

357 Another Reformation?

A friend went on a five-day retreat and came back bubbling; she recommended a book, I read the prologue on Amazon¹ and ordered a copy immediately. Why?

I'm on 'The Way', a journey with Jesus, and, as a pair of walking poles, I've used these articles to help me. (Some articles have helped other folk – that's a real bonus!) When climbing a mountain, you sometimes look back, and there's the track below you – have I really come all that way?! That's how that prologue made me feel.

Some questions I started with:

- 1) How come 'the Gospel' is so unpalatable to so many people? Maybe penal substitution is wrong theology?
- 2) Why is today's church not 'on fire', as it was in the NT days?
- 3) How could so much 'bad stuff' has been done, over the centuries, in the name of Jesus, the God of love?
- 4) How do you come to terms with the violence (God's violence) in the OT?

Some helpful new (to me) ideas I've picked up:

- 1) God wants restorative justice, not retributive justice.
- 2) Genesis is God creating a *place* to dwell with people; the Bible is God coming to dwell with people – but having to withdraw as we messed up – finally coming in the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Creeds only state (a) what God is like (Father, Son and Spirit) (b) what happened when Jesus came – purely the narrative.^[18] It only says Jesus died 'for' our salvation, not 'how'.
- 4) 'Progressive revelation' – Throughout history, humans have gained knowledge; in the Bible, God gives us wisdom to apply that knowledge. "The people of the time thought..." applies to so many things, e.g. slavery, but God knows you can't change people's thinking overnight, so...
- 5) 'Accommodation' – God allows us to get our understanding wrong (including Bible writers!^[315]) with the longer-term goal in mind – even to the extent of our wrongly understanding God's motives: God 'told them' to kill every man, woman and child.
- 6) Most recently, c/o NTW, the good news is **not** about 'me going to heaven'; it's about heaven coming to earth – now and in the future.

¹ Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*.

Emerging thoughts, which that prologue echoed:

In millennium 1 we focused on bringing restoration: Christ as Lord of individuals *and* over institutions (i.e. coming against systemic evil). In millennium 2 we focused more on exactly **how** salvation works. The focus moved from restoration (paradise) to the violent death of Jesus as ‘the answer’.

Instead of making the world a better place, it was all about individual salvation/damnation. This gave church leaders much better control, so ‘the system’ could work more efficiently.

The Reformation got us away from salvation by works, but it didn’t get us away from the centrality of death and violence. Christianity was still stick-based: ‘Get saved, or you’re going to hell.’ It got us away, too, from personal authority – ‘the Pope says’ – but it replaced it with reasoned theological authority – ‘the Bible (our interpretation of it!) says...’.

Maybe we need another Reformation?

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