

17. *I take you in my care*

You are quite right to be indignant at a certain way of speaking about God, which attributes to him purely human thoughts, sentiments, and modes of behavior. It is a serious error. It profanes the divine mystery, and in the last analysis lays the foundation for atheism. There are many believers all around us who surrender to it. It is nothing new. Voltaire was already denouncing it in a famous saying I cite to you from memory: "God made man in his own image, and man certainly returned the compliment."

On the other hand, you are wrong to relegate God to the mists of the unknowable. As if we had to be resigned to know nothing about him!

It is true that our *"God is hidden"* (Is 45:15). It is true that he altogether different from us. He himself has declared it through the prophet Hosea: *"I am God and not man"* (Ho 11:9).

God is not the image of man. Let us stoutly maintain it. But man is in the image of God. And that's why the qualities of man, especially his qualities of heart, give us an insight into the perfections of God's love for us.

The Bible vigorously and continuously affirms the transcendence of the Most High. It denies that the human intellect has the power to know the Creator the way one knows a creature. However, it does not hesitate to speak to us of God, by first speaking to us about creatures.

The Bible invites us to find in God the affection of a father *"who raises an infant to his cheeks"* (Ho 11:4); the tenderness of a mother: *"Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you"* (Is 49:15); and the faithfulness of a husband: *"The Lord calls you back, like a wife...married in youth and then cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you,...but with enduring love I take pity on you"* (Is 54:6-8).

It is a deeply religious attitude to discern, in God, the wellspring of the most delicate sentiments, the tenderest and most vehement feelings of the human heart.

In the last few days, I thought of you as I read a passage of Anouilh, which I am copying for you. In it, you will see the reaction of a husband in the presence of his young wife, who has fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion.

"It sufficed for you to stop talking, to let your head slip onto my shoulder, and it was all over.....The others continued to laugh and talk around me, but I had just bid them farewell. Young Jason was dead. I was your father and mother; I was the one who held the head of the sleeping Medea resting on him. What was your little woman's brain dreaming about, while I was thus taking you in my care? I carried you to our bed....I just looked at you as you slept. The night was calm, we had long since outstripped your father's pursuers. My armed companions kept watch around us, and yet I did not dare close my eyes. I defended you, Medea—indeed against nothing at all—that whole night."

Try to understand—and this will be a wonderful consolation for you—that your God is no less “human” in your regard, when you happen to fall asleep during mental prayer in the evening at the end of a hard day’s work. I know that you will not interpret this text as an invitation to laxity, but as a call to trust in the One who loves you more tenderly than a man cherishes his beloved, and who takes care of you with infinite solicitude.