

Jesus, the tangible, accessible and friendly God

In the early Greek concept, as well as many other ancient peoples, God was an inaccessible being who could never have any contact or approach with humans.

Jesus rejected this mistaken concept by being tangible and accessible in relation to those who surrounded him. That is why the expression "Emanuel", which means "*God with us*", fits him adequately, as we read in Matthew 1:23.

A notable feature of Jesus' character was his welcoming behavior in relation to the needs of the people who approached him.

Jesus was the personification of the Good Samaritan of the parable, who attended to the needs of that man who had been a victim of robbers and was ignored by those who had religious prejudices, represented by the priest and the Levite in the parable of Luke 10: 30-37.

Jesus valued the contact with the lepers, prostitutes, foreigners and others discriminated by the society of his time, taking every opportunity to speak about the Kingdom of God and bringing a message of hope to those marginalized and without perspectives people.

Jesus did not discriminate against anyone, whether by sex, race, social or intellectual status, religion or any other reason that leads society to discriminate against people.

If at first, Jesus seemed to discriminate against a Canaanite woman, shortly after Jesus extolled the faith of that woman, who identified herself with the puppies that ate the crumbs that were left over of the children's food. (Matthew 15: 21-28).

So it was also with thieves, publicans, Pharisees, scribes, children, dying, demoniacs and other people rejected from the social coexistence. Jesus treated all people without scruples and without barriers, valuing each people equally, as we read in Matthew 9: 10-13 and 11:19.

He subjected himself to the risk of being stoned by extending God's forgiveness and mercy to prostitutes and sinners, with whom he lived, without fear of "defilement" (John 5:18 and 10:33).

Once, Jesus stayed in the house of a tax collector named Zacchaeus, not caring about the comments of his opponents, who said that he was a guest of a man of ill reputation (Luke 19: 1-10).

For Jesus, more important than his own reputation was the opportunity to reach the distanced ones, so that people could know him closer and hear his teachings, although some of those who accompanied him were individuals with a dark past.

In one other time, Jesus received Nicodemus, a respected Jewish religious leader, who came to meet him at night, fearing to be seen consulting someone who did not have the credit of the Jewish clergy (John 3: 1-21). Jesus not only received Nicodemus, but also devoted him all the attention he used to attend all the people who came to him.

Although Nicodemus was not one of Jesus' disciples, he heard from the Master some of the remarkable principles of Christianity, as well as the concept of the new birth and the atoning purpose of the Son of God, as we read in chapter 3 of the Gospel of John.

This is proof that Jesus did not privilege an elite group, to the detriment of the needs of other people who professed a different faith.

Another example of Jesus' welcoming attitude is in John 8: 1-11, in which a woman caught in a flagrant adultery was forgiven by him, since Old Testament law commanded to stone any women who commit such sin.

In this case, Jesus showed once again that he had a pattern of social inclusion, giving the woman a chance to change her behavior and a life orientation, when she said: "Go away and sin no more".

Jesus' attitude was not to cover up anyone's sin. However, its sympathetic form to the rejected of the society revolutionized the concept of the relation that God wants to have with the men.

At no time did Jesus neglect to attend to the sick, to cast out demons and to welcome children who were brought to him (Matthew 4:24 and Luke 6:19). To those who consulted him without ulterior motives, he answered them with parables and metaphors, as people could assimilate his teachings.

The disciples of Jesus, who were filled with the discriminatory law of the Old Testament, were surprised to see him talking to a woman, as we read in John 4:27, since the law of Jehovah and the traditions of the Jews were extremely male chauvinist.

Jesus frequented wedding banquets, dinners in houses of people reputed as dishonest and other social activities along with people of all kinds, without worrying about "being contaminated" with the sinfulness of people. He considered everyone equally and never had scruples to approach men and women considered "sinful" by society.

Because of his so liberal attitude, Jesus was accused of being a "glutton and drinker of wine, a friend of publicans and sinners," as Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34 say. He was extremely sociable and approached with freedom of people, in public or in privacy.

In Luke 7: 36-38 we read that one of the Pharisees named Simon begged Jesus to eat with him. And when he had entered the Pharisee's house, he sat down to supper. Then a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she heard that Jesus was in the house of the Pharisee, brought a jar of alabaster with perfume.

Standing behind Jesus at his feet, the woman weeping began to tear the feet of Jesus with tears, and dried them with her hair; and kissed the feet of Jesus and anointed them with the perfume.

When he saw this, the Pharisee who had invited him said to himself, "*If he were a prophet, he would know who and what kind of woman he touched, for he is a sinner*". However, Jesus knew that the woman who was touching him was a prostitute and also knew the heart of the Pharisee, even if he spoke only for himself.

In all these circumstances Jesus justified himself to his questioners by saying that he came not to call "righteous" but to sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). He further said that those who consider themselves healthy do not go to doctors, but those who are aware of their illness seek help from doctors because they know they have no choice (Matthew 9:12 and Mark 2:17).

Jesus never showed disgust at contact with sinners, men or women, which often happens with people who make judge of they own, considering to be extremely holy and immaculate.

A woman with hemorrhage disease was healed simply because she touched the strip of Jesus' mantle (Matthew 9: 19-22). If Jesus were worried about the possibility of contamination, he would not allow the woman to touch him, since the Old Testament law considered the woman impure during the menstrual period (Leviticus 15:32).

The texts of Mark 10: 13-16 and Luke 18: 15-17 relate an episode in which some people brought children to Jesus to touch them, but the disciples were indignant at the exposition of their Master in such a humane and vulgar condition.

However, Jesus rebuked them and ordered them not to prevent the children from touching him. Then, to confirm his desire to draw closer to the people, Jesus took a child, placed his hands on him and blessed him. In the same way Jesus did with all the other children.

According to all these examples, we can conclude that Jesus had great pleasure in being able to touch and to be touched by people, because he wanted to transmit his love and mercy in the most practical and personal way possible. In other words, Jesus is a tangible God.

However, in a completely opposite way, we see the repulsive attitude of Jehovah in the Old Testament, when he struck a man named Uza, simply because that man stretched out his hand and touched the ark, which was falling because of the shaking in the chariot of oxen (2 Samuel 6: 6-8).

Jehovah immediately reacted and struck Uza, for he died. The text gives us a "reason" for such drastic action on the part of Jehovah. The ark symbolized the physical presence of Jehovah and therefore could not be touched by anyone, that is, differently from Jesus, Jehovah is an intangible god.

The ark was transported with rods to prevent anyone from touching it during its transposition (Exodus 25:14), which shows Jehovah's concern as to the possibility of being touched by a mere mortal.

Something happened to the oxen that were carrying the ark; perhaps they stumbled or became disheartened and the ark staggered. Immediately, Uza approached and held the ark in his hands. Uza was only trying to help and was killed relentlessly.

In turn, a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, approached Jesus behind the people and touched the hem of Jesus' mantle and was immediately healed (Mark 5: 25-30). At that moment also Jesus realized that power had come out of him, so he turned to the people and asked: Who touched me?

Therefore, from Jehovah got out death without mercy whereas from Jesus got out life and healing.

The conclusion is that Jehovah is not the same as Jesus, for they who touched Jehovah were struck down whereas they who touched Jesus were healed.

Jesus, the Son, is the same as God the Father, as he said to Philip (John 14: 9), but he has nothing to do with Jehovah, who is the relentless exterminating god of the Old Testament.

That is clear evidence that Jehovah and Jesus are not the same person, for those who touched the Lord were implacably dead, while those who touched Jesus were healed, as well as the hemorrhagic woman, who was healed simply because she touched the edge of The robe of Jesus by faith.

The contact with Jehovah produced curses whereas the contact with Jesus produced virtue, as we read in Mark 5:30 ... *The woman thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"*

There was only one time when Jesus did not allow to be touched, as we read in John 20: 16-18. In that episode known as "*Noli me tangere*", Jesus made the restriction because his body was still in a process of changing of nature, for he said to the woman: "*Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*".

The presence of Jehovah brought astonishment and trembling of death, as Hebrews 12: 18-21 says ... *You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death". The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear".*

In turn, the presence of Jesus brought calm and tranquility to people, as in the boat narrated in Mark 4: 35-41, where Jesus rebuked the wind and calmed the sea.

Wherever Jesus came, His presence brought comfort and encouragement to those who were hopeless. When he visited someone, peace came in that place. If peace did not come, it was because they rejected him and did not love him.

If there was a gloomy "climate" in one place, he was relieved by the presence of Jesus. Although the atmosphere was evil and the spirit of death reigned, the presence of Jesus brought peace and a sense of hope to the afflicted.

Jesus did not expect the environment to become "holy" to be able to frequent and interact with people, contrary to what Jehovah did, which selected special environments of religiosity and absolute purity to be present.

As an example that Jehovah did not allow himself to be manifested for "unclean" people, there is an episode in Exodus 3: 5, where Jehovah revealed to Moses his chronic repulsion for closeness to mortal sinners.

Jehovah only manifested favorably to Solomon after the king offered him a super-sacrifice, as 1 Kings 8:63 and 64 says ... *Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to Jehovah: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of Jehovah. On that same day the king consecrated the middle part of the courtyard in front of the temple of Jehovah, and there he offered burnt offerings, grain offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings, because the bronze altar that stood before the Lord was too small to hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the fat of the fellowship offerings.*

Also 1 Reyes 9:25 ... *Three times a year Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he had built for Jehovah, burning incense before Jehovah along with them, and so fulfilled the temple obligations.*

The access to the intimacy of God was only freed after Jesus was glorified, for until that moment the Jews were prevented from approaching God. Only the high priest was allowed to enter once a year and with many sacrifices in the super-restricted "holy of holies," where Jehovah dwelt.

The veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, as Matthew 27:50 and 51 relates, which made separation between the holy place and the "holy of holies" of the Jewish tabernacle. The Old Concert of Jehovah, which was led up by Moses, gave rise to the New Concert of the Father God, which is led up by Jesus Christ.

Jehovah was intangible, for he resented the approach with men, for fear of losing his glory of archangel. That is why he is totally different from Jesus, who approached the sick, prostitutes, thieves, lepers and all those in society.

Jesus was accused of being a friend of the excluded and the marginalized of society, that is, the social "discarded", as we can read in Matthew 11:19 ... *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners".*

Jesus is like the Samaritan of the parable, who attended to the needs of a man he did not know, which had been the victim of assailants, whereas Jehovah is like the Priest or the Levite of the same parable, who passed away and took a detour, perhaps for fear of being contaminated by a dying sinner.

This means that Jehovah is disgusted with people, because he does not want to be contaminated with the filth of mortal sinners and thus losing his glory of archangel.

In turn, Jesus is like the light, which illuminates the deepest darkness without being contaminated with them. That is why Jesus is truly the light of the world (John 8:12).

Finally, we can conclude that Jesus is the true God, tangible, accessible and welcoming, who touched and allowed to be touched by men and women, good or bad, which transmitted virtue when touched by a woman with hemorrhage (Luke 8: 43-46), whose hands touched dying people to bring healing (Luke 8:54), whose feet were wet with the tears of a repentant sinner (Luke 7: 36-38), whose saliva anointed the eyes of a blind man to return to see, in whose breast the disciple John found the affection of a friend (John 13: 23-25) and whose face received the hypocritical kiss of the traitor Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:47 and 48).

Oswaldo Carvalho