

On Patriarchy, Religious Patriarchy, and Human Agency in the Anthropocene

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Forging a bright future for all life on earth requires human agency. Humans are male and female. It follows that human agency is masculine and feminine, and the efficiency and efficacy of human agency is therefore shaped by gender relations. If gender relations are guided by patriarchal gender ideology, human agency is bound to be patriarchal and therefore conducive to female oppression, irresponsible parenthood, and the subjugation of nature. Therefore, in order to forge a bright future for all life on earth, it is necessary to outgrow the patriarchal paradigm of gender relations, in families and everywhere else, and evolve toward a renewed paradigm of male/female interpersonal communion of mutual restraint, respect, and reverence. This cultural evolution may not be sufficient for the survival of the human species, but it is absolutely necessary. It is also possible. Not easy, but possible. Religious patriarchy persists as a vexing obstacle to social justice and ecological sanity. But as we see, via the signs of the times, that the patriarchal era of human history is passing away, men and women can jointly forge a new human civilization of solidarity and sustainability in a cohabitable planet -- a living communion between man and woman, and between humans and the human habitat.

Then take a huge leap to the final paragraphs.....

How to go from here to there? By invoking the African principle of *Ubuntu*, which means "I am because we are," the kind of path to take and the kinds of paths to avoid can be summarized as follows:

"I am because we are" ~ This is the natural binary, balancing both self and mutuality in both men and women; humans *are* because other humans and the ecosphere *are*, and abide in an ecocentric culture that fosters solidarity and sustainability in both the objective and subjective dimensions of life. This is the kind of path to seek.

"I am because we are not" ~ This is a patriarchal binary of maximum self and minimum mutuality; strong humans *are* because other humans and the ecosphere *are not*, and therefore should be objectified and subjugated for the benefit of the strong humans. This is anthropocentric patriarchal masculinity, a kind of path to be avoided.

"I am not because we are" ~ This is a patriarchal binary of minimal self and maximum mutuality; some humans (women, weak men) *are not* because stronger humans *are*, and this is the traditional way of evading conflict and making things work. This is anthropocentric patriarchal femininity, whereby some women internalize patriarchy to the point of becoming as patriarchal as the male patriarchs. This is another path to avoid.

Ubuntu also applies to the interdependence between humans and the human habitat. There is a symmetry between man/woman relations and human/nature relations. Man abuse of woman, and human abuse of nature, go hand in hand. The converse is also true: human abuse of nature reverts to man abuse of woman, in a wicked vicious cycle that has not been broken since the inception of human history. It is now time to break it. Back to *Ubuntu*. We are because the biosphere is. We are because the ecosphere is. Sixty years after *Silent Spring*, and now more than ever before, "it seems reasonable to believe, that the more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for the destruction of our race. Wonder and humility are wholesome emotions, and they do not exist side by side with a lust for destruction" (Carson, 1962).

This is the great challenge we face in the 21st century and the 3rd millennium: to outgrow the patriarchal mindset of domination that has prevailed since time immemorial in order to give life -- all life -- a new chance to flourish in our planet, the only planet in the universe known to offer the conditions for life to emerge, evolve, and survive. For humans, such flourishing may entail a significant reduction in numbers (hopefully via responsible parenthood), moderation in the consumption of energy and nonessential merchandise, and minimization of waste. Then, future generations can refocus human agency on what really matters: integral human development of men and women in their masculinity and femininity, consciously embedded in an integral ecology.

References: a long list then follows ...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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