

THOU SHALT NOT TORTURE!

What a strange era is this one of ours that finds itself with the responsibility of drafting a new commandment that God didn't even imagine, when He gave the sacred tablets to Moses! Thou shalt not torture: it is that today we torture and widely: it is, that we need to wake up our consciences...little tortured by the reality of torture.

Torture is spreading throughout the world. In certain countries, it is institutionalized; it becomes even a way to govern, camouflaged beneath psychiatric treatments or slogans of national security. We invent refined systems to torture "cleanly", without leaving a trace. We export sophisticated torture equipment as much as we do household appliances. With this rationalizing of torture, the Inquisition, says Pierre Emmanuel, was nothing but a nursery tale.

Our mind becomes used to looking at the most monstrous things. At first we refuse to believe it, then we react swiftly or slowly. And soon, we slide down a slippery slope, made of all our neglects, of all in which we are complicit. The slightest sign by which we look down on our a fellow human can, from slight to slight, make us into heartless and even smiling executioners

What a strange era, this one of ours, which can brag about torture, being forbidden by constitutions and by universal declarations and which is dumbfounded to learn that it is proliferating under the most subtle pseudo-justifications! Pope Paul VI has spoken of it as a dangerous "epidemic". "Torture," he says, "is to be absolutely condemned, it is never permissible, not even under the pretext of exercising justice or of defending public order..." We must radicalize the fight against torture, not accepting half measures and making a principle of denouncing torture whatever the motive for it may be wherever it is practiced.

A magnificent mission calls Christians to the forefront of the struggle for the abolition of torture with the same momentum as other generations fought slavery. Let us beware; this evil is like the seven-headed Hydra. It resurfaces quickly, everywhere and in ourselves.

Courage et perseverance.

Cardinal Roger Etchegary « I Move Forward like a Donkey”, Fayard Editions 1984)