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A miscellany of supports for retaining in Scripture, & using,

THE MASCULINE PRONOUNS FOR GOD

1 They are the Bible's only pronouns for God.

2 No version or translation ever suppressed them until 1996. The New Revised Standard Version (1989) does not do so (e.g., 6x masculine pronouns for God in the 1st chapter; NRSV avoids [its "To the Reader"] "contrived English"). Even the quite radically inclusive-language Contemporary English Version (1995), though it eliminates Ps.23's masculine pronouns for God, has them 12x in Gn.1!

3 Not only (consistently) in Scripture, but in the whole of Christian history, until the last few years (& only in small pockets of Christianity), the masculine pronouns for God have prevailed "everywhere, always, & with everyone" (to use an ancient Christian formula for what all Christians assent to: all Christians [till some recent deviants] always & everywhere have assented to the Bible's pronouns for God).

4 If I think I'm at liberty to rewrite, to my own ideas, what another person wrote, I'm in need of moral sensitivity-training. In the case of pronouns for God, some have permitted gender sensitivity to subvert moral sensitivity.

5 The fear of alienating a niche-market audience, viz. gender feminists, should weigh less than the fear of alienating the children & the children's children from the pronominal way the Bible talks about God.

6 In all languages, pronouns are an integral part of speech. God is the Bible's central subject. To drop a part of speech from the Bible's central subject produces a sad, ludicrous idiolect (i.e., an idiosyncratic dialect). A doomed linguistic move, innocent of the nature & structure of language.

7 The linguistic asceticism of refusing to "eat" the masculine pronouns for God produces a scrupulosity (psychiatric sense) impeding the Christian language's free flow of talk about God. True also of translating, which aims at accuracy (in conveying the original's message, balancing grammatical & dynamic equivalence), precision (in capturing idioms & nuances), clarity (in communicating understanding), economy (verbose is gross, concise is nice), felicity (appropriateness, beauty), lucidity (illumination), & naturalness (without the archaisms, technical terms, & neologisms that call attention to how something's being said, in distraction from what). (As an old Bible translator, I am appalled at the multiple impedances the taboo against God-pronouns puts in the translator's path.)

8 We cannot expect Christian orthopraxy (right-doing) in the absence of Christian orthodoxy (right-thinking), which includes "a fear as well as love of God" (as Thos. C. Reeves puts it in his THE EMPTY CHURCH: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity, Free Press/97). For a complex of reasons, including the fact that the family's adult male has the family's largest muscle-mass, "he" is more to be feared than "she" or "it." The Bible's pronouns for God help carry the fear motif, & dumping those pronouns depresses that essential motif in biblical religion & thus furthers the effete sentimentalization of "the empty church."

9 The sacred text is not ourselves (as empiricists claim). Those who see their experience, personal/group, as sacred sieve out of Scripture whatever contradicts, or fails to confirm, the sacrality of their experience. Thus "women's experience" sieves out the Bible's pronouns for God....The loss of the fear of God distorts all Christian doctrine. Take the atonement: (1) Delores Williams says no man hanging on a cross could do her any good; (2) Rosemary Radford Reuther says no male savior could save women.

10 There's something to be said (though not much) for abbreviated Bibles, but little good can be said for expurgated Bibles--Bibles from which something considered polluted has been "purged." If the purity sanction seems too heavy to apply to the pronouns-for-God debate, remember the instant punishment (by gender-feminists yelling the equivalent of "Unclean!" only a few years ago) of speakers who used Christianity's (masculine) pronouns for God. This embarrassment caused many speakers to clean up (sic) their act & learn unbiblical, unnatural, nonpronominal ways

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to refer to God. Once this barbarous newspeak has been learned, speakers who'd been frightened by the "Unclean!" cry are understandably irritated by the "Unfaithful!" cry coming from us Bible-speakers.

11 But some were not frightened out of the way the Bible refers to God. Stephen L. Carter, e.g. This African-American Yale law professor has this to say on p251 of his INTEGRITY (Basic/96): "A few years ago, when I wrote a book called THE CULTURE OF DISBELIEF..., I was disappointed to receive some criticism for referring to God as 'He.' I was following the religious tradition that has sustained me in difficult times, and I am not inclined to change now. Readers who are suspicious of faith and would prefer a more scholarly justification might profitably examine Francis Watson, TEXT, CHURCH AND WORLD: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective (Eerdmans/94), chaps.9-12 of which represent a very respectful argument, taking full account of feminist scholarship, for referring to God as 'He.'" Better to acknowledge the elephant in the linguistic livingroom.

12 In addition to fear, dumping the God-pronouns is motivated by the desire to remove a communication-barrier. The argument runs that we must (in this respect) change Scripture so it won't be misunderstood! That's passive: the active way is to educate the Bible-ignorant so they'll understand Scripture *from inside*. Once you are inside the Bible, you know it's worshiping a deity who transcends analogies, including sexuality (Is.55.89), so the masculine pronouns for God are not to be read literally (i.e., that God is male) but are "gender neutral" (p412 Francis Martin THE FEMINIST QUESTION: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition, Eerdmans/94)....The passive move is a betrayal of our sacred text, like killing a village to save it. No such betrayal has occurred since Marcion (mid-2nd-c.), & even his was not so great: the canon, the church's definition of the contents/limits of our sacred text (beginning with the Muratorian Canon, in defense against Marcion), had not yet been defined.

13 Dumping the God-pronouns is anti-ecumenical, cutting the idiolects off from the Church's language in the Great Traditon. The idiolects will lose, but cause much pain & confusion & waste in the process. If they were to win, the scriptural currency would be permanently debased, the original usage considered antique & perhaps even forgotten except for dusty scholarly research.

14 Historic christology emphasizes Jesus' humanity, not his maleness. What has drawn our attention to his maleness is the radical feminist attack on the Bible's "andro[male]centricity." In parallel with the plain fact that in the *language* of revelation God is masculine, in the *action* of revelation Jesus is male (& "Holy Spirit" functions as male in Jesus' conception ["virgin birth"]). We can achieve nothing good by fudging these irreducible gender-facts about the Bible. Fudging feeds doubts about the truth & therefore authority of Scripture.

15 In hermeneutics, exegesis (what the text says) precedes exposition (how the message is communicated). As a longtime pastor & even longertime teacher, I know the difficulties of exposition; but as a scholar, I don't let expositional considerations pollute exegesis. Dumping the God-pronouns is a clear instance of such pollution.

16 Dumping the God-pronouns is an instance of "the erosion of particularity" (a phrase of Gabriel Fackre [p100, THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION, Edinburgh/97] in another connection, my underlining). Down with post/modern reductionisms!

17 New ideas must struggle for respectability. You want to prevent a new idea (such as dumping the God-pronouns) from achieving respectability? Try laughing at it: "Sue is leaving Sue's house across town so that Sue can take Sue's grandmother for a ride in Sue's car." Thus Gilbert Meilaender (p14, FIRST THINGS 1.98) lampoons this barbarous, sober-silly passage in Norvene Vest's FRIEND OF THE SOUL (Cowley/97): "God's word...goes forth from God....God spoke forth creation, and it was so! God's purpose is accomplished by God's very word."

18 "Each [language-]user has complete control over speech but very little control over language" (G.B.Caird, THE LANGUAGE...OF THE BIBLE, Eerdmans/80/97, p38). Alice was right: Language will not tolerate Humpty Dumpty's idiosyncratic use of it. Dumping the God-pronouns is a doomed idiosyncrasy.

19 One dimension of psycholinguistic studies is the ban. Dumping the God-pronouns is a banning project: how does psycholinguistics speak to it? To begin with, it's an arbitrary-deliberate ban ("he" [for God] as a dirty word), not a traditional-communal ban ("shit" as a dirty word). The former seeks to create revulsion (by *hissing*, in the early days of the ban); the later autonomically effects revulsion (expressed by *gasping*, as the audience when I used the word in a quotation [which would have been meaningless without it] in Norman Vincent Peale's pulpit, at a N.Y. Theol.Seminary convocation)....If successful for a sufficient length of time, the former type of ban can develop into the latter: hissing can change to gasping. Unless this transition occurs, the hissing abates (as indeed it has) & the sanction (in the negative sense, another word for ban) so weakens as to encourage the timorous to return to using whatever speech was arbitrarily-deliberately banned. The ban has failed....I repeat: The ban against God-pronouns is doomed.

Taboos (another word for ban) are especially important in religious language. You got kicked out of Qumran if you let slip God's Name (YHWH; 1 QS 6.27-7.2). In all of Judaism, "verbal insulators [were] placed between the holiness of God and the world" (p74 of G.B.Caird's excellect section on "Taboo"). Three such insulators occur in Jn.1.14. Taboos of reverence, fear, and delicacy seek to reduce "the permissible currency of the world-stock." The God-pronouns ban is a taboo of delicacy --in deference (as it's often put) to "hurting women."

Again from the psycholinguistic angle, the God-pronouns taboo should be viewed in the light of the Heb. wds. *qodesh* (holy) & *cherem* (a highly charged, multivalent term for what's banned ["declared unholy and prohibited from both sacred and common use"] because it's been "consecrated to an alien deity"). (Or devoted, set aside for, YHWH.) In the case of the God-pronouns taboo, the alien deity is Egalitarianism (wo/men as "equal," so no "patriarchy" in heaven or on earth). What was "devoted" (*cherem*) was to be destroyed: the God-pronouns, gender feminists & their followers insist, must be destroyed, abolished. The more radical among them insist on a logical extension: the masculinity of the biblical God must be destroyed, abolished. And radical feminists push one step further: the biblical God must go, yielding to a kinder-gentler deity (perhaps a goddess, though goddesses known to history-of-religion scholars were almost all of them anything but kind & gentle).

20 The ban-ners of the Bible's God-pronouns wrongly believe that the Bible teaches fe/male equality, not recognizing that Egalitarianism is an alien deity Trojan-horse-like eisegeted into Scripture to find proof texts. As made "in the image of God," fe/males are equal, they say. But while nowhere does the canon of Scripture question that man is made in God's image, not so in the case of woman (1Cor.11.7). Again, they claim to see fe/male equality in Gal.3.28, which no more teaches that men & women are or are to be social equals than that slaves & free are or are to be. I may believe in gender equality (& indeed in some dimensions I do), but I shouldn't be deluded into thinking I can use the scriptural sanction (in the positive, support-sense) for it. A pronounless deity could be preached as warrant for gender equality if the scripture of the ersatz genderless deity taught gender equality--but both are conditions contrary to fact.

21 Severe pressures to dump the God-pronouns come from pluralism, multiculturalism, what Kathryn Tanner (MODERN THEOLOGY 9 [1993], 1-18) calls "colonialist discourse" (assuming religions' commonalities more inportant than their differences). The assumption is that we're at an unfair rhetorical disadvantage if the devotees of other religions can nail us with worshiping a "male" deity, so we (not !!) sidestep the scandal of particularity. But the verbal-ascetic move has the opposite of its intended effects: it reduces the possibilities of authentic inter-religion dialog, & it makes evangelism & missions more difficult.

22 The canonical approach to Scripture accepts, by a "second naivete" (Ricoeur), both the contents of the Bible (including the God-pronouns) & the complexity of the Bible's formation, while understanding the whole as internal conversation within a language community (the biblical language, based in the biblical languages). Those wishing to be a part of this community should learn its language; those wishing to remain part of this community should submit to its language. To expect the community to conform its language to outsiders & renegades is to expect the commun- +

ity to commit suicide. The Bible will have its way; the question is whether it will have its way with us. We cannot successfully sever the Word from its words without severing both from the world that was the historical womb of the Word--that world which converses with our world as we faithfully preach the Word.

23 Efforts to "adjust the faith to the prevailing culture" (Peter Berger) weaken the faith without making a dent in the ever-changing prevailing culture. Efforts to liberate the faith from its originating culture (by, e.g., dumping the God-pronouns) end in imprisoning the faith within the liberators' worldview, the liberal worldview now losing credibility & even plausibility.

24 The Bible's God-pronouns maintain the Creator's distance from his creation: feminine language for God, in ancient & modern usage, obscures or even denies that distance. This idea is thoroughly explored by Eliz. Achtemeier, pp1-16 of A.F.Kimel Jr. (ed.), SPEAKING THE CHRISTIAN GOD (Eerdmans/92). "Everything is divine" if (as the UCC Book of Worship says) "You have brought us forth from the womb of your being"--which means the world "shares in deity's substance," thus is inseparable from, at no distance from, God. Nature is re-hallowed, its biblical desacralization defeated....Biblical faithfulness demands retaining the Bible's God-pronouns.

25 IRONY: Sensitivity-mongering & "politically correct" victim-politics militate against sensitivity to the biblical language & the consequences of alterations of it.

26 The divine "he" sustains, & is sustained by, the divine nature's "severity and kindness" (Ro.11.22). Soft Christianity, which cancels the severity (& therefore also the holiness) of the biblical God, finds "he" too harsh as well as (allegedly) sexist: "A God without wrath brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a cross" (H.Rich.Niebuhr).

27 The dumping of the God-pronouns has a destabilizing effect on the language of the God-community, whose "matrix of experience" (Clif.Geertz) is that language as the Christian culture's oral bond. The God-pronouns are not in the category of dispensable metaphor but are what, in general statement, Max Black described as figural language not decorative but essential to communicating truth.

28 In HOW SHALL WE SING THE LORD'S SONG? (Confessing Christ/97), G.Fackre (pp60-106) shows the disastrous theological distortions resulting from THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL's demasculinization of the biblical God. He does not so specify, but this applies also to the suppression of the God-pronouns.

29 A false orthodoxy is amnesiac: having forgotten the question, it "believes" only the answer. The question was "inclusivity" ("a slogan word that hides more than it reveals" [Eugene Wehrli, Craigville Colloquy XII): "not everybody at the table is playing the same game"): the (proposed) answer is the pronounless deity (called "God" even though this word is masculine). But here's the cost: An unsubtle public will not be able to distinguish between a strong distaste for the pronominal way the Bible speaks of God & a strong distaste for the Bible & its deity.

30 Paraphrases may dump the God-pronouns, but no writing so doing can qualify as a translation. In TRANSLATION AND TABOO (N.Ill.U.Press/97), Douglas Robinson deals broadly with this ideological phenomenon. Makes me sympathetic with that Orthodox-rabbi student of mine who'd never even touch any translation! Writing thus bowdlerized falls into the category of "advocacy literature." "God" in such literature is a designer deity of a virtual religion.

31 The masculine pronouns for God give women an erotic advantage over heterosexual men. My boldface on this from Mother Teresa: "It is God's work. **He** does the thinking and writing. I am only a pencil in **his** hand."

32 God is beyond gender, but God-talk cannot be: neuter is the negation of gender, not its transcendence. And "it" is the word expressive of this negation.

33 In #2701 I analyzed the "poisonous thinking" behind dumping the God-pronouns. In #2873 I've pointed to some of the dismal consequences of this false & linguistically unfaithful move, which hitches up to a wrong wagon. God as "he" is an abiding asset, not a fading liabiity. The text of the biblical canon is irreducible (Rev.22.19).