

“We will reap contempt”

Thoughts by Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.



“The Christian cross can be seen on church towers from Portugal to Finland, from Ireland to Moscow. It is the identity symbol of Europe. Taking down the cross, limiting it to the private sphere or hiding it equals a capitulation and a cultural and religious self-denial. This way we will not reap respect but contempt of those of other faiths.

Could you imagine a country with a majority of Muslims which would give up the symbol of the half-moon? Or would in such countries Christians complaining that the call of the Muezzin disturbs their sleep have any prospect of success? Or would Muslims renounce the building of a mosque only because some citizens or groups of citizens take offence at it?

At present we hold a wrong, not to say a weak and cowardly understanding of tolerance. Tolerance means to respect and esteem the convictions of other, but not to renounce one’s own conviction.

Of course, looking at Jesus on the cross can be alienating, frightening and even a sight that stirs up. But is not our world very often frightening and stirring up? Do not our children have this experience every day when watching – not even brutal killer games – but simply the evening news? In the midst of a world full of injustice and violence this cross of the Crucified should be a sign of reconciliation and of love which extends into the darkest situations.

I have the impression that in this regard some alleged critical Christians are surpassed by Hindus and Muslims in their respect to Jesus. Even though Muslims don’t believe in the divine sonship of Jesus, they do have deepest respect for him as a prophet. The Koran also knows a Christmas story (including the virgin birth). Why then should Christian kindergartens stop telling the Nativity story to the children or to illustrate it by a manger scene? This kind of tolerance takes itself ad absurdum at the end.

Very different to this is it to pray with Muslims or other Non-Christians. This is not possible. The mixing of different religions is not a expression of respect but of disrespect of the other. It denies not only one’s own faith but it induces the other as well to deny his. We should not do this neither to us nor to the other. The answer to the pluralistic situation is not a mouse-grey levelling down but that we learn to respect each other in our otherness.”

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