

# JESUS AS GODDESS-SAVIOR AND GOD-LORD

2744 29 Sept 95

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in the history-of-religions gender wanderings of world-religions' deities, with special reference to the ancient Middle (formerly, Near) East, with focus on the case of a popular-religion conversion within paganism, viz, how Apuleius (born ca.125 AD/CE) was transformed from an ass into a man crediting the savior-goddess Isis and her husband, the lord-god Osiris

The virtue of this, my longest Thinksheet title, is that it succinctly orients you to the Thinksheet's four contexts, so in this intro I can add the fifth: Current inclusive-language literature, including The New Century Hymnal, flees from the masculine "Lord" into the supposedly, though not actually, gender-neutral "Savior" ("Savioress" never having had wide currency). This escapist ploy has the pernicious effect of confusing two acts of deity & experiences of humanity, viz, deliverance-salvation and submission-obedience. Ironical, since PC (political correctness), of which IC (inclusive language) is one dimension, lays great stress on getting human experience right, reading it accurately.

1 It's a current conceit that ancient words that may be misunderstood, esp. any to which some people might take offense, should be hurled into the dark hole of oblivion. Hitherto, education was the solution: words indispensable for understanding the ancients in their situation in history & in life were taught & so kept alive. The unlearned might misunderstand & at some words even take offense, having only crippled current meanings (denotata & connotata) to rely on: the learned are aware of the "then" basic meanings (denotata) & resonances (connotata). Eg, "Lord"--historically, the usual Eng. for the predicate in the earliest Christian confession of faith ("Jesus is Lord," not "Savior"): Κύριος *Kurios* in LXX (the earliest Christian Bible, a Gk. OT) rendered the Heb. tetragrammaton YHWH, God's personal name, now usu. rendered "Yahweh": it was "current among Greek-speaking Christians" (MM\*621) to refer to Jesus as "God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Tit.2.13 NRSV; cp. Jn.20.28, Heb.1.8)....By learned I mean those who took Sunday school seriously, no matter their level of academic achievement. In the Christian community of catechesis (educational preparation), leiturgia (worship), & didache (continuous, life-long learning), Christians through the ages have known how to feel, not only to think, "Lord" (& expressions incorporating the word--eg, "Lord God," "Lord Jesus," "the good Lord"). Some today fatuously believe that "Lord" can be sent to oblivion without loss of the Christian religion, but Christian history provides them no comfort. Their literature, including their hymnals, are doomed to become *curiosa*.

2 Let's use Lucius Apuleius' earliest work (mid-2nd c. AD/CE), which in the Gk. original (not extant, surviving in Lat.) he probably called "Changes" (or "Transformations," Gk. "Metamorphoses," lit. "changes of form," in the protagonist's case from boy to donkey to man)--let's use this book to learn what the early Christians faced, culturally-religiously, when they were doing their formative theological thinking. In his last two chapters (often omitted in modern secularistic editions, but in Wm. Addington's 1566 translation, only slightly revised by Harry C. Schnur, THE GOLDEN ASS [Collier/62]), almost certainly autobiographical, A. tells of his conversion (& its consequences; 261-83) first to the goddess-savior Isis & then to her husband, whom she'd resurrected, the god-lord Osiris. Now please think about this Thinksheet's title. In the case of Jesus as "Savior and Lord," there's no gender role-distribution. In monotheism (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, some Egyptian & Hindu cults) there can be no gender role-assignment or -wanderings among deities. Henotheism is belief in one deity, but monotheism is belief that there is "only" (mono-) one deity--so the only god must incorporate the masculine & the feminine.

3 How this incorporation occurs I'll display in the case of A., whose first name means "Light"--appropriately, for the author intends to enlighten us readers while enchanting us with a highly entertaining, sometimes ribald, narrative of his spiritual journey, which culminates in a white surplice, a vow of celibacy, & a tonsure (elements eventually assimilated into Christian monasticism).

4 One of the constants in world religions, historians of religions tell us, is the gender distribution of the feminine to immanence (eg, "Mother Nature," "Mother Earth") & of the masculine to transcendence (eg, Dyaus Pitra [the heaven Father,

"our Father, who art in heaven"], El Elyon, "High King of heaven," "the Lord God Almighty," the Holy One "high and lofty" [Is.6.1 NRSV, "the hem of his robe filled the temple"]]. (In both Testaments, the "Holy One" is masculine; inclusive-linguists, using it as gender-neutral, are trading on public ignorance.) The human soul needs the far god for awe & the near god for love; vital religions oblige; religions failing to do so, die off.

5 Official religions, those promoted by the state, cannot provide warmth: politics, government, may & sometimes does heat up, but it provides no warmth for the soul. So it was in the world into which the Savior-Lord Jesus was born. Popular religion supplemented, in the case of Christianity ultimately supplanted, official religion. And always & everywhere, popular religion is warm. Said Juvenal about Rome, "The Orontes has flowed into the Tiber": popular religions of the Near (Middle) East had flowed into Greece (eg, the Eleusinian mysteries) & westward into the capital of the Roman Empire. In that city's Kulturkampf, clash & competition of cultures & cults, A. reveled, having long been mainly a student of popular religion before moving to Rome. Why, do you ask, was he converted to Isis-Osiris rather than to Jesus? For one thing, Christianity could not compete liturgically with I.-O. for performance values: read A.'s final two chapters & feel the excitement, indeed the ecstasy, of the worship! For another thing, Christian ethics doubtless offended him, a bisexual, a pederast with a wife. And for a third: while a believer, he had a Roman rational distance from his religious involvement, & a Greek esthetic, almost dilettante & narcissistic, enjoyment of a wider spiritual cuisine than a stern monotheism, even when softened by the suffering, even dying, compassionate Savior could offer. Finally, as a Jungian would say (& Marie Louise vonFranz does say: 1966 "A.'s Golden Ass" lectures at, & pub. by, Zürich's Carl Jung Inst. that year), A. did separate business with his anima (vis-a-vis Isis) & his masculinity (vis-a-vis Osiris): in Christianity, he'd be dealing directly with the masculine, a masculine with wholly internalized feminine (anima, as in the NT's Jesus Sophia: eg, 1Cor.1.24--a point of mine, not vonFranz). (Both Judaism & Christianity are violated by feminism's effort to revive the goddess by giving Wisdom [the main Heb. word, & the main Gk. word, being feminine] quasi-independence from the masculine Yahweh & the male-masculine Jesus. The effort moves away from monotheism into ditheism [transcendentalized gender egalitarianism, as eg Isis/Osiris].)

6 Ostraca & papyri show how "Lord" & "Savior" were used by the common people, & thus what it fundamentally meant for them to use these titles in calling upon, & referring to, Jesus. The Ptolomies, Julius Caesar, the Emperors (Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, et al) were "savior," protector, preserver; & so were the deities from the East (Attis, Jesus, et al): but the former were far-cool-"masculine," the latter near-warm-"feminine" (some of them even female: Cybele with Attis, Isis with Osiris, et al). (A parallel, on another pattern, in the East: to cool-historical-Buddha was added warm-fictional-Amida Buddha. Like the human body, the human soul has an optimal temperature range which, not surprisingly, the world's religions show [each in its own way].)...The n. "salvation" could be political, but the common usage of the common people had to do with the common range of private--personal & domestic--troubles: concern for food (Ac.27.34, Paul's concern for his shipmate's survival), protection from the elements (Heb.11.7, Noah's household saved from flood), physical health, well-being, safety from accidents-crime-enemies. But a parallel trajectory in the use of this Greek noun is both political (deliverances of the Jewish nation, eg Ex.14.13, 15.2; &, as politico-spiritual, messianism) & personal (as a present possession, L.1.77 et al; & as hereafter, Ro.13.11 et al). One consequence is that in Christianity, the tension between the "social gospel" (of pro-human societal change or transformation) & "soul (individual) salvation" is inherent, thus permanent & not to be resolved in either direction....As for the adjective on the same root--σωσ/ζ/τ, sos/z/t--the force is causative, answering to the question "What produces salvation?" The usual popular answer was, "A sacrifice, or a gift." If in anticipation of salvation, placatory, beseeching, or magical; if after salvation (in any of the above meanings), thankful. For the Jews, physical sacrifices did not survive AD 70 CE (the destruction of the Jerusalem temple). Sacrifice came to be understood in the spiritual sense (the only sense in the NT) of "the sacrifice of praise." But

nonbloody offerings continued as money & sometimes "in kind" (produce or commodities). Since the deepest meaning is the giving of self, one's self, self-giving, & the early Christians understood Jesus himself as God's self-giving even unto death, all the historical cultic & symbolic avenues of perception were exploited in developing the twin doctrines of incarnation & atonement: in the bold phrase of Geo. Buttrick, by faith we are saved by "the death of God on the Cross": the Cross, to use the Eng. adj. paralleling the Gk., is **salvific**, lit. "making saved or safe" (the Lat. active adj.; the resultant Lat. adj., *salvus* = safe, healthy--from *salus* = health, safety--on the same root as Gk. ὅλος *holos* = whole [complete], secure [free from danger], safe [free from threat of harm]). (Hebrew, too, is word-rich in this semantic domain. "Shalom" is the Heb. word most familiar, here, to Christians.)

Enough on what ostraca & papyri reveal about "Savior" & the other same-root words: what about "Lord"? Σωτήρ *Soter* "Savior" was both political & personal, more the latter: was Κύριος *Kurios* "Lord" the reverse, ie more political than personal? Yes. From the wide meaning possessor/owner/master (as dominus of the domo, master of the household, the sphere of domestic politics), the word easily transitioned into a title of respect/courtesy/honor/lordship vis-a-vis other political spheres (eg, Lord Nero & [in religion] Lord Serapis; & in lesser spheres of power, eg Lord Herod the Great [d.34 BC/BCE] & Lord Herod Agrippa I [d. AD 44 CE]). An AD 67 CE inscription calls Nero "the Lord of the whole world [κόσμος *kosmos*]"; & a 12 May 62 BC/BCE inscription calls Ptolemy XIII "the Lord King God"!....When it came to naming or titling Jesus, the Christians outdid the Jews (whose YHWH did not have all those adulative titles the pagans used of their deities & earthly rulers) & the pagans (who did not have the rich Jewish understanding of the divine as YHWH-Kurios (Lord, all caps in many Eng. versions, to signal YHWH behind the Septuagint's Gk.)). Kurios--the highest title, "the name that is above every name"--is applied to Jesus as Cosmic Emperor, at whose personal name "every knee should bend...and every tongue should confess" his lordship (Phil.2.9), & have nothing to do with "the gods many and lords many" (1Cor.8.5) with whom the gospel was in competition....The adj. from the n. "kurios," viz "kuriakos," was the usu. political term for "imperial." The Christians used it to mean "what belongs to, & is under the dominion of, Jesus" (Lat. equivalent as used in Eng., "dominical," "Dominus" = "Lord"). Our word "church" is this word with a Germanic accent....Κυρ *kur*, the root of these words, = **power**.

7 Of course **Jesus** gave his own coloration to "Savior" & "Lord." He did not disappear into the denotata/conotata of those titles: his followers before & after his resurrection used the titles, as available in their languages, to express their experience of him. (Yes, I believe the Spirit guided in the development of the Christian vocabulary; but I'm writing from below, within the limits of reason, without my usual religious-theological premise of revelation.)

That experience of Jesus was intimate-warm-"feminine" & ultimate-cool-"masculine." Unlike Osiris, he had no wife to manage the intimate-warm: he had to do it all, be it all. In this he lived, & modeled for his followers, a new concept of masculinity, inclusive of the feminine (with, a Jungian might say, a fully developed anima). Till today's ultrafeminism, this was not considered a defect, a deficiency, in the Christian religion. Now, this sect would repair the awkwardness of monotheism by reifying Chochma to form the divine dyad Chochma/Yahweh (paralleling Isis/Osiris) & Sophia to form the divine dyad Sophia/Jesus--the reifying being a personalization of wisdom. As the early Christians resisted the divine dyads of their time, we must resist this of ours. "Reimagining" (originally, "Reimaging") is good, for our imaginations should be in action in the praise of God and defense of the gospel; but sneaking a goddess in on us is bad....Another type of divine dyad, this one internal to God & thus in tension with the internal-to-God Trinity, is extensively displayed in the New Century Hymnal, where it appears as Father/Mother or Mother/Father.

8 When Julian of Norwich calls Jesus "our Mother," she's signaling the feminine in his being & behavior & benefits. Two stories:

(1) Before Communion last Sunday, the pastor asked the children "What do we do when we come to Jesus' table?" A small child said, "We hug the Lord." "Jesus is Lord," the earliest Christian confession, bespoke both the cool-

far & the warm-near; & that Sunday school child was responding to the latter, which was adequate (without the Goddess or Mother God) to communicate caring & intimacy. Do our Sunday school girls feel inferior to the boys when both sing "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world"? Not unless they are so taught.

(2) At fellowship hour a few Sundays earlier, an old man told me his greatest comfort in facing death is something his UCC-pastor daughter said to her six-year-old who had asked, "Mommie, I know we go to heaven when we die, but how do we get there?" Grandpa heard the answer, which came without hesitation: "Jesus comes down & leads us to heaven." The answer wholly satisfied the child, & grandfather.

Christian children growing up in homes untouched by this pietism, this Jesus devotion, are not as warmed by thoughts of Jesus, Lord & Savior. Catholic churches East & West have been experiencing sheep-loss into evangelical (old pietist) & pentecostal (new pietist) churches, the sheep coming in out of the cold. (Of course both catholicisms have vigorous pietist strains, but these in the past have seldom set the tone in parishes.) (In the monastery of Clairvaux, I meditated on a hymn written there ca.1150: "Jesus, thou Joy of loving hearts"--than which, I believe, no greater hymn has ever been written to the warm side of the Lord.)

9 As Jesus combined cool-masculine & warm-feminine in himself, so he saw his heaven-Father when he called him "Holy (cool term) Father (for him, warm tern)" (Jn.17; cp. Is 57.15 & the Lord's Prayer).

10 Great hymns often **balance** cool & warm. I remember conversations with Georgia Harkness, a great theologian with a cool mind & a warm heart. Her hymn "Hope of the world" is warm, on Jesus as compassionate Savior; but it pleads that the "Lord" will "use" us "as thou wilt": **Lord** balances the previous **save**. But banally dependably, "Lord" has disappeared in the NCH (No.46). On the same principle of offenselessness to females, "Deliverer" (gender-neutral) would sub for "Savior" if the latter were felt to be what lexically it is, viz, masculine. Then we'd have the colorless, resonanceless dyad "Deliverer & Sovereign," two words Christians can think but not feel....In the NCH, the Christian vocabulary has crashed into a mindless calamity. Emotionally deficient terms replace soul-satisfying ones in the interest of overcoming a supposed deficiency in the way the Bible speaks of God--viz, a deficiency of male/female balance in the lexicon. The effort to overcome that supposed deficiency has resulted in a worse one.

11 In both Testaments, God overcomes the distance between himself & human beings. He is Immanuel ("with-us-[is]-God"), Shekinah (glorious Presence), Man (the incarnation). Biblical religion does not lack warmth to **balance** "the Lord... high and lofty" (Is.6.1 NRSV). To use a hymn phrase of Gerhard Tersteegen, it is about "Love Almighty."

12 While the Christian vision of God fails the test of gender egalitarianism (there being no divine Mother or divine Daughter), the actual effect of Jesus & the early church (as even Eliz. S.-Fiorenza admits) was to raise the status of women to virtual equality with men. Call that, if you please, a victory of substance over symbolism. But can the Christian language for God be brought up to egalitarian speed? Not without profound theological distortion & corruption of the Christian understanding of God. Eg, the incarnation would have to be dropped: the greatest possible insult to females is that God *himself* came only as a male. (Not an insult? Ask any feminist [radical or ultra- or gender feminist].) The modernist way of resolving such an embarrassment was to attribute to **revelation** only what does not offend modern sensibility. The jettisoning went so far that today, most Unitarian-Universalists consider themselves atheists: belief in God or gods offends modern consciousness. Faithful Christians will take a deep breath &, without blushing, proclaim a gospel that is guilty of "the scandal of particularity," the specific lineaments of the Christian Story. Those lineaments include the masculine (never feminine) pronouns & titles for God (though of course there's biblical warrant for feminine similes [not metaphors] for God)....Feminism rests on two long developments in Western intellectual history: (1) Reason was first inferior to revelation, then equal, then superior; (2) Experience was first inferior to revelation, then to reason, then

superior first to revelation & then to reason (as it is in a current "foundationalism"). "Women's experience" is, in E. S.-Fiorenza's handling of the Bible, as much the touchstone of authenticity, truth, as reason was in Jefferson's Enlightenment-rationalist version of the NT. The folly & treachery of this doth not yet appear to intellectual elites in church & society....A medieval-Renaissance parallel: "Natural law" achieved so high a status that it became looked upon as "a major source of divine truth apart from revelation" (B.Childs, BIBL.TH. OF THE O & NTs, 553).

---You may go home now if you're not interested in seeing how divine gender plays out in THE GOLDEN ASS. But if you hang in with me, you'll deepen your sense of the meaning of this Thinksheet's title.

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13 As punishment for youthful indiscretions (sins), Lucius (Apuleius' nom de plume, in this almost certainly autobiographical AD 2nd c. CE novel)--henceforth, L.--got transmogrified into an ass, donkey. Fairytale parallel (derivative?): "Beauty & the Beast," the prince by lust in the act of rape having been transformed into the Beast & then, by Beauty's love, reconverted back into the prince. (Disney adds pathos by having the Beast converted to love at the point of his meeting Beauty, but able to become the prince once more only by being loved sacrificially [Beauty sacrificing herself for her father--a distinctly Christian-redemptive theme].)....In both tales, the masculine is redeemed by the feminine: (1) Isis redeems (reassembles the severed chunks of, & reanimates) Osiris; (2) Beauty rescues two males: her father, from the clutches of the Beast; & the Beast from his beastliness (outer & [earlier in Disney] inner). Notice, again, the first half of this Thinksheet's title....In his just-published autobio, Gore Vidal says the chief male resident of Camelot (to remain in our present image) always was sexually a beast, never became a prince. JFK told (says GV) GV that he'd never been in love: his interest was in orgasm, not relationship. (GV says he was in love only once: with a boy he was in private school with & who died at age 19 in WWII.) (Animals live at the lust level, & humans who live at the lust level are sexual animals. By "love," we mean something distinctly human, an achievement rather than an attribute. And it cannot come to full blossom & fruit except between heterosexual equals. Two forces in our society today make love improbable: [1] Narcissism, which includes acting out sexual impulses; & [2] Feminism, which fosters an adversarial stand-off between the sexes.)

It occurred to me to read Bruno Bettelheim (THE USES OF ENCHANTMENT: THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF FAIRY TALES, Vintage 75/77) on Beast/Beauty. (1), on narcissism (307): "The Beast's palace in which all of Beauty's wishes are immediately fulfilled...is a narcissistic fantasy typically engaged in by children....If nothing happened to interrupt such a narcissistic dream life, there would be no story; narcissism...is not a life of satisfactions, but no life at all. Beauty comes to life when she learns that her father needs her." (L., through his vision of Isis, foresees a life of service.) In thoroughgoing Freudian speak, B. calls the B./B. fairytale a story of "the humanization and socialization of the id by the superego" (309). (2), on overcoming destructive adversariality (also 309): this fairytale's vision is an "impressive image: a world where the good live in happiness, and the evil ones--the [jealous] sisters--are not beyond redemption." The story of L. has the feel of this fairytale. Mature love overcomes not only the animal/soul, body/mind alienation, but also has benevolent social effects.

14 THE GOLDEN ASS's chap.47 is "How Apuleius, by Roses and Prayer, Returned to His Human Shape." (Remember the part the roses love-symbol played in Beauty & the Beast?) Awakening "with sudden fear" "when I had slept my first sleep [of the night]" by the seaside, I "saw the moon" (Isis symbol) & thought on the fact that "all human things" are "governed by her [the goddess's] providence." So I prayed to her (261ff, my modernization of Adlington's Eng.): "O blessed queen of heaven...Ceres...or Venus...or the sister of the god Phoebus...or Proserpine...." "By your feminine light" you illumine all cities & nourish all seeds.... "by whatever name or fashion or shape it is lawful to call upon you, I pray you to end my great travail and misery and raise up my fallen hopes....Remove from me



this hateful donkey-shape, and return me to my relatives & myself as Lucius; and if I have offended at any point your divine majesty, let me rather die if I may not live."....He returned to sleep & is awakened to see "from the midst of the sea a divine and vulnerable face, worshipped even by the gods themselves." "The poverty of my human speech" frustrates his desire to describe Isis, who then addresses him: "Lucius, here I am; your weeping and prayer have moved me to help you." Then she goes into a long, beautiful spiel of self-description, detailing her powers & many names, ending with "my true name, Queen Isis." You will be "bound and subject" to me for the rest of your life. He awakens "with fear, joy, and heavy sweat," determined to obey all that she reveals to him as his duty; he follows a procession enacting the "pomp of the saving goddess,...mother of all"; he regains human form the moment the high priest "thrusts out the garland of roses to my mouth" & I ate it "with a great affection." (The beauty & power of this passage is beyond my power to describe: please read it!) Thus saved "by grace from heaven," he becomes an Isis/Osiris priest, ordained to a "yoke of ministry [service]." Then into her temple. ...So much for the salvific **feminine**, Lady Isis, husband of Lord Osiris.

15 Now we turn to the **masculine** divine, in chap.48 (273ff): "How the Parents and Friends of Apuleius Heard News That He Was Alive and in Health." "The grace and benefit I had received of the goddess" was soon known by all who had known me--the story of "a man raised from death to life," now "set apart for the service of the goddess,...who appeared to me every night." This life of obedience, including chastity, "was hard." "I daily served at the temple," & the goddess gave me "her principal priest Mithras [!]" as mentor into the final stage of initiation. In the inmostness of the temple he worshiped all the gods. (Here, the works of Arthur Darby Nock & Harold Willoughby, on pagan regeneration, come to mind.) (L.'s great prayer to Isis is 278f.)....Then "in my sleep" Isis prepared me "to receive a new order and consecration," though "I was most fully an initiate and sacred person already." But then "there came a new and marvelous thought to my mind: I was only religious to the goddess Isis, but not yet to the religion of the great Osiris, the sovereign father of all the gods,...the highest and the ruler of the greatest...."