

## Oh My God

We all embark on tasks then wish that we hadn't, because it becomes all too hard. You try to walk away from the whole thing, but you find that it continues to nag at you until you go back and take up the cudgels again. When I first began to explore the historical Jesus and tried to define what I believed God was it all seemed so exciting and straightforward, however I quickly discovered that this wasn't the case. Whilst I was able to question the traditional interpretation given of Jesus birth, the miracles and some of the sayings that were attributed to him; the logical consequence of what I did believe when these concerns were removed told much more about what I didn't believe. Would it have been better if I had continued to hold the faith of my teenage years and not be too critical about matters of reason?

The questioning began simply, I argued that if the God I believed in was not someone whose wrath brought Tsunamis as a punishment for a wicked world, and this phenomenon could be explained by massive earth movements under the sea, then could I call upon God to make other changes in our world. Could I ask God to heal my friend who has a massive brain tumour or heal a child involved in a car accident? It was so much easier as a teenager to talk about God as a personal being, a loving parent, rather than as 'essence' or a 'sea of love' or as Tillich says the 'ground of our being.' It was easier to talk about "prayers of intercession" and handing over the responsibility of doing something to God; than to meditate on how I could respond to the plight of my friends, the poor or disadvantaged and actually do something about it.

Could I continue to be blissfully ignorant and disregard these nagging doubts and their accompanying quests for openness and truth, or having once been challenged would this change my way of functioning forever? To face the reality that I do not know what God looks like and that the person of Jesus is a much more complex and confronting figure than we were taught at Sunday school was a daunting prospect.

I remember being in a study group with a group of people who had just studied Albert Nolan's Book "Christ before Christianity" and I posed the question, "Could we change Jesus' mind on a particular

issue?” “Could he accept advice from us?” All of the group participants were considerably younger and all stated that Jesus’ thinking was far above ours and that he would not have accepted our advice because he had the ability to foresee the outcomes we were postulating. If this is the case then is it possible that Jesus was just game playing with his disciples when he asked them questions and he already knew the answers? It would mean, that when he invited us into discussions and debate, he wasn’t interested in what we had to say, because he already knew the outcome, he already knew what we would say.

Can you now see something of the dilemma if Jesus is really human then when he asks us for advice he is really seeking help. Jesus is seeking help from us because he is searching for an answer which is beyond his human ability. Is it possible that he could be seeking from us the word of God as a response to his questions?

If we hold to this image of Jesus then understanding his words and actions as portrayed in the gospels requires a lot more explanation than a literal interpretation. How wonderful to begin to understand that Jesus was able to convey a wisdom and spiritual understanding of God and people, whilst being authentically human. It really means that it is possible for us who are wonderfully human to reach a similar understanding.

Having taken a step along this path it is impossible now for me to turn back and accept the teaching of the past, even though the journey is not smooth, it is exciting. There have been times when I have experienced the God activity in my life and where there is no other explanation than to recognize the Spiritual influence of a loving God. These are the times that Marcus Borg calls the “Thin places”; these are the places where we recognize the activity and presence of God. Not an elsewhere God, but a God who is present ‘here and now’. Borg tells us that if we want to recognize the thin places we must keep our ‘hearts open’. A closed heart is insensitive to wonder, it affects the mind and the reasoning process. As Borg says ‘blindness and limited vision go with a ‘closed heart’ but most of all a closed heart forgets God; it does not allow for the ‘magic’ around us to become reality.” Borg quotes Thomas Merton the Trappist Monk in expressing his understanding of God:

*“We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time. This is not just a fable or a nice story. It is true. If we abandon ourselves to God and forget ourselves, we see it sometimes, and we see it maybe frequently. God shows himself everywhere in everything – in people and in things and in nature and events. It becomes very obvious that God is everywhere and in everything and we cannot be without him“*

Every now and then we experience this God Spirit shining through. According to Borg these are the ‘Thin places’ where the veil momentarily lifts and we experience God. A thin place is anywhere where our hearts are open. It is the boundary between our world and the world of the Spirit. A thin place is a mediator of the sacred and this can appear to us in the shape of a stranger or friend, so keep your hearts and minds open, for even though the path may be bumpy the experience of meeting God is mind blowing.

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