*) that is used mostly in the Book of Job.

Jerom, who was charged by Pope Damaso (380) to translate the Bible from Hebrew into Latin, being in difficulties before these complicated names, translated both of them with *"Deus Omnipotens"* (Gen 17.1; 1 Sam 4.4), interpreting the Greek translation called LXX which considered the only expression *pantokrator* *"Lord of everything/Universal ruler"*.

We find this term *pantokrator* about 10 times in the New Testament, mostly as quotations from the Old Testament (2 Cor 6.18, as quotation of 2 Sam 7.14) and in various passages of Revelation (9 times).

Not a leaf falls ...

From the image of an almighty God arises the old proverb that says *"Not a leaf falls without God's will"*. This is an insane proverb, which influenced a covert and deviant spirituality that caused a loss of faith for many people, arising from an incorrect translation of a passage of Matthew's Gospel:

"Aren't two sparrows sold for only a penny? But not one of them falls to the ground without your Father knowing it." (Mt 10.29)

It was first translated with *"without your Father's leave"*. But this translation didn't correspond to the Greek text where we read, *"not one of them falls to the ground without God knowing"*; also in Latin we have *"à l'insu"*. This way of interpreting the passage is confirmed in Luke's Gospel where we read *"But God does not forget even one of them"*. (Lk 12.6).

This difference is very significant: it's not a matter of Father's *will* but of Father's *knowledge*. The evangelist wants to urge people to fully trust the Father who knows them better than they know themselves (He even counts every hair on your head!, Mt 10.30), whom nothing escapes, not even what happens to the most meaningless creatures, as sparrows were considered at those times.

Graphically the old culture transformed this concept in the image of a triangle with an eye inside. This image should have infused a sense of trust, meaning that everything is before God's eyes. It became a fearful image, instead: a severe and angry look of a policeman-God who keeps everything under control or a peeping-God who always looks under people's blankets.

And what about the cross?

Strictly connected to God's will there's the call to accept suffering as a cross sent by the Lord.

In Gospels we find this call for five times but always with reference to a free choice made by individuals to follow Jesus.

Jesus' exhortation is addressed to a free will: *"If anyone wants"* (Mt 16.24).

He doesn't want his followers to be resigned, but free, enthusiastic, and to be able to make a free choice. This is a call that has clear consequences; therefore it cannot be a command imposed to everybody, but a proposal for some: *"If anyone wants to follow me, he must say no to himself. He must pick up his cross and follow me"*. (Mt 16.24).

Anyway it is possible to better understand the sense of this call if we differently translate this expression: *"whoever doesn't accept to lose one's reputation..."*. This is the real meaning. Cross was the torture for despised. Jesus doesn't offer titles, privileges, honor; he warns that if one doesn't accept to be considered as a criminal by religious and civil authorities, if one doesn't want to be an undesirable citizen,

following him is quite vain. It is useless because "*They quickly fall away from the faith when trouble or suffering comes because of the message*" (Mk 4.17).

Suffering, pains, losses have to be called with their name, never mistaking them with the cross or attributing them to God.

Cross is not given, it derives from free choice made by an individual who welcomed Jesus and his message, by accepting even the most extreme consequences of slander: "*If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, what can the others who live there expect?*" (Mt 10.25).

God's true face

It's therefore necessary to eliminate all the ancient traditions, superstitions and devotions that changed God's true face, making it unrecognizable. In old religions divinities were mostly images of fears and hopes of man, his power ambition and his frustrations. Divinities were projections of human virtues and weaknesses. Man projects his sense of justice, that he realizes is limited, towards the divinity, building a kid of god who very angrily punishes men' offences, "*But one will not escape God's judgment*", those who cannot accept a God who is able to love the wicked say with great satisfaction.

In order to obtain the favor of this God, man deprives himself of what is necessary and important and offers it; in this way we also add a god who accepts men sacrifices. It's a kind of relationship reflecting the one between master and slave: a slave, the believer, tries to gain his master's goodwill by offering him the best things he owns. In Hebrew world, where several of these aspects of divinities are present, a slow but steady purification of God's true face starts, that are to be found then in the works later called Bible.

In particular the authors of Scriptures will try to adjust images of divinity which are deep-rooted: a god that punishes and requires sacrifices.

The Lord doesn't punish

When we read the Bible we should already know its literary genre. If we draw up a statement of we write a poetry we use Italian in a very different way. The one who reads a sport newspaper he doesn't expect to read business terminology. A sunset can be described either by a meteorologist or a poet.

We must always keep this in mind when we set about our reading of the Bible in order to be able to distinguish what the author is saying and how he's saying it.

What the author is saying is always valid, the way he says it pertains to his culture and to the literary style of his time.

If we don't maintain these two levels separated, the message can be misunderstood or even mystified.

A clear example is represented by the famous episode of Universal Flood.

According to the man of the Bible every atmospheric phenomenon, as arising from heaven, the divine dwelling, was something related to God. Sun and rain, clouds and wind, lightning and thunderbolts, (Ps 144.6), these all were instruments through which God rewarded or punished individuals (Am 4.7).

In the narrative of Flood (Gn 6-9) the author intends to modify the belief that atmospheric phenomena are linked to God's anger, in fact the Lord states that "*The waters of a flood will never destroy all life again. A flood will never destroy the earth again.*" (Gn 9.11)

To confirm his statement the Lord lays his weapons down. The bow he used to throw his arrows and punish men (Hab 3.9-10) is laid down for ever. This bow not only will never be used to punish people, but will be the sign of covenant between God and mankind: "*I have put my rainbow in the clouds. It will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.*" (Gn 6.13)

He doesn't require human sacrifice

In Jerusalem, south of the Temple, there's still the *Valley of Ben Hinnom*. This was the place where people used to sacrifice children to a Phoenician divinity named Molok (Jer 7.31). Sacrificing children to divinity was normal (Jud 11.34-39). Children had no importance or value. As Thalmud says: "*a nail of fathers is more important than the stomach of sons*" (Ber r. 45,8).

The Biblical episode known as the sacrifice of Isaac (Gn 22.1-19) changes the idea of God, teaches that when other divinities require the sacrifice of children, the God of Israel, Yahvè, rejects it, instead. The one who asks Abraham to sacrifice his son is *Elohîm*, common name of a divinity: (lit. translated from Greek) "*Elohîm tested Abraham*" (Gn 22.1) asking him to sacrifice his only son. The one who prevents him from sacrificing Isaac is not *Elohîm*, but *Yahvé*, the God of Israel: "*Do not lay a hand on the boy,*" he said. "*Do not do anything to him*" (Gn 22.12).

The meaning of this narrative is clear: while other divinities (*Elohîm*) require human sacrifices, *Yahvé*, the God of Israel, doesn't accept them.

He doesn't like sacrifices

While better knowing God we can state that not only God doesn't accept human sacrifices, but he doesn't even require any kind of sacrifices: "*I want mercy and not sacrifice, God knowledge more than holocausts*" (Hos 6.6; Mt 9.13; 12.7).

In the Book of Isaiah we find one of the most violent passages against sacrifices and worship:

"Do you think I need any more of your sacrifices?" asks the Lord. "I have more than enough of your burnt offerings. I have more than enough of rams and the fat of your fattest animals. I do not find any pleasure in the blood of your bulls, lambs and goats.

Who asked you to bring all of those animals when you come to worship me? Who asked you and your animals to walk all over my courtyards? Stop bringing offerings that do not mean anything to me! I hate your incense. I can't stand your evil gatherings. I can't stand the way you celebrate your New Moon Feasts, Sabbath days and special services.

I hate your New Moon Feasts and your other appointed feasts. They have become a heavy load to me. I am tired of carrying it. You might spread out your hands toward me when you pray. But I will not look at you. You might even offer many prayers. But I will not listen to them. Your hands are covered with the blood of the people you have murdered". (Is 1.11-15).

JESUS IS DANGEROUS

Time has come for a full and definitive revelation of God's face through his Son Jesus. But who is Jesus?

No doubt he's a very dangerous individual. In order to capture him a great police deployment takes place. His capture will involve *"the group of soldiers, their leader and the Jewish officials"* (Jn 18.12). "Group", better translated with "cohort", indicates a team of 600-1000 soldiers serving the Roman official. The Jewish guards, who served the temple in Jerusalem were about 200 employed by the High Priest. The cohort had to keep order in the town of Jerusalem, Jewish soldiers had to serve the Temple. Between these two groups there was a great rivalry and animosity and people belonging to the cohort were not allowed to the Temple; but they get united facing one only danger. Involving more than 1000 persons to capture one individual - who doesn't offer resistance but gives himself to them - indicates that he is very dangerous.

Who was this dangerous Galilean? What had he committed?

His credentials were very poor. In Judaic world the most ancient paper that describes him provides this definition *"a bastard of an adulterous woman"* (Yeb. M. 4,13), executed *"because he practiced sorcery, seduced and diverted Israel"* (Sanh. B. 43 4a).

The situation isn't even better in Gospels, where it seems that his relatives show no regard for this strange and troublesome relative (*Even Jesus' own brothers did not believe in him* Jn 7.5). According to them he was just a madman to eliminate, for he was a disgrace to his family:

"His family heard about this. So they went to take charge of him. They said, "He is out of his mind." (Mk 3.21)

This negative judgment of his relatives is greatly confirmed by:

- Religious authorities who add a religious feature to his madness, that of demoniac: *"He is controlled by a demon. He has gone crazy! Why should we listen to him?" (Jn 10.20; cf 8.52; Mk 9.30);*

- Teachers of the law, the official theologians of Judaic religion, who state he is a *"very evil thing"* (Mt 9.3) and deserves to be condemned. They think he acts like this because *"He is controlled by Beelzebub! He is driving out demons by the power of the prince of demons."* (Mk 3.22);
- Chief Priests and Pharisees who think *"He is a liar"* (Mt 27.63);
- The crowd who thought that Jesus is one who *"fools the people"* (Jn 7.13);

Jesus is a public danger and has to be eliminated at the soonest, before his message is spread among people (*"If we let him keep on doing this, everyone will believe in him. Then the Romans will come. They will take away our temple and our nation."* Jn 11.48). Jesus also succeeded in disappointing John the Baptist, who had realized he was the awaited Messiah. But, once he noticed that Jesus behaved differently from the executioner Messiah he had announced, he gives him an ultimatum that sounds like a disavowal: *"Are you the one who was supposed to come? Or should we look for someone else?"* (Mt 11.3).

Even some of his same disciples, once learnt the program of this strange Messiah, deserted him: *"From this time on, many of his disciples turned back. They no longer followed him"*. (Jn 6.66). The background is disheartening: the Twelve remained, but one of them *"is a devil!"* (Jn 6.70), and among the remaining *"there are some who do not believe"* (Jn 6.64).

When at last authorities capture him, he will be handed over to Pilate and charged of being a wrongdoer not only by religious officials, but even by his same people: *"If he hadn't, we would not have handed him over to you."* (Jn 18.30).

It's a complete failure for this prophet, who was known as *"a big eater and a drinker"*, one who didn't go round with the right people, being the *Son of God*, but who was said to be a friend of the dregs of society: *"tax collectors and sinners"* (Mt 11.19), *"this mob knows nothing about the law."* (Jn 7.49). These were people supposed to be guilty of the delay of the Kingdom of God.

Why such a grudge was borne to Jesus? What serious damage has he caused as to deserve such a great distrust, hostility and homicidal rage and end up in the greatest loneliness:

- Left by his family,
- Betrayed by his disciples,
- Ridiculed by Romans,
- Mocked by religious authorities,
- Nailed up on the scaffold that was reserved to those *"under God's curse"* (Dt 21.23)?

In order to be able to understand what Jesus did and why we have to better comprehend who was - or better say who was not this carpenter from Nazareth, Galilee.

Jesus has never been a pious Jew or a reformer who came to clean religion or the Temple, as a Messiah was expected to do.

Jesus came to eliminate Temple and religion.

Jesus was not even a prophet sent by God.

Jesus tried and succeeded in doing what any other prophet or religious reformer did. Prophets and reformers are charismatic individuals who are able to widen their experience of the sacred and re-formulate it in new ways. Their expressions will initially remain not understood, or even opposed or persecuted, but later on, in some time, they will be accepted or sometimes imposed.

Jesus went further. He didn't remain in the sphere of sacred; he went out. Christ not only ignored - in his life and teachings - all what was thought to be sacred, but eradicated it in order to be able to show the rottenness of its roots.

According to Jesus religion not only didn't allow a plain unity with God, but was an obstacle to it. The religious institution, instead of facilitating it, used to impede the relationship with Go.

This is Jesus crime. He opened people's eyes, showing them the "naked king" of the imposture called 'religion'.

That's why he was killed.

He was killed by the Jew religious institution with the approval of Romans, because the High Priest and the officials realized that Jesus would have let their world fall into ruin by destroying the sacred roots on which society was based.

Jesus was able to do it for he is a Man-God, a visible display of the invisible God, the only one who was able to change the relationship between men and the Father.

In Gospels Jesus is defined either the *Son of God*, or the *Son of Man*. The two definitions complete each other: Jesus is the Son of God for it is in him God that displays his human condition, and is the Son of Man because Jesus is the man with a divine condition.

As a matter of fact, at the end of the Prologue to his Gospel, John writes: "*No one has ever seen God. But God, the one and only Son, is at the Father's side. He has shown us what God is like*".

By stating that Jesus is the one who has shown us the Father's true face (Jn 1.18), he exhorts the reader to pay attention to the person of Jesus because it's only through him that God's true face reveals.

According to John we shall not base on preconceived ideas of God, then concluding that Jesus is exactly like him. The starting point is not God, but Jesus.

It's not Jesus who is like God, but God is like Jesus.

Every image of God that doesn't correspond or coincide to what Jesus has said and done is incorrect or false and must be wiped away.

Jesus subordinates the knowledge of the Father to that of himself: *"If you really knew me, you would know my Father also. From now on, you do know him. And you have seen him."* (Jn 14.7)

Subordinating the knowledge of the Father to his, Jesus makes us understand that this dynamic and continuous knowledge takes to a process of life fullness. The more is our adherence to Jesus is real and authentic, the great opportunity we have to know the Father.

But Philip, one of disciples, doesn't understand Jesus words and goes on separating Jesus from the Father:

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father. That will be enough for us."

Jesus answered, "Don't you know me, Philip? I have been among you such a long time! Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. So how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (Jn 14.8-9).

Religious tradition about God can condition individuals to such an extent as to prevent them from experiencing the Father. Philip, who spent much time with Jesus, hasn't understood yet his true identity. He didn't comprehend that Jesus is Father's revelation.

Jesus is the only way to know God (Jn 1.18): Father is exactly like Jesus.

Jesus marks the end of a God to be looked for

The one who is searching for God maybe looks for a sort of imaginary divinity and never gets to the end of his path.

With Jesus God is not to be searched, but just to be welcome.

Searching is as abstract and far away as the muddled ideas of God we have; welcoming is something immediate, instead.

By stating that no one has ever seen God, the evangelist contradicts what Scriptures used to say. In Bible we read that many characters assert they saw God: Moses with Aaron, Nabad, Abihu and the 70 elders of Israel, at the end of covenant on Mount Sinai, *"they saw the God of Israel ... and they ate and drank"* (Ex 24.10-11; 33.11; Nb 12.6-8; Dt 34.10).

Through the statement *No one has ever seen God*, the evangelist relativizes the importance of these other statements in Scriptures. So all other descriptions are partial, limited or even false.

The evangelist is excluding Moses too. He states: No, Moses didn't see God, therefore the Law he handed down to us cannot represent the fullness of God's will.

As a consequence Law not only doesn't favor a true knowledge of God, but even represents an obstacle that hampers it.

In his Prologue the evangelist writes that *"Moses gave us the law. Jesus Christ has given us grace and truth"* (Jn 1.17).

Law became inadequate to explain the relationship between man and God and is replaced by a continuous communication of *grace and truth*, the loyal love through which the Father wishes to establish his relationship with men.

In order to express such a deep change in this relationship, a new kind of covenant was needed to replace the old one.

While Moses, "*servant of God*" (Rev 15.3), proposed to Israel a relationship with Yahvé like the one between servants and Lord ("*I'm the Lord your God, worship me*", Ex 23.25), Jesus, "*the son of God*" (Mk 1.1), begins a new relationship between sons and their Father based on an incessant love giving: "*Just as the Father has loved me, I have loved you.*" (Jn 15.9; 14.21-23).

Human condition towards God is not the one of a servant and his Lord, but that of a son and his Father who lets him reach the divine condition. As Jesus is not a servant of God, but the "*son of God*" (2 Jn 1.3), so will be for all those who adhere to him and won't be his servants (Jn 15.15), but brothers - since they're sons of the same father - who are called with him and like him to cooperate to God's plan for mankind (Mt 28.10).

Whereas the ancient covenant suggested a relationship with God to be based on obedience to his Law, in the new one the relationship between the son and his Father is based on resemblance to his love (Mt 5.48; Lk 6.35).

It's symptomatic that obedience, an instrument used by all religions to subject faithful to an imposed doctrine, never appears in Jesus message. He never urges someone either to obey God or himself, nor another creature.

God revealed by Jesus can be defined only through these words of the New Testament: "*God is love*" (1 Jn 4.8-16).

God is love and love can only be offered, otherwise it becomes violence.

God is love and love cannot be expressed through laws or doctrines, but through deeds which are able to convey it.

That's why Jesus' acts were always urged by the love of the Father and never by obedience to Laws.

Each time he experienced a clash between obedience to God's law and man's welfare, Jesus never wavered and chose the latter: loving man one can be sure he's loving God, too (1 Jn 4.7-16); by honoring man, God is honored too. Usually in order to honor God and his Law one dishonors or lets man suffer.

Law in Gospels is always used by religious authorities in order to rule and put populations down, invoking the law in defence of their own interests, never for people's sake.

The true face of a God-Love will be disclosed by Jesus by defining him *Father* (Mt 6.9). While *god* is the common name used by all religions, *Father* is something particular only pertaining to Christianity.

One kind of God that is not there anymore ...

Whereas one is able to know the Father only by focusing on Jesus teachings, the image of God that comes out is very different from the one of other religions' divinities.

The kind of God who is revealed by Jesus doesn't reward the good and punish the wicked, but reaches all of us with his love, without exception, *"for he is kind to people who are evil and are not thankful"*. (Lk 635)

God doesn't love men because of their goodness, but only because he is love.

Being loved by God doesn't depend upon behavior or responses of man, but only upon Lord's goodwill; his love is addressed to everybody, no one shall feel excluded. Peter will state *"God has shown me that I should not say anyone is not pure and 'clean.'"* (Ac 10.28)

Glory *"to God in the highest heaven"* is accomplished on earth through *"peace and goodwill given to all people"* (Lk 2.14).

It has to be noticed that in the past the relationship between God and men was seen as based on meritocracy and therefore that verse of Luke's Gospel was translated with *"May peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!"*.

Peace was given only to those who deserved it. This is false! *Peace*, a word that indicates all what makes man happy, is not reserved to those he is pleased with. It is addressed to everybody along with his love.

Jesus brings a new concept: God's love for man hasn't to be deserved. Father's love doesn't depend upon his merits, but upon his needs. The more he is needy, the more the Father is irresistibly absorbed in displaying his love to him (Lk 18.9-14).

Welcoming this new image of the Father we carry out many special changes: from *religion* to *faith*, from *obedience* to *resemblance*, from *merit* to *gift*, from *reward* to *present*.

Jesus practiced what he proclaimed, especially towards sinners, causing great discontent among pious persons and guardians of tradition.

Conformists protest because they think that by eliminating a rewarding and punishing God "what will happen in the end"?

If sinners stop fearing punishments and are not frightened by God's threats anymore ... there's no religion anymore!

Thanks Jesus religion ended and faith began: what man has to do in order to get God's love is not important anymore, man's response to a Fatherly love is.

The worship of God

The news about God introduced by Jesus have been the cause of his death: Jesus, *"God with us"* (Mt 1.23), demonstrated though teaching and practicing, that the Father displays his love by serving men.

The image of God who serves men had the explosive effect of eradicating the concept of religion, the one based on service of men to God; therefore Jesus got the hatred of every one, starting from religious authorities who based their power and status on religion, up to people who practiced religion feeling protected by it.

The new face of God that Jesus has brought was completely unknown to religious landscape of that time and represents the final changeover from religion to faith: no more men serving God, but God serving men. This God *"did not come to be served. Instead he came to serve others"* (Mk 10.45; Mt 20.28). Each religion used to teach and still teaches that men have to serve their God (Dt 13.5), a very demanding one, who steals goods from them (*"Bring the best of the first share of your crops to my house. I am the Lord your God"*. Ex 23.19), who steals time (Ex 20.8-11) and energies (Dt 6.5), by asking a service to be carried out mainly through worship.

The Father that Jesus introduced is not the one who steals, but gives, he doesn't impoverish man but enriches him.

The image of a God serving men is very important to Jesus and in Last Supper, after having given himself as vital bread for others (bread and wine), he states: *"I am among you as one who serves"* (Lk 22.27). Service is something that totally reveals Jesus identity and keeps him present and recognizable once risen *"They told how they had recognized Jesus when he broke the bread"* (Lk 24.35; Jn 21.9-14).

The God that Jesus introduced to his disciples doesn't behave like a monarch, but as a servant. Upsetting tradition and logic Jesus will compare God to a master who returns late at night and, having found his servants ready upon his arrival *"The master will then dress himself so he can serve them"* (Lk 12.37). God doesn't need men to serve him; he wants them to serve others with him and like him.

The Father of Jesus is the one who puts all his loving power at men' disposal in order to raise them to his same level. That's why in Last Supper Jesus, *"the Lord"*, carries out the job of a servant in order to let servants feel masters (Jn 13.1-17).

Welcoming signs as washing feet to a guest was something performed by inferiors to superiors: non-Jew slave to his master, woman to her husband, sons to their father (1 Sam 25.41) and disciples to their master.

By washing disciples' feet Jesus, Man-God, shows that true greatness doesn't lie in ruling, but in serving others. Jesus, by placing himself at last place, not only doesn't lose his dignity, but reveals the true one, the divine one: *"I was with the first of them. And I will be with the last of them."* (Is 41.4). Jesus is not *lowering* himself, he's *raising* others.

Man shows his dignity by voluntarily deciding to serve others, not being served; the God of Jesus doesn't absorb men' energies, he transmits his same to them. He just needs to be welcome in order to merge with man and expanding his existence towards a dimension that won't be interrupted even by death.

When an individual welcomes, without reservations, the continuous creative work of the Father, feels new vital energies arising that he will be able to turn into concrete actions for others and will get him on the same wavelength of the Lord, becoming only

one thing with him (*"I will be in them, just as you are in me. I want them to be brought together perfectly as one"*, Jn 17.22).

The age of temples and sanctuaries is ended. The only sanctuary where God's love is revealed is man. While in the ancient sanctuary men were allowed only on certain conditions - and many were considered unclean so couldn't enter the temple - Jesus community doesn't wait for men to approach but will reach especially those who feel excluded or rejected by God, in order to show them the unconditional love of the Father.

This is the God of Jesus, all other images pertain to *"a God who doesn't exist"*.