

“The Messiah” by Haendel  
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In listening to Haendel’s “Messiah” for the umpteenth time I thought I detected a central point. This oratorio is an object of worship in Protestant countries. Its climax is generally considered to be the “Hallelujah” chorus, at the end of the second part. When this chorus is performed, in English-speaking countries the audience stands up, as I witnessed personally at Lincoln Center in New York. However, the central point I thought I detected is at the end of the first part. There are two consecutive Airs for the female voices, the first for Alto and the second for Soprano. The first is “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd”. The text is taken from the Old Testament (Isaiah 40:11). The second Air is “Come unto Him, all ye that labour”. The text is taken from the New Testament (Matthew 11:28-29). The joining of the two texts is due to Charles Jennens, , who collected the biblical passages which form the text for the

oratorio. Haendel composed very tender music for these texts. In my view, text and music both express caregiving – a loving parental attitude.

I also asked myself which is the connection between these two centers of the oratorio, one explicit, the other hidden. Why is the other hidden? I suggest that we see here the dialectic between matriarchy and patriarchy. Caregiving is typical of the original matriarchal culture, which however, after the advent of the patriarchal culture, 4-5 thousand years ago, is submerged and forbidden. It may emerge in works of art, but it is still hidden. The Hallelujah chorus, the explicit center of the Messiah, is a paean to the patriarchal God the Father: “King of Kings! Lord of Lords!”

This dialectic is also to be found in the history of psychoanalysis. Freudian orthodoxy is a typical example of authoritarian patriarchal culture. The matriarchal alternative, strongly disapproved, re-emerged with Ferenczi and was later consolidated by such analysts as Fromm, Winnicott and Bowlby. In particular, this attitude is also to be found in Romano Biancoli’s last case which I shall discuss in the forthcoming meeting in Ravenna on June 5-6. This loving approach in psychoanalysis is synthesized by Fromm in a note unpublished in his lifetime: “Understanding and loving are inseparable.”