Images of God’s People

Teacher Background

The Anawim of God

*Anawim* is the plural form of an Old Testament Hebrew word which is variously translated as "poor", "afflicted", "humble", or "meek". It is the *Anawim*, "the lost and the forgotten ones", to whom Jesus refers in the beatitudes on The Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven", and "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth". (Mt 5:3,5).

The prophet Zephaniah (Zeph 2:3, 3:12-19) relays God's message that, even in the worst of times there will remain "a faithful remnant" in our midst. God's Remnant then, are the people who find their security and treasures, not in the trappings of the material world, but in God.

In both The Great Commandment, and throughout Matthew 25, Christians are commanded by Jesus to aid their neighbour - to constantly strive to redress the grievances of those who are abandoned or alone, alienated and marginalised; to protect the dignity of the poor and to stand with the oppressed as they attempt to become free of that which oppresses them. Jesus constantly ministered to the poor and the sick, to the outcasts of society.

**How People image God**

How people image God seems to be central to how they view the world and their level of involvement in social concerns and in society generally. Theologians and sociologists of religion have discovered that those who believe in a God who is immanent, involved in the world and acting through people support action for social justice somewhat more easily than those who experience God as remote, outside the world and lording it over people. Christians image God in different ways.

**The People of “God, the Transformer”** This God calls us to continue his/her work of creation. God's people are called to participate in God's own creating, liberating and transforming activities. God hears the cry of the poor through his/her people and continues to raise up prophets who respond to the needs. Christians participate in the building up of God's kingdom.

**The People of “God, the Dreamer”** Those who hold this image believe in a better world. They are outraged at injustices and never tire of hoping. They believe, even against the odds, that love, justice and peace can reign in the kingdom of God.

**The People of a “God who loves”** This God is encountered in relationship with others. The person's relationship with God calls them into relationship with others and with the world around them. This includes going beyond the familiar to social location and experiences different from their own. The God of love invites the person to love where there is little love - those oppressed, poor, victimised. And in these relationships, there is a struggle with the question "Why?"

Scripture is full of images of a God who lives in relationship. Our creation as children of God makes us brothers and sisters - this begs the question: is there any such person as a stranger in the Judeo-Christian context? The Israelites, in the Old Testament, understood God's call in a community context as this community understanding was central to their survival. God called people through the political and economic contexts of their day. So it is reasonable to think that they might work this way in our time also. God's intervention is always on behalf of those who are denied justice (the widow, the orphan, the stranger) seeking to bring us back into right relations.