

The Remnant



It's easy to forget that the majority of people to whom the biblical prophets proclaimed Yahweh's word never listened, much less carried it out. This experience led most prophets to develop a theology revolving around the "remnant". They became convinced only a small group of Israelites would actually change their lives. Prophets certainly exercised their ministry with low expectations.

Paul of Tarsus also has to deal with a remnant in Corinth. Much to his surprise, those who eventually chose to relate to the risen Jesus weren't the people he thought would relate when he began his ministry. "Not many of you," he reminds his community, "were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth". God turned Paul's expectations upside down. "God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, the weak of the world to shame the strong, the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God."

(In) Matthew's introduction to his well-known Sermon on the Mount ... the evangelist reminds his community if they've agreed to buy into Jesus of Nazareth's dreams, this is how they'll make those dreams a reality. If, for

instance, they want world peace, they'll achieve it only by building loving relationships with their enemies, not by being more powerful or meaner than they are. This unique group experiences a blessing in being poor, mourning and meek. They strive daily to show mercy, be single-minded and bring peace. Such radical beliefs aren't for everyone. Especially in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus says they're just for those willing to "repent": to change their value systems. Only they will experience God's kingdom: God working effectively in their everyday lives. The Galilean carpenter expects his followers to fly in the face of common wisdom and always put the good of others before their own, to deliberately weaken themselves by constantly giving themselves to others.

Such actions dovetail perfectly with the theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who believed in evolution and that those who correctly buy into evolution can actually understand Jesus' message and life. Evolution for Teilhard revolves around "centro-complexity". He discovered that after the Big Bang, as the universe aged, creation constantly became more centred and more complicated. This learned Jesuit was convinced that we're called to build this centro-complexity in our relationships with one another. We're expected, in those relationships, to become more one, yet at the same time more complex. We do this by following Jesus' command of love. Teilhard taught that love is the only force that makes us one while it also makes each of us more unique. Eventually, when we achieve complete oneness with one another, we'll also become completely one with God: evolution's last stage, the "omega" point of all creation.

Teilhard thought that it's the weakest, not the strongest, link that evolves. Our sacred authors were likewise convinced only a small remnant will ever be willing to trade their strength for the loving weakness God demands.

Source: Fr Roger Vermalen Karban. *National Catholic Reporter*
Jan 13- 26, 2017

REFLECTION

Paul's expectations of who would respond to his message were overturned, "those who eventually chose to relate to the risen Jesus weren't the people he thought would relate when he began his ministry".

> **Have you ever experienced this remnant phenomenon in your ministry?**