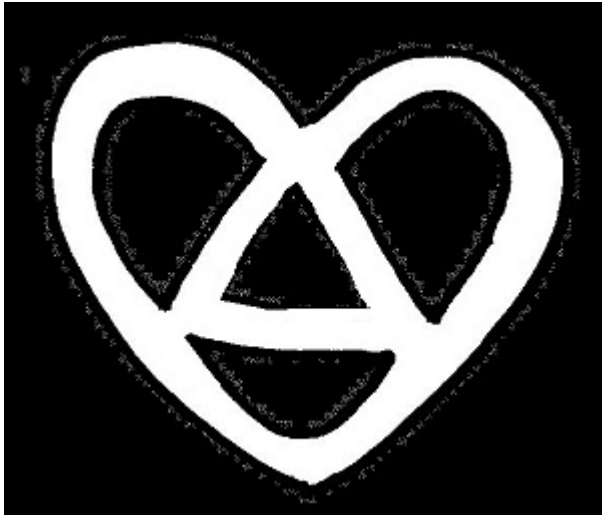


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by Pat Marrin

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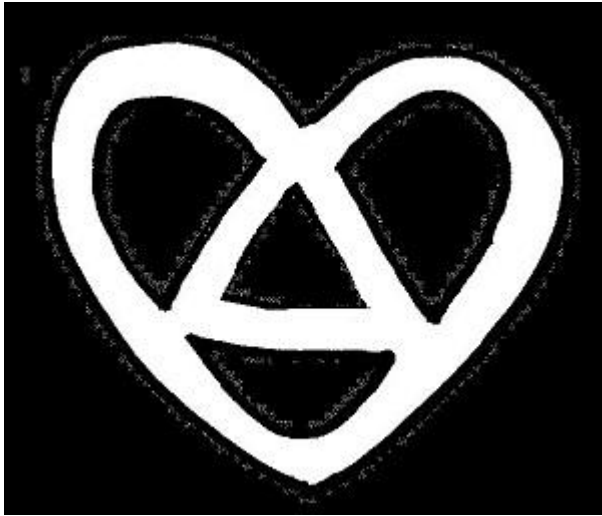
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“The Father who sent me has testified on my behalf” (John 5:39).

Exod 32:7-14; John 5:31-47

What distinguishes the biblical witness from many other religious narratives is the assertion that its agents are directly linked to God and have divine authority, not just human leadership. Moses brings the Hebrews out of Egypt because God told him to, and they must obey him because he speaks for God.

He is aghast to come down the mountain and discover that they are worshiping a molten calf. They are “depraved” because such idolatry dooms them in the wilderness, cut off from divine direction and support. They are totally dependent on God, who liberated them and alone can bring them across the desert to the Promised Land.

The fourth Gospel takes up this same theme in presenting Jesus as an even more intimate representative of God than Moses. He is not just the Messiah; he is the Son of God. Jesus’ credentials do not come from the testimony of John the Baptist or any human source. His identity flows from an inner communion with his Father, the eternal *Abba*, whose love animates Jesus’ every word and action. He does not need human testimony or approval. His astonishing works are sufficient witness that he is from God, for who else could give sight to the blind, multiply bread in the wilderness and raise the dead?

Jesus’ critics say they rely on the Scriptures and on the authority of Moses, while Jesus claims that he is the fulfillment of the Scriptures and the one Moses foretold. This quarrel clearly puts Jesus on a collision course with the religious authorities who

will demand his death for blasphemy—claiming to be equal to God.

These readings can seem distant from our own concerns, but they are about the basic validity of our faith and our hope to be guided in our pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world. If all we expect from religion is respectability and comforting rituals, any rational system will suffice. If we want a passionate journey of self-emptying love, a plunge into radical surrender and fearless obedience to a mystery larger than ourselves, then only an absolute authority can ground us. That authority is God.

Skepticism is a virtue in any search for truth, and a healthy agnosticism will protect us from false religion. But eventually our search for meaning must make us dare to decide what we believe, how we want to live and how we will face death. Scholars have argued whether reason or faith is the best guide. Blaise Pascal famously observed that “The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.”

Jesus called his disciples with the look of love, asking them to lay down their lives with him and for him in order to reveal that God had sent him to save the world. Faith seeks understanding by enlightening reason to know the mysterious logic of the heart. So, when the mind falls short, as it must, it is our hearts that will show us the way home.

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