

by  
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the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"? Surely it does, but I wish to focus on this "beginning."

Many have sought to ameliorate this text by claiming that "fear" means "awe" or "reverence." That is fine as far as it goes, but the fact is that when fear is to be part of our response to God, we have not yet known "perfect love."

One searches in vain in the authentic teaching of Jesus that we should fear God. I

have sought to show that the concept of a two-sided or two-faced god (or what I call the Janus-faced god) is the essential view of pagan religion mixing what Rudolf Otto in his book (*The Idea of*

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*the Holy*) called *fascinans* and *tremendum*.<sup>2</sup> We are both attracted and repelled by this kind of divinity.

The two-faced god is the god of all archaic religion. It is to be found in the view of God in the Jewish tradition, particularly Deuteronomy, and has been taken up into the Christian tradition due to a failure to distinguish the two distinct streams within apostolic Christianity, viz, that of Christianity oriented to the sacrificial system in Jerusalem and that of writers like Paul or

# "FEAR NOT"

**T**he gospel begins with these words from the angels, "Fear not Mary."<sup>1</sup> The risen Christ, the first words to his disciples, "Don't be afraid, there is nothing to fear here." The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews said that Jesus came "to take away the fear of death" and then the writer of first John says that "perfect love casts out fear."

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The same word that is used for casting out of fear is also used for casting out demons. God's perfect love casts out all of our fears. The fear of punishment, the fear of hell, the fear that God is somehow out to get us, the fear that somehow we're not going to be good enough, the fear that we

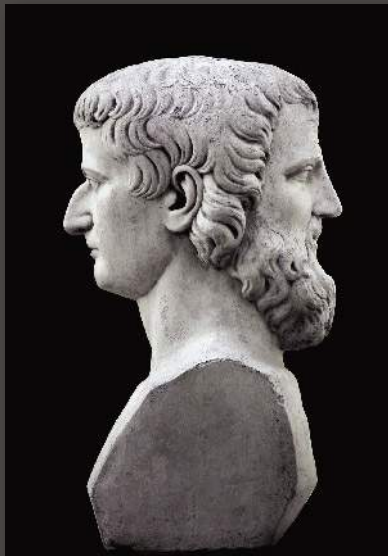
are not going to make it. The fact is that we live in a universe where, from God's perspective, fear has been cast out of heaven like lightning.

We no longer have to fear death or dying because we believe in a God of life, a God of hope, a God who brings resurrection, who will bring wholeness and a new creation that will be so extraordinary that words cannot describe it. And that is our hope!

The words above were part of a sermonette I gave and I was

honored to have these be the final words of the documentary *Hellbound*? These words were not meant as some form of Pollyannaish tripe, or some utopian dream, but in fact as gospel.

Is it not the case that Scripture says that "the fear of



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the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel.

So it is that Christianity, canonizing both streams has brought back into the mix the

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concept of the *tremendum* or the fear of God and has worked this out in its doctrines of double-predestination, penal atonement and views of punishment in the afterlife. In short, there is a historical explanation as to the where, how and why the gospel was “corrupted.”

Authentic Christianity heeding the exposure and deconstruction of this Janus-faced god in certain New Testament writers (and certain Jewish scriptural traditions) has always been a part of historic Christianity. Today it is becoming the singular point around which we are discovering that the God of the gospel is not two-faced but is singularly Love.

While there is a virtual tsunami of literature in the last century that deconstructs this archaic religious view imported back into Christianity, it has barely filtered down into the

mainstream church or the person in the pew. This is primarily due to the way the Bible has been understood as a divine communiqué or

telegram and the displacement of a Jesus centered view of the divine. While much work remains to be done, enough has been done in biblical and theological studies to challenge the hegemony of the Bible as a

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“perfect” text, and especially that of a harmonizing or “flat” rendering of Scripture.

The church of the 21st century will take full advantage of the shift that is occurring as we wean ourselves from any notion that God is to be feared, for it is only when we can wrap our minds around “perfect love” that we will lose not just fear of God but also fear of the other, whether friend or enemy.

As we come to know the

Abba of Jesus, we will also know the power of Love, a Love that permeates all our relationships and brings real healing, reconciliation and alone is the true Power of the Gospel.

The implication is that we must rethink all of our doctrines of revelation, Scripture, the Trinity, Jesus, the Gospel and ethics and spirituality.

By so doing we may find ourselves converted not to religion but to the authentic Life found in God, poured out by the Father in the sending of

the Son and the Spirit. Thus, we will be the community that lives in love and so bears witness in our life together to the gospel. □

1. Luke 1:30, KJV  
2. Michael Hardin, *The Jesus Driven Life* (Lancaster: JDL Press, 2013), second edition.

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