



P E R S P E C T I V E S

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Forgive Them Father, For They Know Not... *Goodbye to Patriarchy*

This column is being written on Father's Day—as the humorist Jim Gaffigan observed, “the government mandated day of paternal gratitude.” By now, everything conventional that needs to be written already has been. What motivates this column is to look behind the conventional nostrums of the day to the more basic, the more archetypal, the deeper regions of what it means to be a “father” as opposed to merely being a sperm donor.

There are many legitimate reasons for all of us, not just feminists, to be woefully depressed by what the “patriarchy” has done to our civilization. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word means “a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is traced through the male line.” It goes on to explain that patriarchy is essentially “a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.” Yes, Patriarchy from the Greek root literally means “the rule of the father” or “chief.” So, sorry to break it to you fellas on Father's Day, but if you think the world is messed up (and it is), it appears that we males of the species are to blame. And not just white males in Western societies.

Many scholars believe that patriarchy began at least 4,000 years BCE as hunter-gatherer societies were supplanted by less gender-equal farming cultures. With the onset of the Hebrew religion, the role of women was excluded from the “god-humanity covenant”. In China, Confucianism refined the patriarchy and assigned inferior roles to women, which was then formally adopted as a religion by the Han Dynasty 2,200 years ago. Add to that, the totally male hierarchy of the Catholic Church and top it off by noting that the Muslim world, since the time of Mohammed, has taken the concept of societal male dominance even further for the last 1400 years. That's a lot of tiers in human cultures across the ages experiencing what patriarchy has wrought. Why all this reflection on patriarchy on Father's Day? Why particularly, when today's title is a scriptural reference to the final words of Jesus on the Cross?

Like every person reading this who honestly looks around, civilization is not in a good place and the biosphere is even worse off. With so little time to adequately respond to civilization's destruction brought on by climate change, it is critical we understand how we got here so we can change course. That “understanding” must begin with an acknowledgement that it is the patriarchy that has brought us to this point and that only a full inclusion of all persons, regardless of gender, will be required to pull together as equals for us to save humanity as we currently know it. That would start by releasing the flawed notion that masculinity and femininity are mere by-products of human hormones or genitalia.

It isn't an accident that humans decided they could “subdue” nature, thereby creating the current conditions where the biosphere is so overheated that 40,000,000 people were refugees last year—most of them climate refugees. It isn't an accident that we are suffering from intolerable heat waves, unrelenting tornadoes, constant flooding on a biblical scale, and watching as the frozen ice mass at the North Pole melts into the sea even while the South Pole is calving 1600 square mile icebergs, larger than the State of Rhode Island. It's also no accident that the forces of totalitarianism are politically ascendant as nation states become buffeted by the waves of immigrants, democracies fail to put a higher value on political integrity than

expediency, and that we have built a military-industrial complex globally that feeds the incessant wars we suffer from.

What is the answer to all this woe?

It is time to end the patriarchy, knowing that the most admired of men are those who have developed a strong inner feminine aspect of themselves to balance the inner masculine they already embody—even if they didn't fully realize it. In a similar vein, women who have a highly developed feminine aspect are always more effective when they can balance this with cultivating their inner masculine. Why is this important?

Many wonderful aspects of masculinity can best be embraced by recognizing that our feminine side provides us with the desire to nurture as well as to conquer. Those aspects of masculinity that inspire men to lay down their lives for their loved ones in battle or in a civilian crisis is something to respect. It is a genuine desire to serve that motivates “the brave man” to “do the right thing.” Embedded in this highest aspect of the masculine is the desire to protect and to nurture.

Like the proverbial Yin & Yang, those forces of dualism depicting how seemingly opposite forces are actually complementary and interconnected, our masculine energies are best deployed when merged with our inner feminine. From this place we become interdependent with each other, and the natural world we left so long ago when patriarchy first took over. It's time we healed that divide of male and female so that, as a revitalized “whole” humanity, we can apply ourselves to rebuilding the “nest” we were so graciously provided when humans arose on the earth.

What better day than Father's Day to trumpet the effectiveness we will achieve when we take the best aspects of what it means to be a father, and consciously cultivate them. Let's celebrate how a balanced masculine-feminine energy can restore peace to our relationships, stability to our communities, regeneration of the biosphere, and liberation for the “starving masses yearning to be free.”

Being a father is ultimately about lovingly taking responsibility. First, for ourselves. Second, for our families. Third, for our societies. Fourth, for the biosphere. And lastly, for the generations yet unborn who can be saved from making the same terrible mistakes as prior generations.

Yes, we men should be “forgiven” for what we've done, as we didn't really intend for the incredible damage that patriarchy has wrought. We “didn't know” what we were doing. And we can also thank men for all the good they have done with the best of fatherly intentions in shepherding our human tribe down through the ages. Since we know the difference between the harm that has been done and all the good as well, we are now free to become wholistic masculine-feminine fathers who feel responsibility in our bones connected to the love that is in our hearts. Happy Father's Day!

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