

## *The Texts of the Convivium*

### **OFFENCE, REPARATION, FORGIVENESS**

When I was a boy I went to the zoo one day and offered a peanut to a monkey. He snatched it and brought it up to his mouth; and, immediately after he had swallowed it, without even thanking me he stretched out his hand to receive another. So I gave him another and another until I suddenly thought of playing a trick on him: I made a hole in the skin to extract the peanut, then gave him the empty skin.

You can imagine the anger of the quadruped who immediately lunged towards me. Luckily for me the cage prevented him reaching me but he turned round and then went back to his starting position to then take a run-up and smash himself against the cage that was protecting me from any injury. He repeated this four or five times until I decided to abandon the action, where a group of curious by-passers had already gathered to see what was going on.

It was a terrible episode. I bitterly regretted my improvident initiative, which, nevertheless, led me to two observations: first, I realised how stupid I had been; second, I saw that the monkey was so like man that he had the same ability to be offended.

Well I have certainly seen dogs defending the bone held firmly between their teeth; and other animals who defended their young, or food, or territory. But I have never seen any animal become offended, except for that monkey. I never wished to repeat that experiment, but I am nevertheless convinced that I can herewith make a generalisation.

That monkey had a sense of her own dignity, which was offended by me. He was a monkey to be respected. He accepted a gift, but wouldn't tolerate being made fun of.

At this point I thought of making a comparison between man, who the evolutionary theory defines as being the closest cousin to the monkey.

Also and above all man treasures his own honour. Honour, in what it consists of and how it is defended is a subject dealt with in a small book (Manuale Hoepli, 1923). The title is *Codice cavalleresco italiano*, (Italian chivalry code) the author is colonel Jacopo Gelli, a man of great experience in disputes, duels, juries and courts of honour. He can legitimately congratulate himself on having composed thousands of disputes rerouting them to the afore mentioned juries and courts of honour, as well as for the fact that the number of deaths has considerably decreased on the field.

More modestly also my father, once a cavalry officer, who can congratulate himself on having made peace between various over touchy and quarrelsome friends of his. This book, which I jealously keep to myself, is full of pencil marks made in different parts.

Honour can be offended and, according to Gelli, there are four degrees of offences:

- 1) *The simple offence*, if directed against the *prestige* of the person insulted, and the offender, having injured in offence the *worthy man*, has to answer for an *affront*;
- 2) *A serious offence*, if the *honourableness* of the *gentleman* has been attacked, and he who has been made guilty has to answer for an *insult*;

- 3) *Extremely serious offence*, if directed against the *honour* of the *man of honour*, and he who is made guilty has to answer for an *outrage*;
- 4) *Offence of high degree*, atrocious, when it touches the *family*; and he who offends the father of the family answers for a *dishonour*.

The offence could demand a *satisfaction* (apology, denial of having offended, retraction) and, in more serious cases and ones less remediable, a *reparation*.

We touch here a more delicate point. Gelli reveals that, in his days, the duel was considered “a means of reparation for personal offences”. And he adds that this happens “wrongly”. I’d say: it concerns a widespread prejudice, which fits into an archaic mentality that has to be contested.

In a typically medieval atmosphere, in a society of continual war with everyone against everyone, this anxiety for reparation of offences received ends up by being attributed to the Divinity itself.

It is God the Father Himself, the infinite Being, who, because of the original sin of Adam and Eve is offended, and infinitely... according to Him. Therefore the infinite offence caused to God the Father demands an infinite reparation, that can only come to Him by the sacrifice of another infinite Being, God the Son.

In his own turn the Son can be offended for having been neglected by his own ungrateful devotees, and the reparation consists of voluntary martyrdom of the chosen souls.

Offence demands reparation. The leitmotiv is always: “You have offended me and I will make you pay for this offence by inflicting physical sufferance upon you, like that which could come from wounds if not mortal ones”.

Here we are talking about an “eye for eye and tooth for tooth”. we are talking about a throwing on the scales an evil that will rebalance the evil received by another. We are talking about vendetta, a “feud”.

One speaks improperly of “reparation”. There is no reparation of anything at all here: a fault is added to another fault.

Gelli is an idealist who does his best so that the quarrels and disputes can be made up and so that harmony and good triumph. But the widespread mentality from which he distances himself, adds violence to violence, pain to pain, evil to evil.

It’s a decidedly anti-Christian mentality, despite the fact it adorns itself with traditional religious symbols. Any classification and accounting of offences is revolting to the Christian man, who aims at forgetting them, solicitous as he is of the good of the man himself who did him evil or wrong.

Digging up wrongs suffered certainly doesn’t improve our spiritual life, on the contrary, it lowers the tone. Here, as one rightly says, forgiveness is the best vendetta: from he who has suffered evil and he who has committed it, emerge purified parameters.

One talks a lot of God the Judge. But is not the more consonant attitude to a Divinity who loves without limits that expressed by Jesus on the cross “Forgive them, Father, for they do not know what they do”?

Going back to the concepts of Chivalry, the true gentleman is a man of gentle and kind soul. And true honour lies in honesty, in doing good. Here the spirit of Christianity converges well with the most profound intentionality of the Gelli Code.