

This Thinksheet's PROJECT is to take a fresh look at the word which, more than any other, is radical-feminist code for what's wrong with heaven & earth....Three positions: (1) radical-feminist (something's wrong with heaven & earth); (2) conservative (nothing's wrong with either); (3) biblical (something's wrong with earth but not with heaven).

1 Badmouthing "patriarchy" is not only fashionable, it's a credential for entrée into polite society & esp. into liberal intellectual circles both secular & religious. As a contrarian, I've never been overly concerned with open-sesame speech; indeed, I've been critical of it as pandering: "Most human utterance is self-promotive or self-protective" (Nels Ferré). My models for this behavior of mine (if it's not immodest to say so) are Jesus (who used words with integrity of soul) & Socrates (who ripped words out of the social fabric to let them speak for themselves).

2 As a house can become too decrepit for safe occupancy & sound refurbishing-investment, a word may become so denigrated as to be not worth the effort & risks of reinstating. (Or even a whole class of words: instance, some of my friends say, the Bible's [all-masculine] pronouns for God--as I see it, a fatal concession). I believe that "patriarchy" is *not* such a word. It's denotatum is sound (it accurately states the Bible's divine-authority idea), & the present opprobrium of its connotation will pass when this second wave of feminism passes (as is now beginning to happen).

3 Staked solidly into the Christian ground is the plain fact that Jesus' favorite name (not just title) for his-&-our God was **Father**, whose patriarchal will ("not my will but yours" [L.22.42]) was for him the first, middle, & last word (as the Gospels abundantly testify). Absolute obedience is a patriarchal characteristic, & Jesus models it in relation to the One the UCC Statement of Faith calls "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father" (dropped, of course, from the feministically bowdlerized versions). "Say it ain't so" sang a Broadway musical, & some have been so turned off by this central note in Jesus' understanding of his mission that they have struggled to attribute it to a later generation (as have some in the Jesus Seminar). So there we have two preposterous: (1) Jesus' favorite name for God wasn't his favorite name for God; & (2) Jesus' central note in his mission, viz. absolute obedience to the Father, wasn't his central note. What remains of the literary remains of Jesus is shreds these tailors patch together to present us with the "real" Jesus as he "really" was clothed in his right mind. *The remains of no other historical character have ever been so thoroughly abused.* The motives for the abuse? (1) Historicism (well put by Rodney Clapp on p26 of July/Aug/96 BOOKS & CULTURE: "Christians before modernity did not read the Bible to get *behind* the text so much as they read it to get at the truth *in* the text"), & (2) Radical hatred of everything in the semantic domain of "patriarchy."

4 Before moving to biblical lexical evidence, let's see what "patriarchy" is in the big Random House Dictionary: "1. a form of social organization in which the father is the supreme authority...and descent is reckoned in the male line....2. a society, community, or country based on this social organization" (my underlinings).

5 In all regards, on all notes, the Bible's "Father" & "community" correspond to our current definition of "patriarchy." From the standpoint of the feministic revisionists, the situation could not be worse.

6 And there's no psychosocial escape hatch. A Christian cannot say that God should have chosen to reveal himself to a less patriarchal people: "how odd of God / to choose the Jews" (said Ogden Nash), but choose Abraham-Isaac-Jacob-Joseph-Moses God did. A scholar cannot pull off the thesis that patriarchy is only the husk of biblical religion, the edible grain is something else: what the ages have found edible is precisely the patriarchal message of Creator-Redeemer-Sustainer-Sanctifier, "the Lord of heaven & earth," "the King of time & space," "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name" (Eph.3.14-15).

7 If you review Ephesians, you'll find in it the roots of all the ecumenical themes

the churches have heard so much of in this century. All these themes assume, & draw inspiration & strength from, this letter's developed doctrine of patriarchy, as in 3.14-15, where "family" is literally "fatherhood," & in six short chapters God is called "Father" 13x! The mind of Ephesians is the mind of the Church, & that mind would fall to pieces without the Father-rule-idea (Gk., *πατριαρχία* *patriarchia* patriarchy "father-authority," "father-rule," "father-government"). (Gk. has a dozen words for "family": the wd. Eph. chose here, as NRSV shows in a footnote, is lit. "fatherhood," as in the now at least temporarily defunct slogan "The Fatherhood of God & the Brotherhood of Man.")

8 In the compound "patri-archy," which is the more offensive, the 1st or the 2nd element? If we were to find a feministically acceptable substitute for the father element ("patri-");\* we would then have to ask whether gender feminists could live with the 2nd element ("-archy," authority-over). It would then be clear that the genus of the objection to "patriarchy" is in its verticality, "hier-archy," overness: "father" is the domestic species of overness, & its in bad odor because of "sexism." But the '60s individualistic revolt against authority is, I believe, the more deeply felt offense. Indeed, historically, "patri-," a domestic metaphor, has had a softening effect on "-archy" (softer, e.g., than "mon-archy").

9 A basic hermeneutic error in feminist criticism of the Bible's heaven-Father derives from the wrong standpoint for understanding "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name." The error is this: standing inside one's father-experience & looking **into** the Bible. Exegesis demands the reverse: we stand inside the Bible's "Father" semantic domain & look **out from** the Bible. Result: Instead of letting one's father-experience deform the Bible's "Father," one lets the later inform the former. The foundation of the error, what for many makes it invisible, is the present belief that one's experience is the primary standpoint & starting point for looking at everything, including God. (Psychiatrically, this is called narcissistic infantilism; culturally, it's now considered normal, even mature.) One's experience of one's father is irrelevant to exegesis & only tangentially pertinent in Christian counseling: "How can I believe in God the Father when my own father was so horrible?" REPLY: "Believe in the Father to cleanse your father-experience." "It's easy for me to believe in God the Father: my father couldn't do enough for me, he loved me so much." REPLY: "Believe in the Father to cleanse your father-experience."

10 Using concordance &/or Bible dictionary, study "father" & "Father" in scripture. What's needed is the **spiritual-intellectual-linguistic formation** such study, steadily carried on with openness to the Spirit's guidance, alone can provide. Only that can provide the "living," fresh-water stream from on high (if you'll pardon the vertical reference): otherwise your inner life is swamped with the salt water from the cultural ocean. (My reference is to the small bridge we cross to get to church. If tide's in, the water under the bridge is undrinkable, briny; if out, the water's drinkable, sweet.) Without this Bible-study formation, the Christian cannot defend the spirit, the mind, or the language (including the pronouns for God) of our religion. The Church's witness to gender feminism should be education, not concession.

11 But doesn't the heaven-Father of the Lord's Prayer give earth-fathers an advantage over (!) mothers? A responsibility toward, not an advantage over. The Washington DC million-man Promise Keepers rally tried to spell out that responsibility. Was it "a patriarchy of the first backlash" (as Mary Steward Van Leeuwen worries) or "a patriarchy of the last gasp" (a phrase of Judith Stacy in BRAVE NEW FAMILIES [Basic Books/90])? The PK organization takes no position on family headship though some rally speakers spoke up for it. None of us can yet know the shape of the "new families." We Christians know we are to live-preach-teach mutual submission (Eph.5.21)--which, in maintaining the vertical, differs from, & is superior to, the now-much-promoted partnership-ideal (all of course under the ultimate vertical, submission to God: Jas.4.7). It's hormonally probable that the husband-father in the families beyond the "new family" will exercise some form of male headship, without which role the family will have insufficient holding power for the adult male--but "PROCEED WITH CAUTION! POT-HOLES AHEAD."

\*In early Christian literature (LXX, NT, AP), this father-element (1) is not always visible (e.g., "family" here in NRSV Eph.), & (2) appears in five words with meanings inclusive of "relationship, ancestor, homeland, home town."