

In God's Hands
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The following are extracts or paraphrases from chapter 3: The biased God

Our attitude

- a) We have been conditioned to accept that we are accepted because we deserve it, because we have earned it.
- b) We have almost been programmed to expect reward for effort ... (there are) spheres where the conventional effort / reward paradigm is appropriate. But in the sphere of our relationship with God, it is a totally inappropriate way of approaching things.
- c) Consider different orders:
 - i) I respect the law, therefore ii) I am a good person, therefore iii) I am favoured by God
 - OR
 - i) God favoured me (redeemed me), therefore ii) I respect the law, because iii) I want to be a good person
- d) Whenever (the people) fell into the trap of thinking that they owed their favoured lot to their own righteousness and their own adherence to the law – that somehow they had earned their redemption, that it was due to their efforts – it was necessary for them to be reminded of the prologue to the Decalogue, which is categorical: “I am the Lord your God who delivered you out of bondage ...” (Exod 20.2) ... Almost always the people were pulled up short. They thought somehow that they could, as it were, bribe God by elaborate religious ritual, by observing strict religious laws and offering elaborate worship.”

Bias to the poor and downtrodden

- e) We are quite bamboozled when we encounter the God of the Bible. The crucial paradigm of our Bible is how God rescued a rabble of slaves, long before they had done anything to deserve to be chosen. They were not even an attractive lot, when God intervened decisively in their history. They were not even a nation... There must have been many, far more attractive people, far better organized, a great deal more worthy of being saved than this squabbling lot of Hebrew slaves.

Bias against the rich and privileged

- f) When King Ahab wanted to buy Naboth's vineyard and Naboth refused, the king's wife, Jezebel, had him killed. God's prophet, Elijah, confronted the king on behalf of the non-entity that Naboth was (Naboth was such a nonentity that his genealogy is not even recorder in the story) and took the king thoroughly to task because God is that kind of God, always biased in favour of the downtrodden, of the weak, of the despised ...

- g) Even David could not escape the strictures of the prophet when he sinned ... The prophet Nathan did not fear to confront the King ...

Our response

- h) David accepted his punishment with an amazing humility – not the way the kings of non-Israelite nations would have behaved, given their assumption that they were monarchs of all they surveyed.
- i) ... real authentic religion is no exercise in escapism... (it is) earthy and thoroughly relevant to the business of human living, speaking to how we conduct our politics, how we carry out our business transactions, how we live our lives, most especially in relation to the poor and the oppressed.

God's intervention

- j) When God decided to intervene most decisively in our human affairs...(He) did not chose a spectacular way to reveal the nature of God. Clearly, God could have come in blinding splendour and ostentatious majesty ... but (He) chose a subject people ... they were very small beer indeed, bowed beneath the grinding yoke of the Roman Empire ... God surely must have intended that we should note the significance of all of this.
- k) When Jesus went forth to re-establish Israel He called 12 men ... (who) were not members of the elite of their contemporary society... Jesus called His disciples mainly from the riffraff, for that was the company He chose to keep.
- l) Jesus did not choose to mix with the wealthy, or the ecclesiastical leaders; his friends included, unusually for the time, womenfolk, some of very dubious character. He was taking a stand against the contemporary denigration of women.
- m) Jesus saw Himself as having been sent on a mission to seek His Father's lost ones. He told the parable of the Prodigal Son ... and the parable of the lost sheep.
- n) We have unfortunately been badly misled by the conventional pictures of the Good Shepherd ... it was no fluffy little lamb that strayed ... fluffy little lambs hardly ever stray from their mummies ... it was an obstreperous old ram that was lost, with a torn fleece, smelling to high heaven ... (*CP paraphrase*)
- o) God is in the business of saving sinners because God is that kind of God: a biased God, a God who is prejudiced in favour of sinners.

Questions

1. Which of the selected passages above most speaks to you? Why?
2. When there is need, God can't help stepping in on the side of those who are suffering ... *How do we reconcile this with the secular view that it is the suffering in the world which most challenges the idea of God?*
3. David was so incensed by the sheer rapacity and injustice of the rich man in the story that he said the culprit should be executed. Then he was deeply contrite when Nathan said "Thou art the man". *Have there been times in your own life when you have only become aware of your own shortcomings through your reaction to the same behaviours in other people?*
4. Why does God's bias upset us? Do you understand how the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son felt? How about the other characters? The Father? The younger son?
5. Is God really biased against the rich and privileged?