

THE IMAGE WE HAVE OF GOD

Read the attached article (taken from the **Community 02/2024** magazine) then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

- 1 Corinthians 4:1
- 1 John 3:2
- Luke 1:1-4
- Genesis 6:5-7
- Genesis 3:14-19
- 1 Peter 3:18-22
- John 3:16
- 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17
- 1 Corinthians 15:51-52
- John 14:6
- Catechism References - 1.2.4.1 / 1.2.5.2

MAIN TAKE-AWAY

We are enlightened by new understandings of older teachings. It is necessary to continue to listen, learn and grow based on new revelations of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS

1. Were your thoughts about God's ways changed after reading this?
2. Does challenging your understanding with new ideas excite or scare you?
3. What is the consequence of distance from God?
4. Discuss the impact of this sentence "It is only with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that readers of the Bible can recognize the divine will in these texts written by human beings."
5. Discuss any other points from the article that were impactful for you.

ARTICLE

THE IMAGE WE HAVE OF GOD AND WHAT HE IS REALLY LIKE

How is this possible? In the Old Testament, God is angry and in the New Testament, He is love. What has changed is not His nature, but the way humankind sees Him. This is what the Chief Apostle explains in the following doctrinal text.

As stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1), the Apostles have the commission of drawing the attention of believers to the revelations of God. Human beings are incapable of recognizing God on their own. All that we can know about God is what He reveals to us.

God revealed Himself to humankind in a progressive manner. First, He made Himself known as the Creator, then as Lord in the history of Israel. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the revelation of God that surpasses all previous revelations. On Pentecost, God sent His Holy Spirit to reveal additional knowledge about Himself and His plan of salvation. The Holy Spirit is also at work today, especially through the apostolate, namely in the proper dispensation of the sacraments and the proper proclamation of the word of God. At the return of Christ, God will reveal Himself in perfect measure to those who will be caught up to Him: they will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

In Holy Scripture, the revelations of God are attested by human beings who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The authors of the biblical books used their language and knowledge to impart that which the Holy Spirit had revealed to them. In this context, let us remember that many of these texts were written long after the events to which they refer.

The accounts of creation came into being long after the events of which they relate. And it is no different with the story of the great flood. The gospels were likewise written long after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:1–4; CNAC 1.2.4.1).

It is only with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that readers of the Bible can recognize the divine will in these texts written by human beings. The Apostles in particular - under the guidance of the Holy Spirit - have the mandate to interpret Holy Scripture in a binding and authoritative manner for faith, in order to recognize and reveal the divine will.

GOD IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

The Old Testament is a collection of sacred writings of the people of Israel. The manner in which the authors of these writings describe God reflects the cultural and religious context of their time. They often ascribe human qualities to

God. For example, God is offended - His honor and dignity are violated. He becomes angry and punishes. On another occasion He regrets what He has done, and thus resolves to do something new.

God is angry with Adam and Eve. He punishes them: the man is to suffer in order to earn his bread, the woman is to suffer when she gives birth, and the woman is to be ruled by the man. Both are expelled from Paradise. Angered by the wickedness of humankind, God regrets having created human beings and so decides to destroy everything He has created, mankind and beast alike, in the great flood (Genesis 6:5–7). All the calamities that befall Israel are seen as God's punishment for the people's disobedience. And in order to defend His people, God is capable of being incredibly merciless to the enemies of Israel.

Jesus Christ reveals the true nature of God to humanity. He speaks of a God of love who does not seek to punish sinners, but rather to save them. The misfortune that befalls human beings is not a punishment imposed by God, but simply a consequence of the dominion of the evil one. Jesus Christ is perfect, without sin, and yet He had to suffer and die as the worst of sinners - indeed, as a criminal.

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus Christ interpreted Holy Scripture - in particular the Torah, the prophetic books, and the Psalms - in relation to His own person and activity. From this we conclude that we must interpret the Old Testament from the point of view of the Son of God. In CNAC 1.2.5.2 we read the following concerning this: "The significance for faith and doctrine of any statements made in the individual books of the Old Testament - or in the later writings of the Old Testament - can be determined by the agreement of their contents with that which the gospel teaches."

Jesus Christ expressly states that God does not desire to punish the sinner. For this reason, we cannot regard the events depicted in Genesis 3:14–19 as a punishment imposed by God: just because they had made a single mistake, would God really have condemned both the man and the woman to suffer - the man while laboring and the woman during childbirth - and also cause the man to rule over the woman? In light of Jesus' teaching and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are of the view that God merely announced to Adam and Eve the consequences of their fall into sin. Incidentally, if this were

not the case, any initiative aimed at making work less arduous would be contrary to the will of God! The message we derive from this account is that God continued to love human beings even after their transgression and promised to send them a Redeemer.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Like the writings of the Old Testament, those of the New Testament were also written by people who were rooted in their time and their traditions. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they used their words and knowledge to give an account of the life of Jesus and record the revelations of the Holy Spirit. They also took into account the culture of their addressees in order to be certain that the latter would understand them. In the writings of the New Testament, the message of the gospel is always the same, but the manner in which it is conveyed varies depending on the respective writer and recipient.

This applies in particular with respect to the manner in which the texts speak about the death of Jesus Christ. In order to explain the significance of His sacrifice for salvation, the biblical authors alternately make reference to the Old Testament sacrificial cult (atonement), the customs of war (a ransom must be paid to set prisoners free), or criminal law (a debt must be paid).

A literal interpretation of these texts would present God in the same image as that portrayed in the Old Testament. In this scenario, God behaves like a human being whose honor and dignity have been violated. He demands punishment or compensation. Therefore someone must die for the sake of righteousness, and Jesus Christ is the one who must atone on our behalf.

This perspective on the death of Jesus Christ is difficult to understand for Christians today, especially young people. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to speak about the death of Jesus Christ without necessarily emphasizing the notion of punishment.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is above all an act of love (John 3: 16). Since the fall into sin, mankind has lived in a condition of remoteness from God. Humanity's sufferings are thus not a punishment imposed by God, but rather a consequence of this distance from God. God has never stopped loving human beings. He resolved to become a human being Himself, to suffer and to die, in order to show human beings that He is

connected with them. Far from wanting to punish them, He stands by them in suffering, in death, and even in the realm of the departed. He agrees to be treated like the worst of evildoers in order to show that He loves all sinners, without exception.

In His love, God desires to lead all human beings into fellowship with Himself. However, human beings can only be in fellowship with God when their will is perfectly aligned with the will of God. As a human being, Jesus Christ remained without sin. Even though the powers of evil raged against Him, He was able to resist temptation, maintain His trust in God, and remain firm in His love. His perfection allowed Him to enter into fellowship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit as true man - not only as the Son of God. No other human being can attain His perfection, but in His love Jesus Christ is prepared to share His victory and merit with those who believe in Him and follow Him. Such a message touches the heart!

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION BY THE APOSTOLATE

Read on a superficial level, the book of Revelation speaks of the end of the world, the wrath of God, and the punishment of the ungodly. However, the Holy Spirit allows us to understand that it speaks above all of Christ's victory over evil and of His unconditional love for humankind.

The book of Revelation picks up on Jesus' revelations about the future course of the plan of salvation and develops them further. Jesus Christ Himself announced His return. He revealed to Apostle Paul the events surrounding His return (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles then listed the various stages in the plan of salvation: the first resurrection, the thousand-year kingdom of peace, the Last Judgment, and the new creation.

The mission of the Apostles is to prepare the believers for the return of the Lord. Those who are accepted will be able to enter His kingdom as firstlings. But what will happen to all the rest? For example, what about those who have never heard of Jesus before? Can they be saved without following Jesus? The love of God wants all human beings to have access to His kingdom. His righteousness wants all of them to pursue the same path in order to reach it: one can only come to the Father through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Everyone must therefore know Jesus Christ and be able to make the decision to follow

