
The Decalogue that only appears to divide

A few days ago the news broke that the Governor of Louisiana, Jeff Landry, had signed into law a bill requiring a sign to be displayed in every classroom at every grade level with the Ten Commandments, which he called 'the founding documents of our state and national government', prominently and clearly printed. There was, of course, an immediate chorus of outrage from those who felt that such a move would discriminate against people of other faiths or none at all. In fact, the oppositional reaction is exactly what the governor was hoping for, and it will give him a chance to take such a law all the way to the Supreme Court, where he can hope for a favourable reception due to the presence of several conservative judges. **Without going into the substance of the initiative, it must be said that those who argue against such a posting because they see it as discriminating against other faiths or atheists have really missed the mark this time. Who should be offended by the Ten Commandments? The Jews, who received them from God? Muslims, who identify themselves as the People of the Book? The Buddhists, who have ten precepts that are virtually identical to the Ten Commandments?** And as for the self-proclaimed atheists, is it not the case that their own consciences, when properly formed, are guided by a moral attitude which is, in fact, that indicated by the Commandments? Is there a self-proclaimed atheist who "feels" that lying is legitimate, stealing is a right, and cheating on one's wife is a nice possibility? Not at all, and the overwhelming evidence is that those who do these things always try to justify them with a thousand rationalisations. *"Everyone has had the experience of listening to two people argue. The effect is sometimes a bit comical, sometimes just unpleasant; but apart from the effect, I think there is a lot to be learned from listening to what these people say. They say things like: 'Would you like someone to do the same to you?'; 'This is my place, I was here first'; 'Leave him alone, he's not hurting you'; 'Why should you go in front of me?'; 'Give me a slice of your orange, I gave you a slice of mine'; 'Come on, you promised'... People - educated and uneducated, children and adults - say these things every day. What interests me about these phrases is that those who use them are not just saying that they don't like the other person's behaviour, but they are invoking certain norms of behaviour which they assume the other person is also aware of. And it is very rare for the other person to reply 'to hell with your norms'. He almost always tries to show that what he has done is not really against the norms, or if it is, it is for a particular reason. He will argue that in this particular case there is a good reason why the person who took the seat first should not keep it; or that the situation was quite different when he was given the orange wedge; or that an unforeseen event exempts him from keeping his promise"* (C.S. Lewis, "Christianity as it is"). Atheist ideology invokes the freedom of the people in order to prohibit the display of the Ten Commandments, which is the very content of the incipit of the Decalogue: "God spoke all these words: 'I am the Lord, your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall not have the gods of others in My presence. You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness which is in the heavens above, which is on the earth below, or which is in the water beneath the earth. You shall neither prostrate yourself before them nor worship them'" (Ex. 20, 1-5a) **That atheists regard the God of Moses as just another fetish matters little: when they are outraged by the display of a particular religious symbol, they are endorsing God's injunction to Israel in the First Commandment not to bow down to the religion of others.** Then again, aggressive and ideological atheism, which seeks not plurality but the extinction of the religious phenomenon, must accept that religion is important to people. The argumentative weakness of today's practical atheism, which would like to erase everything on the pretext that no one should be offended, lies in the belief that what is irrelevant to a minority of affluent, intellectually sophisticated, complex-ridden white people is also irrelevant to the vast majority of people, when phenomena such as the (self-funded) series "The Chosen", [which we discussed some time ago](#), blatantly demonstrate the opposite. People care about "religion", they talk about it, they discuss it, sometimes they argue about it, but it certainly is present in many people's lives, so it would be strange if institutions did not address it. Whatever the actual

intentions of the Louisiana government, the law about the Law (of the Decalogue) is undoubtedly a useful provocation, both for the intellectual and the man in the street, to reflect on the basis of one's own moral action, hopefully finding in it what unites the individual with the rest of humanity, as was indeed the intention of the Author of both humanity and the Decalogue.

Alessandro Di Medio