

WHO IS GOD HERE?

Psalm 2 (paraphrased selections)

Why do the nations rage? Why do peoples plot, and kings set themselves up? Why do rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Anointed?

The Lord who sits in the heavens laughs. He holds them in derision. When he speaks, they will stand before him in terror. He will say, 'As for me, I have set my King in place. He is my Son; the ends of the earth are his possession.'

Therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

In testimony given before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa, one black man told of crying out to God as the white officers attached electrodes to his body after beating him with truncheons. They laughed in his face. 'We are God here,' jeered one of the guards. The Commission hearings bared the delusion of that brash claim, for the guards, stripped of all powers, now sat in a defendants' box with heads bowed as their accusers paraded before them. They had been dethroned.

Psalm 2 depicts God laughing in the heavens, scoffing at the kings and rulers arrayed in revolt. For the South African prisoner, or a pastor harassed in China, or believers persecuted in North Korea, it requires a great leap to attain that sublime faith, to believe that God is indeed exalted among the nations.

A seventeenth-century prayer from the British House of Commons gets the right perspective, in words that sound eerily foreign in today's political climate. *'Almighty God, by whom alone Kings reign, and Princes decree justice; and from whom alone cometh all counsel, wisdom and understanding; We thine unworthy servants, here gathered together in thy Name, do most humbly beseech thee to send down thy heavenly wisdom from above, to direct and guide us in all our consultations; And grant that we, having thy fear always before our eyes, and laying aside all private interests, prejudices, and partial affections, the result of all our counsels may be the glory of thy blessed name ...'*

I think of Paul *singing* in a Philippian jail and of Jesus correcting Pilate with the plain truth, *'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.'* Even at that moment of crisis, Jesus had the long view, the view from a time pre-dating the solar system.

'Be still and know that I am God' (Ps. 46.10): The Latin imperative for 'be still' is *vacate*. As Simon Tugwell explains, 'God invites us to take a holiday [*vacation*], to stop being God for a while, and let him be God.' Too often we think of prayer as a serious chore, something that must be scheduled around other appointments, shoe-horned in among other pressing activities. We miss the point, says Tugwell: 'God is inviting us to take a break, to play truant. We can stop doing all those important things we have to do in our capacity as God, and leave it to Him to be God.' Prayer allows me to admit my failures, weaknesses and limitations to One who responds to human vulnerability with infinite mercy.

To let God be God, of course, means climbing down from my own executive chair of control. I must 'uncreate' the world I have so carefully fashioned to further my ends and advance my cause. Adam and Eve, the builders of Babel, Nebuchadnezzar, the South African guards, not to mention all who struggle with addictions or even ego, know well what is at stake. If original sin traces back to two people striving to become God, the first step in prayer is to acknowledge or *'remember'* God – to restore the truth of the universe. 'That man may know he dwells not in his own', said Milton.

Now, look again at Psalm 2.

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