

PAGAN MOTHER NATURE AND BIBLICAL FATHER GOD

**Cosmic** feminism, the religion of Mother Nature (for short, "Nature") seems to be winning, in America today, the battle of the sexes against **historic** masculinism, the religion of Father God (for short, "God"). Partnership is my preferred model for human marriage: can it be made to work in divine marriage? Or is there only one God in spite of Americans' worship of two? And if so, can our traditional Father God be reconceived as an androgyn (by leaning very heavily on Gn.1<sup>26f</sup>) in response to current feminism--in partial parallel to an earlier syncretism, viz Yahweh's absorption of Baal (but not Asherah, his consort)?

1. According to Israel's early historians, it's easy to separate the good guys from the bad guys among the monarchs of Israel & Judah. The bad guys moved the image ("idol") of the **Goddess** (Asherah) into Yahweh's temple, or let it stay there if it was there when they ascended the throne; the good guys didn't. On this criterion, or any other you choose, who today are the good/bad guys among the theologians? And what of "woman church" & "inclusive language"?

2. Since, in the history of religions, the human plane models for the divine (as well as the reverse), the divine is peopled by a **divine couple** or (Olympus, eg) couples. In orthodox biblical religion, this ditheism is ruled out in favor of the God-Lord-King-Father, who accordingly must manage the feminine in some other manner than in having a female consort, a wife. One way has been to see the feminine anima as integral to, essentially incorporate in, the masculine person (to put it Jungianly). Another, the way of biblical Wisdom, is to view Hokma-Sophia-Wisdom as a God-created consort of God, poetically-dramatically presented with increasing vividness & even concreteness in the evolution of Jewish wisdom literature. (Cf Jesus as "Second Person" in Trinity.)

3. At all costs, **history** (Creation-Exodus-Occupation-Exile-Return-Incarnation-Crucifixion-Resurrection-Return-Shalom) must be preserved, holds the biblical tradition, against **swamping by nature**, whose downdrag gravity is a perpetual threat. The divine domestic fight is unfair: Nature is visible (as was Asherah in Yahweh's temple), God is not (Who was way back out of sight in the Holy of Holies, & invisible even there).

4. Why not Father Nature? **Hormones**, that's why. The estrogens produce phenomena that, through the ages & around the world, have impressed peoples as more "natural"--just as the androgens, more "historical," history-shaping (eg, wars,\* treaties-covenants, laws, institutions more complex than but resting on the family, which biologically centers in the mother & Mother Nature)....\*But not ferocity. In nature, & in the history of deities, the female is as ferocious as the male.

5. Since, of late, history (with the help of television) seems too much with us, we're being deluged with **romantic primitivism**, a dreamy back-to-nature-&-simplicity yearning through the entertainment media, cults, & (as "creation spirituality," eg) churches. Ignorance isn't necessary here, but it helps: Taoism is known to these romantics only through its philosophical classic, the Tao Te Ching--or even moreslimmly, only Lao Tzu's yin/yang, understood as the partnership of female/male. But what came of this philosophy? A religion in which women are anything but men's equals & reason is overwhelmed by superstition & magic. It seems reasonable that women would get fairer treatment under goddess religions & a religion resting on a philosophy of female/male partnership; reasonable, but wrong. Women have fared better under patriarchy. While pressing for partnership, we need not, should not, be dishonest to the past.

6. On the model of pseudo-Taoism, some are now trying to **syncretize the biblical deity into yin/yang** without abandoning Judaism or Christianity. Impossible. For biblical monotheism, syncretism is one-way: God can be, has continuously been, enriched by conformable accretions as the biblical mission has spread; but you have a new religion--

eg, Islam--when the biblical god is absorbed, assimilated, into--syncretized with--grafted onto some foreign numinous (in the case of Islam, protoArabic with its jinns). To the extent that current feminism is goddess religion, God cannot digest it & the Church will not ingest it. Prediction: Radical-feminist Christians will join with other radical feminists in creating a new religion based on Nature (yes, Mother Nature) & claiming roots in religions of nature around the world & through the ages & with the help of mystical academics (such as dilettante mythologist Jos. Campbell & Baba Ram Das). But to the extent that current feminism is a cry for justice, it is assimilable to God, & the Church should give it solid support. Asherah must be kept out of the temple, but never the cry for justice.

7. The best human news in the 1990s, I predict, will be the effectual emergence of the conviction that nature/humanity homeostasis, our species in **sustainable** relations with the rest of nature, is not only possible but urgently necessary. Put culturally, this means an emerging consciousness of the **partnership of nature and history**. Sexually, this should support the tendencies toward male/female partnership in & out of marriage. Theologically, it should help us biblical peoples, Christians & Jews, to an enriched & empowered understanding of God as the Ruler of both nature & history, which are co-equal partners under God parallel with the woman & man as co-equal partners under God in biblical marriage (the dominance question solved by the supervening Power constituting both husband & wife as subordinates).

8. In all of this, the sense of **mystery** should deepen, widen, mature. The mystery of being, of sexuality, of "eternity in the heart" (the longing for a More Than that is not more of the same). And, yes, the mystery of (& respect for) nature our home & history our story. Good news ahead if we respond aright to all these divine nudges! Good news entirely conformable to, illumining, & enriching the good news in Jesus.

9. But if not ditheism, what about **deism**? Does Mother Nature do her own thing as a creature of God independently of, & sometimes in contradiction to, Father God? Put from another angle: Is our human creaturely freedom to decide independently of, and even against, God, paralleled in Nature? is our freedom **in** nature continuous with, illuminative of, the same kind of freedom **of** nature? I think so. Many implications. For one: Though God has ultimate say in nature & my life, he doesn't always "get his way" in either. God chooses to be self-limiting potentially in the creation of freedom within creation; free entities have interlimiting wills: if in love I will your freedom, I cannot at the same time will my will. What I will is our relationship (covenant), & I want to will what's best for the relationship within the here-&-now conditions of the relationship.

10. This brings us to a distinction made in all Christian theologies & which I call the distinction between God's **promotive** will (what he wants ideally, in perfect love & perfect knowledge) & what he puts up with rather than violate our & (I'm saying) nature's freedom (ie, his **permissive** will). God permits natural & human disasters, individual & social sinning--& the malign consequences of some human/natural intersections (eg, unwanted pregnancies). Call all this, if you will, **modified deism**: it is certainly more biblical than the 18th-century Newtonian mechanistic view of God's winding his watch & then letting it do its thing without further divine attention. Rather, my God is caring & sharing, intimately concerned about every hair of our heads & also the heads of us who don't have hair....A story:

11. Yesterday a reader objected to this of mine: "God declared his creation 'very good' (Gn.1<sup>31</sup>). Gradually our living space is becoming very bad, and we must find ways to reverse this reversal. Population zero is one of those ways, and without abortion there is no practicable hope of stabilizing population. Therefore, abortion is the will of God." My reader read the last sentence not only out of context but as though it stood alone, as a doctrinal proposition. Romantic idealists believe that all marriages & fetuses are made in heaven--or at least fetuses, which are of nature (& so automatically "will of God"), whereas marriages are only of history (ie, human decision). The truth is that God's **practical** will (cf Kant's "practical reason") works, as does ours, within the "practicable" (the control word in my statement's context). Only within that limit can it be said that "abortion is the will of God."