

Donnybrook

25 November 2021

Welcome

Daniel in the lions' den is one of the best remembered of the dramatic stories in the book. Of course, it is not PC – it seems extra cruel that the wives and children were thrown in along with Daniel's enemies.

Topic

It helps to know what kind of writing this is.

Steps

A few books in the Bible are really long short stories or short novellas. Good examples would be Esther, Tobit, Ruth, Jonah, Judith and Daniel. Nearly all were written around the same time, to give courage to Jews, at home or abroad under oppression. A high profile is given to women, especially Esther and Judith. There is not much history in them.

In general, the teaching is the same: it is not the powerful who come out on top but the wise and the faithful. Resilience should resonate with us today because we have all experienced it.

When the Covid crisis started, I happened to come across a book called Holy Resilience by David M. Carr, bible scholar. Carr had a catastrophic, usually fatal bicycle accident. He became interested in trauma, physical, psychological and spiritual. His experience and his study of trauma gave him different way to looking at the Bible. In his opinion, the books we have today are the result of trauma – exile, multiple destructions of Jerusalem, persecution, the cross, the split from Judaism. A really good example is the book of Daniel, born of the trauma of direct persecution. What emerges is "holy resilience" – like the last line of yesterday's Gospel: you endurance shall win you your lives.

Carr's experience leads him to claim that because the Bible is born of trauma, it is, therefore, always relevant. He concludes as follows:

Judaism and Christianity, in contrast, could build on a heritage of centuries of survival of trauma—Assyrian, Babylonian, and Hellenistic. It was Judaism and Christianity that continued into the millennia that followed, with Christianity eventually becoming the religion of the empire and acquiring powers of state violence for itself. The Romans ultimately did not stand a chance.

The writer of Daniel would have understood, I think.