

Hope Within History

By Walter Brueggemann

Chapter 3: Blessed are the History Makers, pg. 57

On the Role of the Religious Tradition and the Making of History

In every generation, our own included, the people who make the time-line, the people who sponsor and benefit from the headline, want to manage the process, deny the hurt, eradicate the ambiguity. In a word, *they badly want to nullify and silence the voice from outside which keeps calling attention to that for which the system cannot account.*

Thus, the conflict between king and prophet is not simply a conflict over ethical substance. It is also and primarily a conflict about processes of interaction, modes of communication, and judgments about what matters in the ordering of public life.

The history makers are those who have the capacity and courage to disclose the human processes. The dominant voices, however, are those which want to close the human processes in the interest of order and the protection of a monopoly which always needs to be guarded. My preliminary judgment is that when the disclosing process is halted, history making comes to an end. Where history making ends, society is at the edge of losing its humanness. Thus, history makers as I characterize them are always set in contexts where the agents of domination want to stop free play of the historical process.

There are of course several ways to silence such voices of disclosure which keep history open. The silencing can happen by priestly control, by political intimidation, by theological orthodoxy, by economic oppression, and by technical reason. Every established power has a vested interest in stopping the historical process.

The wonder is that in ancient Israel (and often since) the voices of disclosure are not silenced. The result is that imperial power is always in jeopardy. Somewhere, in a notice I cannot now locate, Karl Popper has said a remarkable thing about history making— that all history is written by the winners, the people on top, with one exception. That exception, says Popper, is the history of Jesus and his community. I would extend Popper's observation to say it is the history of Yahweh and the community of Yahweh that writes history from underneath.