

## Women's Bible Study

Tuesday, November 27, 2007

### **How do we reconcile the loving God revealed to us by Christ with what we read in the Old Testament?**

An awesome, *very* difficult question....!!

I propose that at least three things be kept in mind,  
which enable one to begin to approach the issue  
of the "God the Old Testament" and the "God of the New Testament".

**Firstly:** know that they are the same God!

Even though, as we read the Scriptures, we may wonder  
if the "God of the Old Testament" is the same as the "God of the New Testament,  
we lean, in faith, upon our very own Christian Tradition,  
which assures us that they are one and the same God.

**Secondly:** we probe the Scriptures with the presumption that  
those "places" of deeper, more perfect Revelation shed light  
on those "places" of more "superficial", less perfect Revelation.  
We believe that the New Testament is more intimate Revelation than the Old Testament.  
This translates into a very important, very fundamental, theological principle:  
the New Testament *completes* and *sheds light on* the Old Testament

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we indeed read:

**Christians read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen.  
Such typological reading discloses the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament.  
As an old saying put it, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old  
and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New. (#129)**

Consequently, we cannot really understand

the Old Testament without the New Testament  
The Old Testament was obviously "sufficient" prior to the Incarnation,  
for it is part of the gradual, pedagogical unfolding of Revelation.  
God shares Himself in history, over time, going deeper and deeper as He proceeds.  
This we call Salvation History.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we further read:

**The divine plan of Revelation is realized simultaneously "by deeds and words which  
are intrinsically bound up with each other" and shed light on each another. It  
involves a specific divine pedagogy: God communicates himself to man gradually.  
He prepares him to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation that is  
to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. (#53)**

**"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son." Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one. St. John of the Cross, among others, commented strikingly on Hebrews 1:1-2:**

**In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), he spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word - and he has no more to say. . . because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son. Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behaviour but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty. (#65)**

**"The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yet even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries. (#66)**

And so, there is growth, there is a movement from the imperfect to the perfect. And, just as with anything that grows, the *grown* sheds light on the *growing*. To put it in more philosophical terms: *actuality* sheds light on *potentiality*. For example,

- the tree sheds light on the acorn
- the adult person sheds light on the child

The New Testament sheds light on the Old Testament.

Consequently, the troubling passages in the Old Testament must be illumined by the New Testament.

As we just read, "The Old Testament is unveiled in the New".

Consequently, *the God of the Old Testament* is fully and truly unveiled in the New.

In other words, Christ more properly reveals the "secret" of God, i.e. who God is.

**Thirdly:** we probe the Scriptures with a guiding question, based on the aforementioned theological principle:

"If, by Christ, we come to know that 'God is love',

then how is what is revealed in the Old Testament revelation of a God of love?"

That is the question I pose as I read *any* Scripture passage, Old *or* New Testament.

"What does this reveal to me of God who is love?"

"How does this reveal to me a God who is love?"

For example, when Jesus rebukes Peter, and says, “Get behind me Satan”,  
how is that loving?

One cannot go wrong with such an approach, with such *hope*-ful probing, for it

- highlights the transcendence of God above human concepts and language
- helps to avoid any projection onto the Scriptures
- obliges one to go deeper

Now, as we read the Old Testament, we may find ourselves before passages  
which do not seem to reveal a God of love.

And so the question “how does this reveal a God of love?”  
can remain unanswered.

As suggest certain exegetes and theologians, in some Old Testament passages,  
the understanding of God articulated by the Jewish people proves to be,  
in the light of the New Testament, too limited.

And so, certain Old Testament passages are further opened, like a flower bud that blooms  
and certain Old Testament passages remain enigmatic, even troubling.

What is certain is that through our prayerful meditation on the Scriptures,  
even when we do not find a satisfactory theological grasp  
and we remain in the discomfort of an open-ended question,  
there is always an encounter with the ultimate Author of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit.  
Indeed, our questioning opens us to the One who comes to encounter us.

With these three things in mind, namely that:

1. the whole of the Scriptures reveal the same God
2. the New Testament sheds light on the Old Testament
3. the underlying question of believers in the reading of the Scriptures is  
“How does this reveal to me a God who is love?”

we probe the Scriptures, accepting to examine case by case.

If we are to discover a God of love through it all, and love is eminently personal,  
then we are to probe each troubling passage individually.

Such is the way

- of a loving reading of the Scriptures
- of believers who seek their Beloved through the Scriptures

We probe the Scriptures, accepting that their composition is complex.

The Scriptures are not a book of simple lessons or a book of theological conclusions.

The Scriptures give us Salvation history,  
and buried therein mysterious nuggets of gold

- that are quasi-supra-historical
- that are a more direct “unveiling” of the mystery of God

And through it all – historical and “supra-historical” –

we must accept to labor intelligently to find the God who is love.

Salvation history as it progresses with the Jewish people is transmitted to us  
by the Jewish people, and is thus necessarily, to an extent,  
colored by their *re-reading* of God's intervention, a re-reading done

- often in retrospect
- with their limited understanding of the Divine and of the Cosmos
- with the presupposition that everything that happens is the immediate hand of God, a God who acts in their favor

Let us therefore recall that the Scriptures are not self-explanatory.

It is a journey – for both its “characters” and its readers.

We illumine our reading of the Scriptures with Tradition,  
i.e. with what has surfaced in the hearts and minds of believers

- who have journeyed before us
- who journey with us

If we recall this, we will be less afraid of difficult passages.

We thus operate with certain “presumptions” that breed peace.

Let us peacefully probe.

There is no need for us to feel as though everything must be understood.

We too are in this movement that is Salvation history,

journeying towards the fullness of revelation we call the Beatific Vision.

In our hearts we possess that which we will see, the One whom we will see.

But our grasp of this mystery, which in fact possesses us, is gradual.

If we were Christian fundamentalists, i.e. Christians who read the Scriptures *literally*,

- we would be in a bit of a bind
- this would be a problem

It is, in fact, *not* a problem.

We are invited to read in depth, benefiting from

- the insights of the saints
- the more official proclamations of the teaching office of the Church
- the work of theologians
- the input of our brothers and sisters in Christ

Let us continue seeking the Word through the word,

“the true light which enlightens everyone”.