

Scripture: Word of God or Word of Man?

Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Backward: Creeping Culture

There are certainly confusing and conflicting parts of the Scriptures as we have seen. Recently, John Dominick Crossan alleged that the Bible is the history of God's radical vision for humanity and human normalcy's subversion of that vision. This comes out clearly in *The First Paul* Crossan coauthored with Marcus Borg. In it they trace the radical vision of releasing slaves in Philemon to a less radical vision in Ephesians 6 where slaves are to obey their masters and masters are to treat their slaves kindly, to Titus 2 which doesn't even mention a master's responsibilities but says only *Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted...* Many believe that the latter two references attributed to Paul were not actually written by Paul. None-the-less this complete change of tenor from Philemon to Titus 2 illustrates a demonstrable shift from a radical vision of God to an accommodation of human and cultural normalcy – a watering down of God's vision in order to accommodate the status quo.

Fr. Richard Rohr has commented that "Life itself--and Scripture too--is invariably three steps forward and two steps backward. It gets the point and then loses it or doubts it. In that, the biblical text mirrors our own human consciousness and journey." Here Rohr speaks of the Bible as mirroring our human experience of moving ahead boldly and then losing ground. Rohr goes on to say that to have a mature faith one must be able to discern which parts of Scripture relate to bold steps forward, moving toward a mature understanding of God representing mercy, forgiveness, inclusion, nonviolence, and trust; and which ones represent the retreat backwards into vengeance, divine pettiness, law over grace, form over substance and technique over relationship. To do this requires more than a literal reading and a shallow and narrow interpretation. It requires a mature faith, one that leads us into a more holistic understanding of the human side of Scripture. Anything short of that leads one to look for proof texts to support their preconceived views and opinions and to a far higher evaluation of one's own faith journey than is warranted.

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