

JUSTIFICATION & JUSTICE XXXVI  
& STATE-OF-THE-ART FEMINISM / WOMANISM

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ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008

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Seldom does anything happen that leaves me feeling de- & op-pressed simultaneously. It happened, though, a few days ago. I'd just gone through a stack of recent feminist/womanist books & articles, & I'd asked myself--as the human-potential movement of the '60s had taught me to--"How are you feeling right now?" & I said to me "Gloomy, de- & op-pressed. I just hate getting additional confirmation for my chestnut 'Sin is anything extended far enough in a straight line.'" I'd hoped--against all historical evidence of movements--that the latest wave of women's rights would avoid hubris. When did I begin to lose hope? I suppose it was when in THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY I read a letter attacking me for applying the word "shrill" to an author whose latest I'd reviewed in said periodical. The letter-writer wouldn't have objected if the author had been a man. Because it was a woman, I was a sexist (though in no dictionary do I find this connotation). What's going on? Where's **justice**?

1. One thing, invidious to justice, is the phenomenon I'll call **the magnetic effect**. Consciousness-raising about injustice to some segment of humanity ironically creates the danger of injustice to some other segment(s) of humanity. When we are, as we should be, conscious of injustices to women, we are in danger of a new form of injustice to men, of prejudice against men, almost as though justice were zero-sum. More broadly: when we're defending a position, we're magnets drawing to ourselves all the evidence we can, some of it actual, some imaginary (as some non-iron may be drawn to a magnet along with the iron filings).

2. Another injustice of movements' hubris, excess--another offense against justice--is that this excessive action stimulates **reaction**, which is subject to its own dangers of offense against justice. Antisemitism is evil, but too much Holocaust talk encourages it. Racism is wrong, but too much "affirmative action" encourages it. Sexism is wrong, but over-accusing the male world encourages it. Unfettered capitalism corrupts both rich & poor, but ideological condemnation of capitalism encourages market-economy self-righteousness....OK, so I'll admit it: This Thinksheet is **backlash**, in the name of justice, against hyperfeminism/hyperwomanism.

3. I thank God for the relief I get when my enemies attack each other: don't all honest & practicing theists? For about a decade, Third World feminists (a.k.a. "womanists") have been attacking First World feminists as racist (white-insensitive to "the colored world") & imperialist (trying to impose their culture, eg in their objection to black-African female circumcision). First World feminists haven't been counterattacking (because of the liberal taboo against Topdog's criticizing Underdog), so the stridency of the Third Worlders' attack has increased. Publishers, indeed, are interested in market cohorts; there's a rising market for womanist books, so we're getting more of them. At the moment, the battle is joined mainly on the christology front: feminist Christ, womanist Jesus. (That God came only as a man & not also as a woman is the impossible christological nut for both feminism & womanism to crack, so that radicals on both sides have reinterpreted the incarnation into metaphor.)

4. Radical feminists/womanists would consider this Thinksheet automatically sexist because of my sex: only women have the right to criticize women (a taboo parallel with only blacks, blacks; only the poor, the poor; only Americans, Americans; only capitalists, capitalists). I reject this **political solipsism** as doubly unjust, Topdog being unjust (1) to self, in wimpishly absorbing the abuse of unjust criticism, & (2) to Underdog, who then is like a poodle that feels free to bark all the louder at a mastiff after noticing that the latter won't attack.

5. But it's not just **justice** that radical feminism/womanism abuses. It's also **justification**, the other focus of the upcoming Craigville Colloquy. The argument runs roughly like this: If the Goddess were in charge of the universe, or an androgynous God, there'd be no need for justification, an idea whose whole conceptuality is masculine. Rid yourself of the patriarchal God &--presto!--no need, no justification, for justification. After bumping into this argument in a half dozen books & as many articles, I decided to scowl at my wordprocessor about it. For one thing, the argument attacking justification necessarily undermines justice, which is--unless flattened into mere secular "fairness"--as masculine as is justification. Not to worry: These radical feminists/womanists do indeed so flatten justice into mere fairness, discarding the roots (Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Christian). But then, what does "fair" mean? Is it fair to brilliant children to provide them with only the same education

as dim ones? (If the God[dess] was unfair in passing out brains, do we imagine our egalitarianism a justice superior to the divine?) The more radical the feminism/womanism, the less it sounds like a theology at all, the more it sounds only like a glorified politics of feminine dominance under the illusion that that would improve the condition of the human race. Men who talk only to men, women who talk only to women, distort human language & thus the human world. Admitted: Much of culture has a male bias, from underencounter with woman's mind & world. Please admit: Much of feminist/womanist subculture has a female bias, from underencounter with men & too easy victories over the (not able to talk back) cultural products of man's mind & world.

6. In this radical feminism/womanism, methinks I catch more than a whiff of "protesting-too-much" categorical **misogyny**, of hatred not for the female condition as oppressed but also for femaleness, the sex with naturally (not only culturally) less self-direction. Women intent upon personal freedom, self-control, self-determination, self-direction are tempted to resent the fact that their biology, for its full telos, requires of them more submission. Passages in the desert mothers note this (yes, the female counterparts of those early Christian monks, "the desert fathers"). Sarah, eg, claimed that although she was a woman in sex, she was not one in spirit (PL 73,925; & see Eliz.A.Clark, "Foucault, The Fathers, and Sex," 619-641, JAAR Winter/88). Hyperindividualism is an elitism, whether or not sexually ascetic, that misfits males & females for living in total partnership with the opposite sex. This perversity has long misfitted men (way back to the ancient Athenian upperclass males); it's now misfitting increasing numbers of women, some of whom are banding themselves together into "woman church" (which attracts also some hyperfeminized males)....Authentic feminism makes for sexual partnership: excessive feminism, hyperfeminism, increases alienation & therefore weirdly parallels both ancient pagan upperclass Athenian hypermasculinism & ancient Christian asceticism (an elitism separating "the perfect," who'd conquered desire, from the merely "righteous," who avoided adultery: the life of virginity was "grace"; of reproduction, was "law"). A movement, no matter how noble its stated aims, that results in wall-building deserves, to that extent, Christian condemnation (Eph.2:14). While we Christian men should join in, Christian women should lead the attack. Unfortunately, what I've seen of the latter is fundamentalist, recidivist, calling for the re-imposing of Hellenistic Christian subordinationism rather than the partnership implied in the equal image of God (Gn.1) & the equal freedom in Christ (Gal.3).

7. Flashback to §5, the justification-**atonement** theme & state-of-the-art feminism-womanism. As I was reading the recent issues of CHRISTIANITY & CRISIS, I read Carter Heyward's 11Dec89 (pp.381-6) substitution of "passion" (erotic active life affirmation) for the "passion" (passive redemptive suffering, esp. that of Jesus) & recalled receiving a card from the Hartford Seminary dean advising me to "read [it] on a day when your blood pressure's not too high." (He should have added "when you're sitting down.") I thought of Carl E. Braaten's latest, JUSTIFICATION: THE ARTICLE BY WHICH THE CHURCH STANDS OR FALLS (Fortress/90), & concluded that judged by CH, it falls. Before further commenting on the atonement today, I'll sketch CH's article. She quotes, from an essay she wrote with Beverly W. Harrison (in CHRISTIANITY, PATRIARCHY AND ABUSE: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE, ed. by Joanne C. Brown & Carole R. Bohn [Pilgrim Press/89]), "[the] doctrine of the atonement probably represents the sadomasochism of Christian teaching at its most transparent." The doctrine was devised by Christian males to "justify the suffering of women, children, and marginalized men in order to secure their own senses of power and control." "Harrison and I argue that a christology of passion has no place for atonement. There is nothing inherently liberating or salvific about suffering." "There's no passion in, and nothing right about, the relationship of a god/father who, in order to satisfy his honor, or vindicate his demand for 'justice,' requires the sacrifice of an innocent child/son. ¶The problem with atonement is not simply that it reflects an archaic, violent mode of justice shaped by patriarchal logic. This violence also bears witness to the fundamental dispassionate shape of patriarchal, androcentric social relations and their theological corollaries...dispassion, or dissociation from one another, is the link between 'christianity, patriarchy, and

abuse"--in contrast to "the Body of Christa" (erotic, positive-passionate, creative).

8. It's instructive to read §7 in light of her latest published article, "The Power of God-with-Us" (14Mar90 CHRISTIAN CENTURY, pp.275-8). Suppose your only evidence on the author was internal: what can you learn about her from the article alone? She's a recovering-alcoholic, Episcopal, lesbian, lonely (in having recently separated from her significant other), ordained, bright, "justice"-oriented (specifically, liberationist), heterodox, teaching-writing theologian. (Any order I'd choose for those adjectives could be used against me! Important: I've added nothing to what's in the article.) Rightly, she insists on contextual awareness in speaking/listening, writing/reading. One does one's theology, if it's hair-&-skin authentic, from who/where/in-relation-to-whom one is. So I can't be faulted, in interpreting her, for saying "Look who's talking"--at least if I'm self-critical ("Look who's commenting") in the process....Below, "C&C" & "CC" are the two periodicals.

9. Commentary: (1) Her religion is the justice-&-peace type, Streng's 6th "way of being religious," which in #545 I characterize thus: "Religion experienced primarily in the prophetic struggle for **justice** & peace. God is optional in the sense that 'movements' have both theistic & secular participants. Altruistic, sociocentric." In the '60s & '70s I taught many of this type, so I know it well & have some sympathy for it. Her self-story in CC shows her a classic instance of the type....(2) This type tends to collapse theology into community, as did Durkheim secularly & Buber (whom she credits) religiophilosophically. Instead of Wieman's God as the person-making power, in CH God is the interpersonal-making power, "The Power of God-with-Us" (CC: "the most basic human unit is not 'the self' but rather 'the relation'...this intrinsic mutuality demands--and should be the foundation of--our ethics, politics, pastoral care and theologies"). Her 1980 doctoral thesis, on a "theology of mutual relation," said God is our "power of relation" & "justice, the actualization of love among us, is the making of right, or mutual, relation." "I was trying to articulate a relational *ontology* as a companion piece to the profoundly *moral* motives and commitments of liberation theology." "Human life" is "a relational matrix in which God is born." Her religion is (my words) a **celebration of mutuality**.....(3) She calls herself (CC) a "member" of the Christian "tradition," but its God & her have little in common. So great is her **alienation** that though she capitalizes "Judaism," she does not "christianity" (because it's been "arrogant and abusive in its exercise of power"). Nor does "God" rate capitalization when "the god of heterosexist, racist patriarchy." Hooker's latitudinarianism (contra the Puritans) set the anything-goes in Anglican theology, so she can be as idiosyncratically heterodox as she pleases without defrocking; but for all her talk of justice, is she being just to retain orders in violation of ordination vows binding her to be a celebrant, proclaimer, & defender of the biblical gospel, which cannot honestly be tortured into her thin numinous social psychology?....(4) Too, justice includes **fairness** to opponents, a virtue her "passion" makes it hard for her to practice. She throws vicarious suffering out the front door (C&C), then lets it in the back door (CC). Says she, there is "no place for the atonement. There is nothing inherently liberating or salvific about suffering." Who said there was? "Inherently" is a straw person, letting her win a cheap victory with an inauthentic argument....(5) Whatever became of **Jesus**? His only mention in her CC "How My Mind Has Changed" (this article) is along with M.L.King,Jr. "and others" as illustrating that "we are not separate from one another." (Does he appear in feminine incarnation as "Christa/community"? ) We can manage **redemption** without him, without biblical atonement-justification: "To struggle against the conditions that make for or exacerbate suffering...is how we find redemption in suffering....we weave our redemption out of solidarity and compassion, struggle and hope. In this way, we participate in the redemption of God" (subjective, or objective, genitive: God's redeeming us, or our redeeming God?)....(6) Her position is very close to "right relation" in the Buddhist Eightfold Path, far closer to that than to any theology that is recognizably Christian. (7) Radical feminism/womanism--mistheotic-misandric (God- & male-hating)--will find **no home** in the churches, but may become a spin-off religion from Christianity....(8)

Her **homophilia** intensifies her accent on relationship, compensatory to the gay-less fact of feeling alien to the sexual orientation of almost everybody in the American (& any other) society. (No, I'm no homophobe. I counseled Marcia Lee Geyer, a student of mine, during her writing of HUMAN RIGHTS OR HOMOPHOBIA? THE RISING TIDES [Universal Fellowship Press/77]. I graded her, & she graded me with the words [3Sept77 letter] "You do a very creditable job of being a liberal.")....(9) Another reason for her relationship accent: she's a **woman**, & in all cultures women care more about relationship (while men are caring more about some other values). (No, no, I'm not a sexist! But if feminists say theology has been recognizably masculine, it's fair to remark that much feminist theology is recognizably feminine. Mutual put-down? No, recognition of reciprocal fact, & of the need for women & men to theologize together.)

10. **Judgment** is what happens to those who resist **justice** & what doesn't happen to those who accept God's gracious offer of **justification**. For CH, judgment & justification are masculine; how come not justice, which is impossible without judgment as both threat (to impede injustice) & action (to punish offenders against justice)? (In her, a Freudian reaction-formation? Of the 16 Jungian personality types, almost certainly she's one of the four "J" [judging] types.) (Yesterday in Boston there were three murders + four nonfatal stabbings. Some sections are becoming close to unlivable, but not the section where CH teaches & folks can enjoy the luxury of being "nonjudgmental.")...Vaclav Havel's speech to our Congress had moral nobility, undergirded with a keen sense of God's judgment, God keeping books for judging persons & nations. This dramatic sense (& he a dramatist) of cosmic accountability to God as Judge intensifies the feeling of cosmic-historic responsibility. In comparison, CH's sense of "justice" is pallid, lacking in, yes, masculinity (in her sense, not mine: Sandra O'Connor is a great judge). Havel was not ashamed to show fear of the final Judge; he's too serious a human being for mere "God is love" (or "relationship") romanticism. So too is Gerhard A. Krodel: "The supreme threat to our world is not communism, capitalism, socialism, or any other ism or lie, but God, coming to judge the world and each of us in his righteousness. That is offensive, unacceptable to bourgeois writers and theologians" (p.269, on Rev.14:9-11, AUGSBURG COMMENTARY ON THE NT: REVELATION [Augsburg/89])....Among recent books on divine judgment, I favor David M. Lloyd-Jones' THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD (ROMANS: AN EXPOSITION OF 2:1-3:20 [Zondervan/89]) & Susan R. Garrett's THE DEMISE OF THE DEVIL: MAGIC AND THE DEMONIC IN LUKE'S WRITINGS (Fortress/89).

11. The **atonement**, by which God through Jesus overcomes our alienation from God, is a doctrine CH is profoundly alienated from & antagonistic toward (while remaining a Christian priest!). Neglected recently in the liberal church because of moral concerns & social ethics, it's our central Christian doctrine of salvation. Rationalism (Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel)--v. rationality--turned from it as implausible. But plausibility is a function of paradigm (Winch, Gadamer, Kuhn, Foucault, Rorty). Surrender the biblical Story-Paradigm, & of course the atonement becomes irrational & implausible (but with it so does the biblical Story: Berger & Luckmann). Colin E. Gunton (THE ACTUALITY OF THE ATONEMENT: A STUDY OF METAPHOR, RATIONALITY AND THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION [T&TClark/Eerdmans/89]) shows the atonement as central to Christianity's rational engagement with the world. The metaphors clustering in the atonement doctrine provide an emotive-rational framework for understanding the divine initiative in re-creation: battlefield victory, legal satisfaction in a court of law, altar sacrifice. It's a debater's cheap trick to treat these metaphors literally so one can reject them as "patriarchal" &/or nonsense &/or blasphemous. Contrast Mara E. Donaldson's application of Paul Ricoeur hermeneutical phenomenology ("narrative of transformation," a profound understanding of metaphor) to C.S.Lewis' TILL WE HAVE FACES....Holist, honorable treatment of the atonement accepts all the **doors**: being (Augustine, Scotus, Ockham, Luther), will (Calvin's eternal decrees), reason (the Enlightenment), feeling (the NT as an eros story, God's love winning through the Cross). It's pathetic to see this rich teaching replaced by an eros (positive-"passion") story of mere "relation," "connection"--as by CH.