

**Recovering the God of Eros: Listening to a Different Drummer**  
**Deuteronomy 30:11-20, Romans 8:31,35,37-39**

**The Vacuum that is Spiritual Death**

I remember seeing trees in my youth, usually old apple trees in the hedge row that were almost dead due to years of neglect. No pruning. No fertilizer. No attention paid to them. As a result every year the fruit, if there was any, was smaller and more gnarled, more infested with insects, more inedible. It was dying fruit from a dying tree. Here is our first lesson.

Dead trees bear dead fruit. Dying things give birth only to more death.

When I last spoke here in November I suggested that peacemakers were sorely needed and that the fainthearted need not apply. We had just seen the passage of the worst federal legislation to corrupt the civil liberties of American citizens called the US Patriot Act. This legislation gave unprecedented freedom to law enforcement, Immigration Services, the Dept of Justice, and the FBI to spy on citizens, to harass immigrants, to question or to detain without attorney or representation, without any civil rights such as phone calls to family to ANYONE who might be suspected as a potential so-called "terrorist." Since that time thousands of people of color have been stopped, harassed, detained and now live in a climate of terror created by a democratic system run amuck. These plans of John Ashcroft drawn up long BEFORE 9/11 were easily passed by a traumatized Congress.

And here is a second lesson.

Fear breeds fear. And when people are afraid they can be manipulated, they can be silenced, they can be controlled.

Since November we have been told that war is necessary because there were huge stashes of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to be used against the US. And in our arrogance we deigned to come to the rescue on our white chargers to pre-empt such a (potential) dastardly deed. War is necessary to disarm Iraq they said. Even though huge stashes have not been found and Iraq was disarming and destroying the few missiles they still had, war is still necessary because Hussein harbors terrorists they said.

But now there is less talk about disarmament or terrorists. Now that the war is underway and there are no terrorists and no weapons of mass destruction, now we must liberate the Iraqi people they say. Watch as the language becomes more shrill. More religious rhetoric is being used. It is, according to one analyst, now sounding like a "crusade message, the fight of 'good versus evil' and 'right versus wrong.'" (Dietmar Herz "US War priorities Shift Away from Disarming Iraq", Reuters, 4/1/03)

Now on this holy day set aside to think on spiritual things, let us step away from justifications and excuses for war. Let us move ourselves away from the battlefield and open our spiritual eyes to see what is happening.

**What Spiritual Death looks like**

*The Experience of War*

*Our Experience*

Spiffy Generals

stand before TV cameras reading the triumphs of the day.

A coopted media

Drone truncated stories of "slight collateral damage."

Suntanned pilots on bombing missions  
hurry home for children's soccer practice  
Leaving puffs of smoke, tiny licks of flames barely noticed in the sand.

Gloating politicians  
Do not acknowledge body bags arriving on our shores.  
They are counting the days until the Devil's demise  
Until all of his fiefdom and all who dwell therein are controlled.  
"The Axis of Evil is breaking. The Axis of Evil is falling."

Rally around the flag and sing, "God is on *our* side."

### ***Their Experience***

Sirens at midnight. Explosions at noon.  
Take cover and hide.  
No need to go to work. The factory is gone. Overnight.  
No schools. It is unsafe to walk the roads.  
"Can we go to Grandmas? Why won't the noise go away?"  
"Don't drink the water, child. It will make you sick."  
"Did you hear? The hospital has been bombed."

Devils. All Americans are devils.  
Look what they do to people like us.  
Look at the landmines. Look at the roadsides.

Damn the Devils. Damn the American devils.  
Rally around the flag and sing, "God is on *our* side."

### ***God's Experience***

"My Children, love one another."  
"Blessed are you who live as Peacemakers"

Bombs rain.  
Tear drops  
fall  
from heaven  
Unnoticed.

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### **Spiritual Disease on World-Wide Display**

When we denigrate the erotic impulse to create and to connect we fall in love with the power of violence. When we are separated from a God of Eros we will fill ourselves full of ego and self-absorption. I suggest that our country's leaders and the masses of our society are terribly disconnected from the Spiritual Source of Life that I call the God of Eros. And, our spiritual disease is now evident to the entire planet. The spiritual vacuum in this so-called Christian nation is having a love affair with death and the world watches. On Feb 15, 10 million people from 750 cities across the globe held peace rallies. On Mar 16 Bishop Desmond Tutu called for a global candlelight vigil and, again, millions participated.

And the Apostle Paul writes we fight against powers and principalities. And the battle is visibly obvious in our lifetime. But it is not, contrary to President Bush's dichotomous thinking "Us versus them," i.e. the Good Americans against the Bad Iraqis or French (or anyone else who doesn't agree with us.) No, the battle is a battle of spiritual

proportions: It is the spirit of fear versus the spirit of love. It is the battle of the death-dealing powers and principalities versus the Life-giving source of Love.

### **A Call to Eros**

I believe we have, in the Christian Church, been in error by emphasizing agape, the Greek word for love defined as a platonic, selfless love. We have chosen agape as the model for our love for one another to the exclusion of Eros. But Eros love is a deep, passionate, embrace that connects and reaches from the depths of our souls outward toward the other. Instead, we have preferred to leave God as a rather distant but kindly patriarchal Father figure for disobedient children, rather than to envision God as the Pleasure-seeking, Lover God, this God of Eros who reaches out for the Beloved. And guess who is the beloved?

*We* are the Beloved. *We* are the loved one whom Eros calls us to join and become one with. This is the Passion that says, "I want you by my side. I long to be complete in you. I will move heaven and earth to create a new world with you." It is a Passion that engages at a deep level that calls us to the intimacy of being known fully.

Medieval mystic, Hildegard of Bingen, writes of God as Eros in this way, "Creation is allowed in intimate love to speak to the Creator as if to a lover. As the Creator loves the creation so the creation loves the Creator. Creation was fashioned to be adorned, was gifted and showered and fashioned to be adorned. The whole world has been embraced by this kiss."

If we live disconnected from a God of Eros, we seek death.

We grow comfortable with violence.

We become immune to suffering. And the insidious thing is, we can justify it.

When Eros is missing, what we can do in the name of our God...!

Arrogance can justify bombing Planned Parenthood and other women's clinics.

Ego can justify bulldozing in Palestine the homes of the families of the suicide bombers.

Self-righteousness can justify the humiliation of full body searches of any person of color at an airport.

We can justify not getting involved with the poor and the suffering people. (It is probably their own fault anyway.) And, like Pilot, when we disconnect from Eros, we wash our hands. Are we our brother's keeper afterall?

When Ross Perot was running for President he said of NAFTA that there would be a "huge sucking noise" as US jobs left our country for south of the borders to the poorer countries should the legislation be passed. Not only was he correct, but the description is apt when we disconnect from Eros and live ego-driven lives, self-absorbed lives, blinded to the needs and suffering of others. When we try to deny that our own humanity is made in the image of the divinity, there is this "huge sucking noise" as the Spirit of God gets squeezed out. When we follow our own ego our spiritual identity as children of God gets sucked out of our marrow. And, we are left standing there a hollow vacuum, devoid of spirit, devoid of love, and proud, very proud of ourselves. When Eros is missing, what we do in the name of our God...!

Now is the time for Christians to stand firmly, visibly, and courageously for what our baptismal covenant means: We are on the side of Life, of Love. We believe Love is more powerful than fear or death or the powers of death. And, the Giver of Life calls us

to eternal life, beginning here and now. Nothing can separate us from God's love. Nothing. Of this we are clear.

### **Recovering the God of Eros**

When God is Eros, Love whispers "Come play." Jesus said "I come to give you life in all its abundance." (Jn 10:10) It is the invitation to romp uninhibited in the Garden of Eden with the first earth creatures and to walk at sunset with God by our side. It is to earn a reputation with Jesus as a party-goer and a winebibber. We know joy because Love has conquered our fears.

There is no fun, no whimsy, no delight in carrying guns, in dropping bombs, in setting up systems of "us versus them". There is no joy in the self-righteous or the arrogant.

But there is playfulness and wisdom in children. Jesus suggested them as the model for the realm of God. We have much to learn from children.

We have an Arts After School program in which we take Penn students to an after school program at a shelter and a local church in West Philly once a week to sing and do art projects with them. This last Friday we read a story about children who made a flag for the whole world. (*The Day the Earth Was Silent*)

Then, we asked our 20 children to make flags that illustrated the life they wanted for themselves, to dream of a peaceful world. As adults we had our own ideas of what this would look like but the children surprised us. One flag in particular seemed to be a dismal failure. A boy had drawn soldiers and weapons and two groups of people labeled evil and good. There was a stick figure in between the two groups. We thought to ourselves, "Oh no. He's missed the whole point of the art project. He is simply reflecting the war images of the culture that comes over the TV set."

But when asked to explain it he said the central figure was himself and he was not sure which side he was on yet, the good or the evil side. When asked who Jesus loved, he responded "All of them." He was deep. He is working on deep theological concepts and he was 9 or 10 years old. He is struggling to hear the voice of spirit calling him to life and love and yet is aware of the call of the spirit of destruction as well.

"Unless we become as little children we will not see the realm of God."

*"When was the last time you got excited about seeing the moon and stars? Have you looked at them as if through the eyes of a two year old? I cannot explain what they are-it doesn't matter. They are lights in the sky. They can be anything.*

*And does it matter who turns on the lights when you enter a room? It does if you are two years old. The power of light is right there in your own hands. Such power there is to allow yourself to see and to allow others to see all by yourself. How wonderful!*

*When was the last time you hopped...just for the sake of hopping? Count to three and jump! Again! Feel the muscles and enjoy the feel of your body returning to that of a child." (Melissa Scholer Guthrie\*)*

"Unless we become as little children we will not see the realm of God."

Secondly, when God is Eros, Love whispers "Come, let us make love." Jesus said all our laws, all our legalisms, all our literalisms can be easily summarized into one word, Love.

As a workaholic, I was in my usual state of being overwhelmed with tasks to do at work and probably also overwhelmed at home too when I stopped dead in my tracks with a sudden thought. “What happens if none of this matters?” I thought. “What happens if the only thing that matters, the only thing anyone remembers, the only thing relevant, or the only thing that *really* impacts the world is spreading love? Each day. With every person I meet?”

How would our lives be different if we took the risk to do something unexpected to a neighbor, something fun, something that conveys “I am glad you are on the planet at this time with me.” What would happen if every day’s goals could be summarized as, “What can I do to spread compassion today?” Perhaps the Genesis directive was not to go forth and multiply but to go forth and make love. Wouldn’t we live differently? What would we be doing now when our country says we must be warring?

### **The Risks and the Christian Response**

We must make no mistake that the powers of death seek to quench the power of Love, that those who take courageous stands of compassion are often persecuted, often silenced, usually trivialized, and always scoffed by the world. We must be clear that the powers and principalities do not take kindly to calls for life and joy and love. Instead, the powers and principalities lie, twist the truth, pervert justice, and demonize neighbors. Let’s be clear Christians are not immune from the effects of such battles.

But, we live by the drumbeat of a different drummer; Eros, Passion.

This drumbeat calls us to

appreciate life as gift,  
appreciate neighbor as friend,  
appreciate enemy as teacher.

It is not the drumbeat of the world calling us to war, war, war. Eros is the drumbeat that calls us to love, love, love, without limits, without qualification, without precedent.

Eros is an exuberant love. It is an extravagant love.

Eros is nonsensical. It defies the worldly standards as illogical.

Eros is a spontaneous love. It is a love that goes the distance.

Eros is a love that goes down deep into the soul. It is a love unafraid of the muck of life because we know love will see us through.

Eros is a love unafraid because love is greater than fear. This love is the Light that the darkness can not extinguish.

It is a drumbeat that says “Dance in the sunlight. Be open to vulnerability, as children are open. Be in the present moment, not in some future, ‘What if?’”

This drumbeat calls us to live positively,

Live creatively,  
Live compassionately,  
Live joyfully,  
Live erotically,  
Live ecstatically.

Life seeks life. And love begets more love.

We are lovers of the world.

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\*Unpublished letter to Beverly Dale

