**The New Parable of The Fisherman**

**(adapted for the IOO website)**

I’ve imagined the stances people take on the question of God as being like a parable of a fisherman that ventures with his net upon a boundless sea seeking to catch a small, slippery fish that no one has ever proven to exist, much less proven to have caught.

Atheists say they’re certain the fish is a myth, for though many have claimed to catch glimpses of it, it is certainly silly, irrational ignorance to believe in something that hasn’t been proven to exist.

Agnostics see the holes in the net the fisherman is casting and proclaim that, regardless of whether or not the fish exists, the fisherman cannot catch it, for even if it swims into the fisherman’s net he will not pull it aboard, as such a small, slippery fish will surely slip through the holes of the net.

The spiritual seeker sees the net being cast into the sea and smiles, knowing, or at least sensing in his or her heart, that the myth has always been misguided, as what the fishermen say they’re fishing for can never be caught in such a manner; can never be corralled, controlled or claimed.

For what is really being fished for is not this one small, slippery fish, as even if one resembling it is caught people will doubt that it’s the fish and, regardless, another even more elusive fish will be rumored to exist, and another, and another. For it is the catching that man will forever covet, and in his narrow quest to glorify his ego man forgets this sea is boundless, and that he can, therefore, never cast a net so wide as to catch “fish” in the general sense, for this must be the egotistic endgame; the ego’s ultimate quest.

And though in their hearts they know they’re wrong, only religious people possess the particularly irrational, offensive belief that there was only one fisherman that has ever cast the only net capable of catching the one most glorious of fish, that it was caught long ago, that it was the most beautiful and magnificent fish that will ever swim in the sea, and that the fisherman who consumed it was granted everlasting life, and grants the same to anyone having faith in his fish story. All the while the religious person is ignorant of the fact that this man didn’t even write that story, and that the fish certainly didn’t dictate it to him.

They aren’t aware that the fish story they read contains only occasional smatterings of this particular fisherman’s words and experiences, and that it was mostly written by the long-dead predecessors of those that sell the boats and the nets to profit off of the gullible and greedy fishermen, most of whom continually buy more and bigger boats and nets and set out upon the boundless sea with the ambition that they’ll someday be able to say that they caught the biggest, the best or the most fish.

They aren’t aware that this fisherman that they so revere was, in contrast to his portrayal in the accepted fish story, actually quite content to eat any fish he was fortunate enough to catch, seeing that most fisherman are so consumed by the need to catch fish that they miss the experience of actually being on the sea; of being borne by its currents and carried across its cresting waves; that they miss the fact that no catching of fish, no matter how many, how large or how otherwise magnificent, can ever satiate the one that lives not for the experience of fishing, but for the catching and consuming, regardless of how large their bellies grow and how many others remain hungry.

He knew that what was being fished for was already and forever in everything and everyone, including every one of the fish, and all those they may nourish. He knew that loving everyone, including by feeding the hungry, was the only way to truly know and honor what was being fished for, offering more bountiful joy than any pride or prize that may be granted by any fishing trophy.

This is the truth of the spiritual fisherman, his life and lessons lost at sea to anyone other than those that see and feel the sea as he did, absorbing its truths and casting overboard false fish tales.