

Globally, the 3rd millenium began (decimally) at 5 o'clock **this morning**, when 1st-light came to a few humans on a tiny South Pacific island. It won't hit me till half a day from now.

Today, more than any previous day thanks to electronics, humanity is experiencing that this is **one world**.

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THE COURAGE TO BEGIN AGAIN

1 Of the assessors of the fin-de-millenium global situation I've read/heard, none has mentioned that the shape the world is in is not what the LORD had in "mind." "Whenever the clay would not take the shape he wanted, he would change his mind and form it into some other shape" (Jer.18.4 CEV). The Potter had the courage to begin again (& you thought I was talking about us). In both power & love, God persists in sustaining the creation by a virtue (strength, determination, character) which we call, when it appears in our species, courage, which is what we need in order to persist when confronted with daunting, discouraging resistances/obstacles.

2 Love based on impotence cannot persist: power overwhelms it. If he'd not believed that adequate power (infinite power!) underlay Yahweh's love for his people, Jeremiah would have quit preaching when his feet sank in the mud at the bottom of the cistern. But he had no doubt of that Power (v.6): "People of Israel, I, the LORD, have power over you, just as a potter has power over clay." "Stop sinning and start living right" or "I won't change my mind" "to strike you with disaster."

Was it the peril to himself that tempted Jeremiah to quit? No, it was a combination of his experience that the people didn't listen & his anticipation that they wouldn't (v.12): "But I know you won't listen. You might as well answer, 'We have made plans to sin, and we are going to be stubborn and do what we want!'" (No surprise that [v.18] "Some of the people said, 'Let's get rid of Jeremiah!'.")

3 Since power-energy is foundational to faith-based courage, we Christians should avoid & attack the feministic identification of power with patriarchy & the rejection of both: God, this heresy says, is not power but love, & God is not Father-patriarch. In #2989.7 I said "We Christians are stuck with the di-lemma: we can reject neither...God is 'all-powerful'...nor...God is 'all-loving'...." And this in §9: "In Jesus, God's power & love are in **balance** (...the paradox dissolved neither into coercion [by giving less weight to love] nor into sentimentality [by giving less weight to power].) Radical feminism did not invent this depotentiating of deity in the interest of love; it's characteristic of two-centuries-long religious liberalism. But this neo-feminism has added a gender argument to the case against giving power, in God, a status equal to, in orthodox counterpoise with, love.

The extreme baleful effect of this gender-derogation of power in God has not been the neutering of the biblical deity but rather the Goddess' replacement of him. Today, here on Cape Cod, in a Unitarian-Universalist church, a nine-foot papier-mache statue of the Goddess (Gaia) is the idol through whom the Earth Mother is being worshiped. Less extreme are theological efforts to deny that the biblical God is patriarchal in character, has patriarchal characteristics--as though to retrofit him under the pressure of a fresh increment to the the Bible's alleged scandal of particularity about divinity (a scandal some, pathetically, think to reduce by eliminating a part of speech vis-a-vis deity, viz. pronouns). (Irony: washing out the linguistic masculinity of the biblical deity slides thinking into the scandal of universality, viz., that God is so much love as to be indistinguishable from love: Love is god.)

But what are the characteristics of the patriarch? Power & love, in **balance**. Of course the human experience of patriarchy is that no patriarch is perfect; but then neither is any lover. And to the extent that "patriarchy" signals something essential in the male, males disappear--from families & churches--when patriarchy-in-God-&-in-society disappears.

4 The Jews' ethnogonic (nation-forming) story is of God's power to defeat even the most powerful (Egypt: the Bible's 2nd book). But the Jews' re-forming story is of God's persisting love (Exile & Return) in spite of (1) his people's persisting waywardness (Jer.18.12: "'We have made plans to sin'") & (2) God's apparent defeat, as a national deity, by other national deities. But note the prophets' move. Instead of trumpeting the superiority of love over power, they persist in their faith/proclamation that God's power, instead of being diminished by his national-deity defeat, is all the more dramatically displayed in his manipulation of his-&-his-peoples enemies!

Intellectually, this line of argument was unsustainable without the stubborn faith that their God was the fons et origo, the Creator, of whatever powers there be, so any seeming weakness/defeat on his part must be a ploy, indeed a power play, on his part, his power to appear later (eschatologically! apocalyptically!) undisguised. Without this muscular theology, the Maccabean revolt could not have succeeded, & the Christian claim that Jesus didn't stay dead could not have been intellectually sustained (& Paul could not have said [2Cor.12.10] "when I am weak, I am strong").

I press my point because so much of today's Christian theology lacks muscle tone, has gone flabby, on the doctrine of God's power--has even so enervated the deity that it's not theology any longer but only high ethics parading as religion. The Bible's "God is the LORD of history & nature!" has deteriorated (especially in much recent feminist theology) to "God is our Friend."

Hellenistic Jews & Christians said "God is the LORD of history & nature" in one word, a word that had & was having little pagan use: παντοκράτωρ *pantocrator*--which we translate as "Almighty" (Lincoln's favorite God-name), "All-Powerful," "Omnipotent." Jesus grew up with the memory that his people had liberated themselves by guerrilla warfare against their Greek oppressors, & revolutionaries among his people were using the Maccabean model to press for armed revolt against Rome. He was so far from ever believing that things could get out of God's hands (i.e., his power) that on the Cross he momentarily interpreted his execution as God-abandonment (not God-weakness!). He certainly knew Greek (Galilee was more Greek than Jewish), & he may have known the Maccabean name-title for God (3Mac.2.2) μόναρχη π. *Monarche Pantocrator*, which we transliterate as "Monarch Pantocrator," literally the All-Powerful Only-Ruling Power. Defiance! The less powerful God seems to be, the more clearly we should see & the more courageously we should proclaim his power.

Today, this century's (& millenium's?) last day, God, the biblical God, seems weak, flabby, effeminate. How shall we say/live/prove he's *not*?

5 Also today, the biblical readings I arrived at in my daily sequential Bible reading happen to speak to the power/love **balance**. In reading Ps.2, I came upon v.11 (in Hebrew, only five words, which I'll translate:) "Serve the LORD with reverential fear, and rejoice with trembling." God is the All-Power, so "fear" & "trembling": God is Love, so "rejoice!" (TANAKH does not include "rejoice": "Meaning of Heb. uncertain"; but all translations have love in the psalm's last line: "Happy...." But the fourth wd. does mean "leap [with joy]," "rejoice." This Jewish translation, & NRSV, resist the plain meaning on the ground that it seems to misfit the context. I say it shocks by seeming to misfit.) So much for the OT reading.

The NT reading (Heb.4.16) I'll translate thus: "Come with boldness [Zink's German is "Freimut," free-mouth] to the throne of grace, to receive mercy & find grace to be helpful as opportunities arise." Feel the oxymoron: "throne" is power but "grace" is love in action both to us (from God) & from us (for God & neighbor). In 1.8, the parallelism to "throne" is "righteous sceptre" & "kingdom." In the next v., Jesus as judge-on-the-throne "loves righteousness and hates wickedness," exercising power in the primary interest of right(eous)ness, not love--though the biblical image of the divine judge is patriarchal, i.e. combining power & love, justice & mercy. NRSV follows a long tradition: "find grace to help in time of need." Oddly, CEV does not see Christian grace-service here: only our need is in view in this translation of the v.: "Whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help." You cannot give what you haven't received; but (Mt.10.8) "Freely you've received, freely give" (I like CEV for its feel that while we need grace, we can't buy it: "You received without paying, now give without being paid"). My "helpful as opportunities arise" renders two words meaning "timely [lit., "good-time"] help"; the Latin has the adj. we transliterate as "opportune"). Rheims (1582) has "finde grace in seasonable aide." All early translations have "help in time of need--Bishops' (1602) "the time of need"; but RSV (1881; ASV 1901) curiously adds (in italics, to indicate it's not in the Greek) "us": "to help *us* in time of need." Rightly, RSV (1946) drops "*us*," & NRSV follows. But RSV (1989) disappoints me: "grace to give us timely help." As does NJB (1985): "grace when we are in need of help." And AT (1939): "find him responsive when we need his help." Help for us, or helpfulness from us, or both? The Greek cannot settle it. From the message of the entire "letter" (really, essay), I incline to "helpful."