

The Same God

Trinity Sunday (Year A)

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One of the easiest ways to talk about God in the Bible is to contrast the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New Testament. The God of the Old Testament, of course, is angry, authoritarian, law-giving, and even violent at times. Just think of the stories about the commandments, patriarchs, and kings. The God of the New Testament, on the other hand, is the opposite: loving, merciful, peaceful, and saving. We think of the example of Jesus and the parables. The more we can accentuate this contrast, the more loving we can appear as Christians.

In the second century A.D., prior to the formation of the canon (the number of the approved books of the Bible), a man named Marcion picked up on this contrast and tried to do just that- make Christians appear more loving. He found all the references to the God of the New Testament, called attention to them, and dismissed the rest. Many people perhaps would find the religion he presented as appealing. Yet, in the year 144, Maricon was excommunicated for heresy.

In today's readings, we heard, "the LORD, the LORD, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity." We might be surprised to realize that this passage comes from the Old Testament. These are the words of the Lord to Moses and repeated in the Psalms, another Old Testament book. As it turns out, contrasting the God of the Old and New Testaments is way too simplistic. As suggested by the excommunication of Marcion, we could say that contrasting the God of the Old and New Testaments is wrong. There is no dividing line between the

two. While it's true that our human understanding of God has changed over the centuries as made evident in the Bible, what has not changed is God.

In its 1965 document on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council wrote, "the plan of salvation, foretold, recounted, and explained by the sacred authors, appears as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament, which is why these books, divinely inspired, retain a lasting value." (DV, 14) In the following paragraph, the bishop's state, "these [Old Testament] books, even though they contain matters which are imperfect and provisional, nevertheless contain authentic divine teaching." (DV, 15) Both of these quotations affirm the enduring validity of the Old Testament.

The story of salvation history from the dawn of creation until the end of the world is our sacred story. All of it matters. The attempt to pick and choose the parts of the story we like or that make us look good is heretical. All of it, the ups and the downs, the good and the bad, the steps forward and the steps back, are who we are. It is all inspired by the same God.

Any attempt to make our Christian religion appear better by dismissing the Old Testament is wrong.

Am I attentive to the entire story of salvation history, able to see the same God at work from the very beginning?

Today's liturgy is the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, certainly a doctrine on the Christian God. But let us not forget that this is the same God as the God of the Old Testament. Perhaps we could go a step further and say that it is the same God as the God of any sincere religion established since the creation of the world.