

Two experiences Loree and I had yesterday come together in my mind as melding East and West and old and new: (1) Old and East, "The Great Bronze Age of China [the two millenia BC, corresponding with our biblical heritage from Abraham to Jesus]: An exhibition from the People's Republic of China" (at NYC's Metro. Mus. of Art); (2) New and West, "Sabbath Evening Service" in Chappaqua's Temple Beth El on the occasion of the conclusion of that congregation's 30th anniversary (the liturgy written by Rabbi Chaim Stern--43pp. never used before, with music never used before--yet both sounding ancient and timeless as well as fresh). COMMENTARY on this interweave:

1. From the exhibit, from the service's printed program, and from my knowledge of Celtic and Gothic art, I conclude that the common characteristic--viz., phylomorphic and zoomorphic balanced flows (both realistic and stereotypic, and both numinous and decorative) root in early Sinism (from whose yin/yang Taoism developed); that the Wei-Yellow and then the Yangtse Rivers began to flow across "the West" about the time Abraham journeyed in the same direction (i.e., Sinic influence on the West--including the birth of Zoroastrianism with its light/darkness?--far preceded Marco Polo). We have been "one world" for longer than we have known it; the East/West Center at U. of Hawaii points backward as well as forward. And "all this is of God."

2. The four hours in the China exhibit were worth it just for one piece 10 1/4" high, at which I caught my breath, for it is the most perfect (in both senses: complete and beautiful) work of Taoist art I've ever seen or even heard of. A gold-inlaid bronze censer in chalice form--the base supporting a hemisphere representing the Pacific Ocean, which rages upward against a mountain Isle of the Immortals--a complex of mountains down which rivers flow, while incense smoke rises through fissures in the valleys.\* Tiny animals inhabit the crags, the topmost being a monkey (the most sacred animal) scratching his head (from a flea, or an idea, or both?). This exquisite work is humor-packed, yin/yang-loaded, and as brilliant in execution as in conception: a glorious convergence of the skills of heart, head, and hand. And a liturgical vessel, which brings us back to last night's worship for the rest of this think-sheet.

3. My "Through the Bible" class this morning asked me to reproduce the Aquinas quotation (on p.28). Curious convergence here, too: The quote is Catholic (from the Angelic Doctor, 7 cs. ago; the beginning of MY WAY OF LIFE); with some Protestant redaction (for Rabbi Stern got the quote from me in my version with the original in background); and here in a Jewish version! "The road that stretches before our feet is a challenge to the heart long before it tests the strength of our legs. Our destiny is to run to the edge of the world and beyond, off into the darkness: sure, for all our blindness; secure, for all our helplessness; strong, for all our weakness; gaily in love, for all the pressure on our hearts. In that darkness beyond the world, we can begin to know the world and ourselves. We begin to understand that we were not made to pace out our lives behind prison walls, but to walk in the arms of God." So I thought to myself: While preparing to distribute that quote to this class, why not fill out the page with this morning's meditation on yesterday?

4. \* Another fruitful speculation: Taoist influence on the Greeks, especially in Stoicism, seems highly probably. Take the earth as God's body (on the metaphor of our body moving cosmically and communally--which Paul makes into "Body of Christ"): here in our artifact the mountains are the world-body's bones, the rivers its blood, and the incense smoke (i.e., the "mists" in the mountains) its breath, its most numinous aspect (as the Bible's *ruach-pneuma-spiritus*, as God's in-breathed [Latin, "in-spired"] breath into mud [Hebrew, *adamah*, thus "Adam"]). As for photeric mysticism (such as in the prolog of the Gospel of Jn.), the artifact is a visual representation of Unchanging Victorious Light lapped and challenged by an active (not negative) Ahriman-Darkness, which (Jn.1.5) cannot "overcome" (NIV, curiously, "understand") it. Cp. Light/Darkness in Hasidism, rooted in Jewish Iran/Iraq Talmud struggle.

5. Some juicy quotes: (1, p.27): "Now at last I've found You,/ Now at last I am found." (2, p.23): "God does not die on the day when we cease to believe..., but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illuminated by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder the source of which is beyond all reason." (3, p.23): "How does a dream come true?/ Let the dream decide."