

200 “O Love that will not let me go”

As I reach my bicentenary(!), this is going to be a positive article, but I do have to start negative, sorry. I can't shake off what I read in a book written by an extremely eminent theologian, the architect of the Decade of Evangelism. He said that the early church succeeded by trying to “persuade, to warn, to teach, to cajole others into that relationship [with God]” and the church today is shrinking because of “the greatest obstacle of all, our apathy.”^[197]

Let's just suppose for a minute that the Christian faith really is about a loving relationship with God. What would that mean? What is a relationship? Well, it's when two persons get to know one another, and each begins to feel that the other is really rather special.

There are various levels of relationship, but there is one where the two persons love one another so much that they make solemn vows to be committed to one another for life!

Suppose our relationship could be a bit like being married to God? A revolutionary new idea? No, Jesus' final words to his disciples^[Jn 17-21] are all about this loving relationship.

How would it work in practice? Us and God, I mean. Well, on God's side, he already knows that we are very special – the Bible says it over and over and over again – God is crazy about us!

For our side? As with any relationship, it takes time. We need to get to know the person. Trouble is, God has such a bad press. What about relating to Jesus instead? Jesus is much more approachable (well, not all his parables are that cosy!), but the Father is OK with us finding Jesus easier. He knows that gods in general have always had a bad reputation, which is why the “coming to earth” thing was such a stroke of genius.

And that's why people flocked around Jesus – they simply loved him!

Some of you may remember a curate at Holy Trinity, Norwich, in the 1990s, and the “What's happened to John?!” thing. Suddenly, his sermons took off; he was so enthusiastic. And in prayer meetings the first prayer was never, “Dear Lord please...” because John would lead off with an excited conversation with God about how great it was to know him, etc. No apathy there!

At the time, we diagnosed it as that John, a strongly conservative Evangelical, had come into a charismatic renewal, but I think he had fallen in love with God. I pray that John still has that love.

The same happened to me when I came to faith in the late '60s – I discovered real love for the first time, coming from a totally dysfunctional family...but I lost it again...and rediscovered it in the '80s...and lost it again...and found it again five years ago. I WILL NOT LET IT GO!

Apathy is ousted by: “O Love that will not let me go”!

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