

JESUS' PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE MARGINALIZED

Varied is the Image of God

“According to Leviticus 11:38 if water is poured upon seed it becomes unclean. The passage, however, does not distinguish between seed planted in the soil and seed detached from the soil . . . In years of poor harvests, a frequent occurrence owing to poor soil, drought, warfare, locust plagues and poor methods of farming, this text was a source of dispute. Why? During such lean years, grain was imported from Egypt. But the Egyptians irrigated their fields (putting water on seed) so that their grain was suspect, perhaps even unclean. The Sadducees judged that such grain was unclean and anyone consuming it also became unclean. They were quite willing to pay skyrocketing prices commanded by scarce domestic grain because they could afford it. . . . One senses economic advance being sanctioned, since the Sadducees were often the large landowners whose crops increased in value during such times. By contrast the Pharisees argued that the Pentateuchal ordinance applied only to seed detached from the soil; therefore . . . one could be observant and still purchase Egyptian grain.” (Ched Myers; *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, p. 76)

Luke 5.30—But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

Leviticus 11.37-38—If a carcass falls on any seeds that are to be planted, they remain clean. But if water has been put on the seed and a carcass falls on it, it is unclean for you.

Matthew 9.13—But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Genesis 1.26-27—Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Karen Armstrong—“The Golden Rule, compassion, and loving-kindness were central to this new Judaism; by the time the temple had been destroyed, some of the Pharisees already understood that they did not need a temple to worship God, as this Talmudic story makes clear: It happened that R. Johanan ben Zakkai went out from Jerusalem, and R. Joshua followed him and saw the burnt ruins of the Temple and he said: “Woe is it that the place, where the sins of Israel find atonement, is laid waste.” Then said R. Johanan, “Grieve not, we have an atonement equal to the Temple, the doing of loving deeds, as it is said, ‘I desire love and not sacrifice.’” Kindness was the key to the future; Jews must turn away from the violence and divisiveness of the war years and create a united community with “one body and one soul.” When the community was integrated in love and mutual respect, God was with them, but when they quarreled with one another, he returned to heaven, where the angels chanted with “one voice and one melody.” When two or three Jews sat and studied harmoniously together, the divine presence sat in their midst.” Rabbi Akiba, who was killed by the Romans in 132 CE, taught that the commandment “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” was “the great principle of the Torah.”

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To show disrespect to any human being who had been created in God's image was seen by the rabbis as a denial of God himself and tantamount to atheism. Murder was a sacrilege: "Scripture instructs us that whatsoever sheds human blood is regarded as if he had diminished the divine image. *God had created only one man at the beginning of time to teach us that destroying only one human life was equivalent to annihilating the entire world, while to save a life redeemed the whole of humanity. To humiliate anybody—even a slave or a non-Jew—was equivalent to murder, a sacrilegious defacing of God's image. To spread a scandalous, lying story about another person was to deny the existence of God.* Religion was inseparable from the practice of *habitual respect to all other human beings.* You could not worship God unless you practiced the Golden Rule and honored your fellow humans, whoever they were." (The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions; Emphasis added)

Deuteronomy 23.1—No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD.

Isaiah 56.3-5—Let no foreigner who is bound to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." And let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.

Acts 8.36-38—As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Aboriginal Elder Lilla Watson—"If you have come to help me, please go home. But if you have come because your liberation is somehow bound with mine, then we may work together." (Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970's)

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