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FEMALE THEOLOGICAL FRENZY: THE MAENADS ARE BACK!

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In a demented frenzy, defense successfully claimed, Lorena Bobbitt cut a man in two. In a Dionysiac frenzy, "The Bacchants" (or Maenads or Bacchae; women of feminist Euripides' last play, 405 BC-BCE) tore a man to pieces. I thought of this cutting & tearing when I read Susan Cyre's report of a World Council of Churches' feminist convocation, "Re-Imagining 1993," Minneapolis 4-7 Nov 93, as she reports it in the Jan./Feb. '94 PRESBYTERIAN LAYMAN. I trust her report for all my quotations below.

1 The conference cut-tore to death the biblical God & the Christian religion, which--the frenzied speakers claim--are nothing but two instances of the world-historical oppression of women for which the code word is **patriarchy**. For the past two decades, a secular feminine religion has been developing. Now some leading church women have joined their "sisters" in "solidarity" not only against "oppression" (all liberationists' code word for the evil against which they are establishing the good) but also for a new order as radically rejecting the old as did Lenin.

2 The sad fact is that the churches must now fight these women & stop funding them. (The Presbyterian Church USA contributed $66,000 from one fund + an unreported amount from three other funds. This must now be seen as suicidal behavior.) Since it would not be seemly or politic for men to fight them, Christian Amazons are needed. Susan Cyre is one. Me, I don't mind being unseemly & impolitic for a good cause.

3 Men are not good news to themselves or to women when they get together & nurse their grievances against women: women--as in this conference--are not good news to themselves or to men when they get together & nurse their grievances against "patriarchy" (masculine hegemony both cosmic [the biblical God] & earthly ["sexism"]). The conference was more than bad news to the church. It expressed frenzied lethal intention, a hater's quarrel. For while the logic of their screeching is schism, most of them (to judge by the speakers) are for staying in the church & turning it into a new religion, rather than withdrawing & forming an independent new religion.

4 I say "to judge by the speakers": of the hearers, I generously suppose that few were as radical as the conference leaders; most were swept along by the frenzy. As for the speakers, they were drawn from what I call the **liberation elite**, church leaders who identify not with the common Christian but with the elite centers of American culture--the universities, the media, most publishers, much of the political and judicial establishment, mainline-churches national offices.... For a keen analysis of this split in America, see Rich. Jn. Neuhaus, AMERICA AGAINST ITSELF--MORAL VISION AND THE PUBLIC ORDER (U. of Notre Dame Press/92). The agenda of aggressive secularism is leaking into the leadership of liberal churches & appears in the view (p.74, though the church reference is mine) of "progress as being liberated from tradition and particularity." Christianity is, in both tradition & particularity, masculine.

5 I am a **suspicious feminist**. Feminist, for I rejoice in women's social progress & pray for more of it. Suspicious, for what women may be up to when men aren't around makes me nervous. Doubly suspicious of men who patronize the women's movement, eg by pushing radical inclusive-language revisions of the Bible, the liturgy, & classics in general. So I'm a cautious feminist, a New Revised Standard Version feminist (xi-xv of any copy of NRSV). I'm as much against crazy women as I am against crazy men, & don't mind saying so, as I must in this Thinksheet.

6 The **lesbian** speakers, as you might guess, gave a double wallop to "patriarchy." "Homo- phobia/misia" could mean the fear & hate homosexuals have for the straight world. RHD[2] dates it from 1955-60. While structurally it could mean what I've said, actually it was created to express the reverse, viz straights' fear-hatred of gays. When reading-listening, it's not prejudice but judiciousness to "consider the source": gays' thinking & discourse is manifoldly warped vis-a-vis the heterosexual world, as is the latter's vis-a-vis the former's. The equality dogma

tries to obscure two facts: (1) that hetero- women & men see-feel-think differently from each other, & (2) that same-sex persons see-feel-think differently from opposite-sex persons. I am (to use a phrase the UCC uses as to how churches should relate to homosexuals) "open & affirming" of the first fact, & "open" & accepting of the second fact.

7 What conclusions should be drawn from the twin fact that nature religions are feminine-dominant (in spite of most leaders being male) & history religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) are masculine-dominant? Careful, now! The one datum I need to note here is that in the conference, the **transcendent** dimension of the historical collapsed, by the female-frenzy earthquake, into the **immanent**-natural. Ontologically, the result was monism ("Reality" includes god & everything else. The article uses "god" for this immanent captivity of the transcendent, "God" for the classical Christian combination of transcendent & immanent in the divine.) One result of this collapse is that God ceases to be personal & becomes--as in Eastern, pantheistic, & animistic religions--an all-encompassing *energy force*, which is the central idea of the divine in the New Age religious movements, which boldly re-create God....Some speakers at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions predicted this development in the West--that the West would lose its cultural-distinctive, viz the historical-transcendent--& it's happened in pop religion & in "process" theology-&-philosophy. For the conference, the masculine-transcendent-historical was, as it were, one long dirty word....Do I think the masculine can be separated from the transcendent-historical? No. Neither did the conference. Women who want to remain Christian will have to accept the whole three-element adjective. I thank the conference for helping make this clear. It's clear in NRSV, which is inclusive-language on the human plane but does not try to de-masculinize God.

8 Susan Cyre: "Declaring allegiance to the goddess 'Sophia,' participants catapulted their rhetoric well beyond commonplace themes of women's equality. Instead, they heralded a more radical agenda: to promote a new religion with a new god. Destroying traditional Christian faith, adopting ancient pagan beliefs, rejecting Jesus' divinity and his atonement on the cross, creating a god(dess) in their own image, and affirming lesbian love-making were recurrent conference themes....participants and speakers angrily denounced the Christian church, charging that its teachings about Jesus Christ constitute the chief source of women's oppression, human violence, racism, sexism, classism, and the abuse of the earth."

9 Some QUOTATIONS:...."We have not come here to jump on the feminist band wagon, but to upset the patriarchal apple cart" (Johanna Bos, Louisville Pres. Sem.)....In opposing the ordination of homosexuals, the Pres. Ch. is "a moral sewer" (Beverly Harrison, UTS NY)....Models already exist for a "substantial liberated minority in every denomination to leave the denomination": "women-church, the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus, and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, which includes Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Mormons, Charismatics, and Wiccans [witches]" (Virginia Mollenkott, who is on the NCC commission to prepare an inclusive language lectionary)...."We are living with god, it is just energy, life-giving energy" (Chung Hyun Kyung, who "instructed the conferees to raise their hands to feel this divine energy"; repeatedly sung throughout the four-day event: "O great spirit, earth and wind and sea, you are inside and all around me")....God is "not a transcendence--that orgy of self-alienation beloved of the fathers--but immanence, god working out god's self in every thing" (Rita Nakashima Brock, who "argued that there was nothing particularly unique about Jesus," & the Canaanite woman of Mt.15 "is the incarnation of god to Jesus")...."I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff" (Delores Williams, UTS NY).....Jesus' death is the ultimate in child abuse & a model for human child abuse. "I can no longer worship in a theological context that depicts God as an abusive parent and Jesus as the obedient, trusting child." Jesus is only one in an "equally worthy siblinghood" (Va. Mollenkott)....Jesus' cross "sanctions violence against the powerless in society" (Arunda Gnanadason, WCC)....The biblical canon (limits) was decided by men, so women don't have to respect it (C.H.K.).