

Pierre Claverie on “The Colonial Bubble”

from

A Life Poured Out: Pierre Claverie of Algeria

by Jean-Jacques Perennes

The emergence of the Other, the recognition of the Other, the adjustment to the other became an obsession with me, it is very likely what lies at the origin of my religious vocation. (p. 17)

The majority of Europeans were not colonists: they lived in a city where the only Algerians they knew were the cleaning woman, the *fatma*, who was also the children’s nanny. Some were racists, but all believed in a French Algeria. For them to see clearly there had to be some spark to start the process. Coignet.....Before even speaking about “colonialism” he first helped the students to recognize the poverty of the Muslims who surrounded them.” (p. 24)

All that I had lived and learned, in both schools and churches, what I believed to be just and good, was called into question by the emergence of Algerian nationalism... How could I have lived in and ignorance of this world, which demanded recognition of its identity and dignity? In churches, how could I so often have heard the word of Christ about loving the Other like myself, like him, and never have

met that Other who was popping out like a bogeyman in our little universe?

In a parallel, a painful tortuous spiritual path led me to the religious life...My thirst for communication, born from the failure of a colonial society and a colonial church, found its first relief in a community of brothers that wasthey helped me to cross over the thresholds of my ignorance and fears. Then, I had to understand how we could have lived, and lived as Christians, without ever asking ourselves the question of the other.” (p. 36)

I believe that we have been living in an illusion for a long time. Living in our enclosed world, we are not more objective than the Communists. I admit that I discovered the 1945 Setif revolt in a book. This warning shot, far from making us reflect, incited us to pay even more attention to defending our rights, and thus gave us the opportunity to ignore quite a few of our obligations. Note that I do not blame: I declare that we gave in to the natural inclination and that not for a single moment did we try to see the problem from the opponents point of view....Thousands of facts with which I have been bombarded for three years are there to show CLEARLY that we have done everything possible to minimize the claims against us and to increase our power... (pgs. 45-46)

This letter marks an important turning point in Claverie’s developing consciousness....One recognizes here a strong ability to analyze, a taste for truth, a real courage. (p. 46)

Let us not forget the Catholicism isn’t a religion of peace and security in the worldly sense: the peace of compromise and security at any cost.... No. It is a sword and often a scandal,

as St. Paul Says. It is for this reason that the church honors martyrs: it's because they have understood that the act of bearing witness, if it is truthful, cannot but come in conflict with the world and lead to death. Perhaps, in Algeria, it will be necessary for Christianity to be born again through a few.....(letter of 5/8/1961) (p. 47)

But I believe that beyond the different forms of expression, and especially in spite of the wall that these seven years of distrust have erected, one can often reunite with people through their essential goodness. This does not lessen the great size of the barriers, but simply changes the way of approaching them (p. 54)

With you, in learning Arabic, I above all learned to speak and to understand the language of the heart, the tongue of fraternal friendship where different races and religions can speak with one another.....Because I believe that this friendship comes from God and leads to God. (p. 69)