

The Island of Nis

By Jim Elliff



James, the youth: Must Christians always be narrow?

The wiser Mr. Brockton: Christians are both pluralists and exclusivists simultaneously.

James: Do you mean that Christians accept other religions and faiths?

Mr. Brockton: We permit them to be wrong. My story will explain.

The island of Nis was considered a religion-free zone, and most of the younger inhabitants had not even as much as heard of formal religion. To be sure, some primitive ancestors had ventured that way in earlier days, and some rituals could be recalled from the collective memory bank of the oldest inhabitants. But worship was non-existent at the time and certainly not a concern.

Three religionists appeared on the island by boat and all three had intentions to change the attitude of the islanders about religion. The first missionary was a Mr. Universick. He had been sent by a Christian denomination to inform the natives of their inherent rights given by the Creator. “Your non-religious state is no impediment to your accessing of heaven,” he said. “The loving God will send you all there upon death, regardless of religion or no religion. All brands are welcome since they all teach you something important about the All-Loving One. However, to find out something of the nature of God now can be beneficial for this life in some remarkable ways, and I’m here to tell all God’s children about these benefits.”

After Mr. Universick’s teaching, the natives became more and more religious. But various factions grew up and divided the group. There were brands of the Christian type and other groups who did not acknowledge Christ at all. This did not ultimately concern the missionary, since all were profiting in some way and all would eventually get to heaven anyway. He was satisfied that this new religious activity was promoting the general good by its broad and magnanimous view of spirituality.

Mr. Intolerato came next. He was a missionary with strong views of the correct

nature of things. He believed in Christ and set about to bring everybody to his views. He insisted that there was only one way to God. Upon winning over some of the political leaders of the island, he proceeded to terminate the worship of false gods and even errant Christian beliefs. Eventually his policy won sway over many on the island, so much so that all religious groups other than his were banned by the government. In fact, every baby was christened into the true religion upon birth. Everybody was to conform and there was to be no exception at least in all the externalities. It was then called a Christian society.

When the third missionary, Mr. Evangel, arrived he had yet another concept to promote. Although he identified with Intolerato as to the absolute necessity of Christ alone to take a man to heaven, he valued, along with the earlier missionary Universick, a charity toward allowing a broad range of religious beliefs to permeate the society. He was both a pluralist and exclusivist. This arrangement had the distinct advantage of producing more sincere Christians while not compromising the narrowness that is inherent in the gospel of Christ. It also made Intolerato and Universick angry.

James: But if Mr. Intolerato was right about Christ being the only way to God, and a whole nation coming to Christ is better than only a few coming to Christ, then should not Mr. Evangel comply with his better wisdom?

Mr. Brockton: Mr. Intolerato misunderstands the nature of faith.

James: Do you mean that he misunderstands the voluntary nature of faith?

Mr. Brockton: You have correctly discerned the error. Faith cannot be dictated or assumed in the populace. Only a faith that comes from the affection of the individual is saving. Its necessity must be born of private compulsion only, that kind of compulsion created in the individual by God.

James: Then we should promote pluralism in religion without compromising our exclusivity.

Mr. Brockton: Stated like a wise man. We give them the right to be wrong so that we might have liberty to be right. Nis was called a Christian society, but absolute conformity failed to the degree it succeeded. Imposition of Christian tradition can only touch the body and not the soul.