

**"Jihad and Abiding in God"
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If the destruction of the twin towers on September 11, 2001 changed everything, the Tsunami on Boxing Day confirmed that change. It is clear that the modern era ended at Hiroshima in 1945. The end of the so-called "post-modern" era was announced by George Bush the First when he proclaimed a "New World Order" on the occasion of the celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The "disorder" that actually it actually turned out to be declared itself on that terrible 9/11.

Now we have seen a disaster of "biblical" proportions and amazingly we have seen it from a thousand vantage points by means of digital photography. And almost instantaneously we have thousands of personal reflections of the meaning and significance of this event from weblogs of people whose convictions, experiences, cultures, languages, and commitments are entirely different from our own.

The "modern" world was defined by the colonial rivalries of nation states that finally exploded in the global vision of destruction at the end of the Second World War. Information, secrecy and expertise were controlled in the service of global power the extraction of resources. The "post-modern" world was bi-polar and Cold-War driven, tempered by mutually assured destruction (MAD). Information was controlled by its context and tightly packaged for its social and political purpose. Former colonies were emerging at the initiative of global economy and playing off one major power against another.

Each era is definable by a scene or a paradigm, which is a representation of its presuppositions about the nature of truth and life. Each develops its own consensus around this scene that develops a series of commitments, of truisms that are assumed and beliefs that are embraced in contrast to other earlier ones that are abandoned, rejected or ignored. Every crisis and event participates in this cultural consensus unconsciously applying its tenets to every decision.

The current world-view is dominated by the assumption of jihad In this scene the global economy is under attack by those whose resentment would return us to a world of local warlords and Sharia law. Ironically, it is the fact that our enemies do not play by the rules of our era but that they exploit them to destroy it that has illustrated how the world has reformed around a new paradigm.

The image of burning buildings and screaming people running from a shock wave and a cloud and soot is now book-ended by the images of thousands running before the tsunami or being swept away in its roiling currents. And by

now hundreds of thousands are left to grieve all over the world. Just as people were united around the world by seeing on TV the destruction on 9/11 brought about by the enemies of the Western economy, so the world was united by watching the horror of the wave hitting.

What was different about these two events despite their contrasting locations was, of course, that one was initiated by human agents, and the other by a freak natural event, an earthquake. Beneath that difference is the question that is common to both: why would God let something like this happen? Other perhaps less noticeable commonalities have to do with the fact that we see these events from privately citizen-owned video sources. And in each case there are stories recounted of heroism, initiative, and simple human feeling that move us. These clues tell us something about this era of struggle and what our behavior in it must be.

Today's gospel gives us John's account of the baptism of Jesus. John's concern here, it seems to me, is centered around two issues that I think actually relate to this complex outline with which I've begun. The first is the question of sacrifice that is raised by the curious identification of Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." In the Hellenistic world as in Palestine at the time of John's writing, the notion of sacrifice would have been inextricably bound-up with that of a Lamb. That is to say the cultural scene of that era would have included a sacrifice to whatever deity or deities were current locally and the universal symbol for that act would have been a goat or a lamb.

The Baptist, by naming "the one on whom the holy spirit descended and remained" thus designating as messiah "he who is greater because before" thus as a sacrificial beast, makes a point which would not have been missed by those who read the gospel or who heard it read. It marked the Church's choice of Isaiah's suffering servant model of a messiah over the traditional "Davidic Monarch" model. That choice would have disrupted or distressed the members of that culture as well as it does those of our own. It would have been "counter-cultural" where the emperor was understood as bringer of peace because of his harsh justice and overwhelming military might to propose a model of leadership by service, forgiveness, inclusion and reconciliation.

Our own "born again" president apparently has not recognized this irony. His approach to the jihadist challenge to western culture and society comes out of an older model, one of nation versus nation warfare rules. No doubt the pressure of politics has meant the need to respond quickly before carefully considering the implications. That's understandable but his response is modeled on the Second World War. Now I don't mean to become partisan in my remarks. My critique is

not of him or even of his party. It is rather that we have not understood the realities that confront us in the contemporary jihadist conflict.

For John's gospel and the early church to adopt a suffering servant model of messiah meant that it could serve the poor and the oppressed and let go of its dependence on a security state. It meant that the God who "became flesh" and "dwelt among us" was one that we could emulate, without might and power, but through faith and compassion. With self-offering love we can take initiative and responsibility for expressing the presence of God in Christ wherever we are.

Now the second issue that locates John's concern in this passage is the use of the expression "abide" as in "Where are you staying (abiding)?" to which Jesus replies "Come and see." In the sixties people put it this way: "where are you coming from—man?" Our abode signifies the cultural scene or paradigm out of which we live and make our decisions, where we come from. When John's gospel was written the Jewish community and those gentiles who were disillusioned with the Pax Romana were seeing the transformation of the cultural consensus and needed to take it on themselves to find another source of security.

Like most paternalistic regimes the Empire of Rome through the divinization of the emperor had promised security and faithfulness to its subjects. Likewise the Jews had promulgated the promise of the God of Israel who would provide security and the vindication to God's faithful people. With successive taxation and slavery, the promise of imperial Rome proved to be empty. With the destruction of the Temple Israel's God appeared to be powerless before the onslaught of Roman brutality.

John's Gospel offers these two groups an alternative abode. Because the spirit comes down upon Jesus and abides in him and therefore he abides in the Father and the Father in him, he can offer to abide in us and we in him. Whatever era or cultural situation we may abide in, we are now primarily rooted and grounded in God and in the community and in the cultural consensus that God provides. The scene and paradigm that we live in and live out of is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Remarkably, this primary abode equips us to live in the scene of every era but not to be defined and determined by it. And it especially equips us to live in the era we are just moving into, what I have called the jihadist era. What is called for from us in this era is a high degree of autonomy, of initiative and responsibility for the values and commitments of liberal western democracy and free market economics. The best example of is the action of the people on Flight 93 who using their cell phones discovered the extent of their predicament and

took matters into their own hands saving any number of lives and further destruction of our infrastructure by frustrating their hijackers plans.

The mission of the church is like that; it depends on each of us recognizing the abiding presence of God and becoming a sign of that presence wherever we are. It also involves us confronting the blindness and dysfunctional assumptions of our own culture. Jesus' life as reported by the New Testament was a sign of protest and confrontation against the sacrificial system that determined the consensus of his day. He was accused of planning to "blow-up" the Temple that was the central symbol of the cultural scene. By consistently confronting that system he revealed the truth about God and by the resurrection God confirmed his testimony and exposed the murderous lie at the heart of that system and every cultural system.

This is true so much so that in the recent devastation of the tsunami, the claim of God's judgment against sinners is exposed as well. In a world that has largely accepted interfaith co-existence and where science has sufficiently accounted for earthquakes and tsunamis, religion can no longer use the judgment of God as an organizing principle. At the same time, the tsunami has exposed as false the claims of the jihadi terrorists that they were acting as God's agents in bringing about judgment on the west. By way of our loving kindness and generosity for the victims of the devastation, we now can confront the lie at the heart of religion, that God is a God of anger and wrath. Instead, our generosity and acts of loving-kindness will display the truth about God.

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