

a few further remarks on/from Francis Martin's THE FEMINIST QUESTION:  
FEMINIST THEOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN TRADITION (Eerdmans/94)

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1 "You are not one of us," say the Protestant fundamentalists, "if you don't believe in the literal Virgin Birth." "You are not one of us," say the ultrafeminists (Jewish, Catholic, Protestant), "if you ever refer to God as 'he'." The former's IO (intolerable outrage) is a **denial**; the latter's, a **deed**. The constrictive, censorious mentality of the latter's left-fundamentalism is the same as that of the former's right-fundamentalism.

The former fundamentalism barely exists in the United Church of Christ, which is latitudinarian on the Virgin Birth: the latter fundamentalism--Down with "he"!--seems to be on the rise, providing one more instance of the perversity of the peripheral-made-central, diverting attention from the Center, the gender-transcending gospel, God's "good news" of the way out (ex-odus) & the way up (spiritual & social).

2 The all-or-nothing heresy/fallacy was frightening enough to me even before the Oklahoma City bombing, a repercussion from the Waco massacre. It's bad enough when political life experiences a monomaniacal melt-down: it's longterm worse when an obsessive myopia rivets attention in religious life. And horrible when the two combine, as in Iran's fatwa of \$2 million on the head of Salman Rushdie.

3 Nowhere in his massive scholarly tome does Martin take on ultrafeminism's absolutist anti-"he" prohibition such as appears in Letty Russell's THE LIBERATING WORD (Westminster/77), by implication in Ruth C. Duck's GENDER AND THE NAME OF GOD: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula (Pilgrim/91; her doctoral thesis, in which God is never Father but [184] "the Source," Jesus is never Son but [same p.] "the offspring of God"; language for God is not revealed but only socially constructed), & Gail Ramshaw's GOD BEYOND GENDER: Feminist Christian God-Language (Fortress/94)....Of these, Martin does not refer to either of the first two authors; as for the third, he adduces only a 1982 article (when she was Ramshaw-Schmidt). His tightly-printed 32-p. bibliography omits, to my knowledge, no other influential authors in the field of feminist exegesis/theology.

My opening assertion in the ¶ immediately above stands even though he occasionally (222ff,249f) touches on the issue of gendered language for God.

IRONY: My experience of listening, conferencing, & reading on the God-as-"he" issue is that speakers/authors **split**: (1) neither side argues its position; (2) both sides, the "he" users (the biblical usage) & the "he" avoiders (the ultrafeminist usage), assume, in their audiences/readerships, their position. But when pressed, both sides admit that this is the crucial God-language issue. Why this avoidance? Because the polarization is so complete that both sides consider the crucial issue a non-issue! More on this anon.

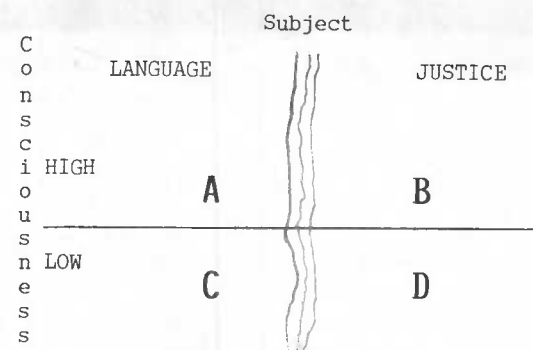
4 Why is pronominality for the divine crucial, more important than names/metaphors? Because it cannot avoid the ultimate issue of God's being, the reality behind God's inherent relating (the immanent Trinity, Father-Son-Spirit) & his doing (the economic Trinity, Lord-King-Savior-Shepherd etc.). Here's a simple display:

- |   |                                     |                                  |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Talk <b>from</b> God:               | REVELATION                       |
| 2 | Talk <b>to</b> God:                 | PRAYER                           |
| 3 | Talk <b>with</b> God:               | COMMUNION                        |
| 4 | Talk <b>about</b> God:              | THEOLOGY                         |
| 5 | Talk <b>about talk about</b> God:   | EPISTEMOLOGY (notions about God) |
| 6 | Talk <b>about the being of</b> God: | ONTOLOGY (knowledge of God)      |

I believe that #1 accesses for us what God wants us to know about his very being (#6), including that (though here language bursts its limits) he's "he." Atheists & agnostics, the latter including those (e.g., Sallie McFague) who hold that all our language for God is nothing more than a socially constructed metaphorical picture, say we can't go beyond #5. But even if one says that we know only God's *persona*, the self he presents to us, rather than God-in-himself, i.e. his *person*, we are always, according to Scripture, to address him as "he," never as "she."....A picture might help, though it mustn't be overread: The actress Sharon Stone distances herself (her person) from her professional role (her persona) by calling the former "I" & the latter "she." Compare also gestalt psychiatry's contrast of the public/authentic I or you.

5 Notice the **clash of consciousness raisings**:

My personal trajectories on this are movements first from C to A & then from D to B. The first was in connection with a prior consciousness raising underlying both: God raised my consciousness about himself in-through the Bible, a book (1) in language (therefore, my secondary devotion to language, including the biblical languages), & (2) concerned with justice (interlocked with the worship of the holy, righteous, just God).



So where's the clash? Not in me. Rather, in the fact that so many in the ex-mainstream churches have so bought into B (a secular movement launched in 1949 Europe by Simone de Beauvoir & in 1963 America by Betty Friedan) as to consciousness lower about language, specifically to Bible-bash right along with secularists. A grand old teacher of mine, Paul S. Minear says (PRISM Spr/88 48) that as "any demand for fidelity to the Bible is **foreign**" to the secular feminist scene, "the editorial committee of the [UCC] BOOK OF WORSHIP...did not give highest priority to the need for fidelity to the Bible." (The same applies, in spades, to the [1995 UCC] NEW CENTURY HYMNAL.)....I boldfaced that word in the Minear quote: I'm so high on A that UCC publications, strangled by radical "inclusive language guidelines" (including an absolute prohibition of masculine pronouns for God), strike me as foreign, unfaithful to Bible & Faith (which is what Minear means, though he's put it as gently as possible).

6 I object! Being high on both A & B (which I believe both Bible & Faith require Christians to be), I reject the **teeter-totter** of AD or CB. But as does Minear, I observe that justice-oriented Christians whose consciousness on language has not been raised as high as mine has are willing to make concessions alienating Christians from the way the Bible speaks of God--especially those willing to use the eraser-end of the pencil, more especially those willing to erase the masculine pronouns for God. I reject both idolatries: AD (the fundamentalists' error) & CB (the activists' error). The latter are deficient in linguistics or metaphysics or both. (Martin is a master in both disciplines, I rejoiced to discover. Unfortunately, his book is heavy-lifting, without lilt; he's clear, even precise, but he asks the reader to think in intellectual & spiritual domains few readers have ever entered. But his message I consider important enough to warrant two long Thinksheets that, to some, may seem as unreadable as the book would to them--but I hope not!)

7 Defining **justice** requires (158) "defining the norms by which one consciousness is considered better than another and by whom....Viewing reality with the eyes of the practical reason inherited from the Enlightenment and with the individualism begun by Descartes and perpetuated in American society by a constellation of forces," feminism is captive to "modernity's tendency to equate authority with dominative power." So (next p.) "consciousness was raised only in regard to the way women were excluded from a world defined by the masculinization effected by the Enlightenment. The oppression worked on all humankind by this outlook was not rendered conscious. One of the discouraging dimensions of this period is the fact that there were not many theoretical or practical alternatives being offered by traditional Christians."....With a keen & comprehensive understanding of the **pre-Enlightenment** situation, Martin shifts the battleground from sexist men v. feminist women, to women & men against an Enlightenment which victimized first men & then, through radical feminism, women, who bought the Enlightenment's equation of liberty & equality & its elevation of individuality over community & its polemic understanding of "fraternity" (i.e., solidarity). (My analysis, Martin's general line of thought.) Reminds me of what Jo en Lai said when asked whether the French Revolution was a success: "It's too early to tell." It's too early to tell, I must risk saying, whether the latest wave of feminism is doing more good than harm. For one thing, we need a quarter century, i.e. a generation, to tell the revolution's effect on our society's (any society's) chief product, the children.

8 The **spin** ultrafeminism gives to the three words underlined in §7 eliminates

the possibility of taking the biblical God straight ("neat," as drinkers say): he's masculine-feminine rather than feminine-masculine, feminine, or neuter (impersonal). But remove the spin, & the three terms are open to a wider vista & profounder grasp of the factors in interplay between the human & the divine realities & relationships.

The divine stage has only one stool (monotheism). If there were two, no problem: one for God, one for Goddess--in the history of religion, the most common transcendental arrangement, the mirror reflex of the human sexual situation. Some monotheist cults, ancient & modern, have tried to have their cake & eat it too: the one God is Father-Mother or Mother-Father. But for many reasons, this just doesn't work for the biblical God, who (e.g.) has a Son but no Daughter.

Broadminded as Martin is in general, & in spirit irenic, he's adamant against any referencing of the divine as female (249): it would be "not only misleading but directly contrary to biblical usage, which must be determinative for Christians" (fn.77: "This point is well made by the post-Christian Daphne Hampson, *THEOLOGY AND FEMINISM*, Oxford, Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990"). As for using only nongendered terms (e.g., Creator, Sustainer), it "could never replace all personal and anthropomorphic terms without depersonalizing the personal God and eliminating most biblical predication" (fn.78: "For a development of this line of thought, see Roland M. Frye, *SPEAKING THE CHRISTIAN GOD*, 17-43.").

9 If we are faithful to Scripture, we cannot remove (this Thinksheet's title) "the scandal of divine-gender [masculine] particularity." Martin, after many qualifiers of this fact, affirms (251) that only the masculine referencing of God can preserve transcendence, can avoid complete collapse into immanence & thus pantheism: "It is a transcultural fact that as natural images, *male* mediates transcendence and otherness and *female* mediates immanence and closeness. This has been established in regard to cosmic religion by Mircea Eliade [extensive fn.], in regard to images in general by Gilbert Durand [fn.], and has been discussed from the aspect of socio-biology by Walter Ong [fn.]. The *values* attached to this symbolization differ from culture to culture, but the interior and mediating impression created by the imagery is constant. By ignoring the mediating function of images and replacing it with a form of representationism [on the foundationalism assumption that the self must have an assumptional fulcrum to gain further knowledge], feminists are trying to introduce feminist imagery into Christian and other linguistic expressions for God. This is an error on two counts. It projects onto the biblical tradition the distortion of masculinity and femininity experienced in our culture. Rather than try to change the revelation of God mediated [not just represented, as in ultrafeminism] in this tradition, we would do better to change the misinterpretation of that tradition by serious intellectual effort to recover [next p.] its true meaning....[&] manifest the true nature of God's *agapē* as revealed in Christ. [¶] The second error derives from the first. Feminists seem intent on trying to obfuscate the otherness, the causality, and the authority of God because they perceive these as domination rather than the foundation for the generous activity of God by which he shares his being with us and calls us to an eternal and personal fruition of that sharing....When the very linguistic mediation of God's otherness [viz., his masculinity] is attacked and eliminated, the result is not a more balanced view of the deity, effected by our own representations, but a distinct tendency to pantheism and a loss of the sense of the absolute freedom of God's creative and redemptive act"--& theology tends to collapse into ecology, as in a number of feminist thinkers today. ([Is, mine.]

10 In "The mutual superiority of the sexes" (in my *FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT* [Eerdmans/95]), I use biology to confirm the truth Martin gets at in other ways (some mentioned in §9, above): "Since the androgens are more leading and the estrogens more nurturing, it should surprise no one that more men than women will be **initiators** and more women than men will be **carers**. This fact must not be used as a biology-is-destiny excuse for men not caring and for women not taking the initiative. But the fact should not be obscured, as it is by radical egalitarians" (26) & thus by ultrafeminists. Calling God "he" means, among many other things, that the initiative is with God (the Creator-Redeemer), who acts from *agapē*, his caring-feminine nature as "Father of mercies." Those who surrender, as too scandalous, the divine-gender particularity of the Bible's "he" for God are compromising their witness to the biblical God.

11 In §9, Martin speaks of "**natural** images," female & male. Almost everybody accepts that our being created *in imago dei*, Scripture lays on us the duty to see earth mirroring heaven: what has come out of God, viz., our fe/male difference, was/is, however conceived, in God (Gn.1.27, God & "man" with masculine pronouns). And almost everybody knows that differential hormones are God's way of bifurcating humanity into girls & boys. But I've met resistance whenever I've extended the *argumentum e naturae* to include the sexual hormones--as though I were guilty of bio-determinism! And my accusers have pressed me for scriptural warrant, & (for one) I've adduced Ro.1.20: "his...divine nature...understood and seen through the things he has made" (NRSV). Paul concludes (next v.), on the basis of this general human experience, that "they knew God." What I say about the hormones as squirting around in individual proportions in each individual skin--well, no novel hermeneutics or theology here; merely the taking "captive to obey Christ" (2Cor.10.5) of scientific data unavailable to former generations of Jewish & Christian thinkers.

I press the matter harder: it is an intellectual defect if a theologian fails to exploit the hermeneutic possibilities as knowledge of nature/humanity/society advances. Put another way: we cannot learn more about the creation without potentially knowing more about the Creator. And again: "new occasions [including new knowledge] teach new duties." E.g., the fact that all the Church Fathers who mention abortion are against it is, now on this threatened planet, no more conclusive than that they all thought semen was (as the Latin means) "seed," the female therefore contributing nothing essential to life any more than soil does (an ignorance demeaning to women for a million years, & now inexcusable).

12 Chap.8, "Analogy, Images, Metaphors, and Theology," is the heart of Martin's book. Why do the Enlightenment captives find the divine masculine-feminine (in that order) particularity scandalous? Because while biblical religion-revelation is **inductive** (i.e., the devotee moves from particular-revelation to general inferences/projections), "foundationalism" (including feminist theology) is **deductive**, moving from general (e.g., the philosophical notion that God is genderless, a Greek idea preceding, but included in, the Enlightenment) to particular (e.g., the question What's the best way to picture God here & now [without privileging the Christian past's pictures]?).

13 The biblical teaching that God is masculine-feminine has nothing to do with sex in God: "God is spirit" (Jn.4.24 NRSV: "Father" thrice in the preceding three vv.) means, in context, not that he is genderless but that he is translocal, not tied down to either mountain (Zion or Gerizim). Analogy receives a correspondence, as in revelation (first-level noetic discourse), metaphor creates it (second-level epistemic discourse). Revelation disappears (as with Sallie McFague) when analogy is collapsed into metaphor, so anything goes in picturing God.

INSTANCE: Scott M. Peck, in his *A WORLD WAITING TO BE BORN*, flips between "she" & "he" in pronouncing God. No problem for him, for he's making up the god as he goes along. In pt.4, "EPIPHANY [!]: Community in the Workplace," God is understandably more she than he, as (my phrase) Community-Producer-through-Authentic-Selfrevelation: God is functioning exactly as I saw Fritz Perls act in drawing forth the "authentic, real you" in group. Much that Peck says is highly useful, but the masculine-feminine/transcendent-immanent biblical God makes no appearance in the chapter (& probably the book: I have, & have read, only this chapter). The masculine-transcendent God has been reduced to serving "community" (with, of course, no mention of the Bible's specifics for God-oriented, God-acceptable community)--a reduction paralleling God's absorption into "process" (Whitehead, Wieman, et al) & various ancient & contemporary pantheisms & panentheisms (e.g., Sallie McFague's the world as "God's body"). Some images do indeed create, but others disclose (232f): the "name" (singular, Mt.28.19) of God as Father, Son, Holy Spirit is not an invention but a disclosure. Creating an image of the divine would logically entail a Couple, but (234) God "has no consort, and his proper name is Yhwh, which is the masculine form of a verb." (Yes, Hebrew verbs can have gender, & many in Is.60 are feminine; but "there is not one verb in the Old Testament to be found in the feminine form when God is the subject.")

14 A **pro-noun** not only refers to, but stands in the place of, a noun. When Peck & others use "she" for the divine, what noun is this pronoun standing in the place of? Clearly & only, goddess. The psychodynamic trajectory of the current Sophia flap is also clear: (1) Ultrafeminists for some time have thought "God" (the biblical God) while saying "she"; (2) Thus the pronoun & the noun came to function as one attentional reality; (3) God, now "she" or nothing (i.e., not "he" or "it"), undergoes a gender change (deep, not mere transvestitism); (4) The feminine side of the biblical God is theologized as primary (feminine-masculine replacing the biblical masculine-feminine); (5) Chochma-Sophia being the Hebrew-Greek feminine terms for wisdom, Wisdom becomes God's primary characteristic; (6) The resulting sapiential religion is practiced as education, the learning of Wisdom (rather than the biblical accent on repentance-faith-obedience-love vis-a-vis Elohim-Yhwh-Lord-Father-Son); (6) From that transmogrification it's only a short step to Wisdom-Sophia worship, as at the WCC Re-Imagining Conference (Minn. MN, Nov/93); (7) Another short step, & one should not be surprised to find the UCC women's center executive claiming that the Bible frequently addresses God in the feminine (the truth being that it never does); (8) the church authorities, having been taken over by this ultrafeminist hermeneutical hubris, circle the wagons to protect the ultrafeminists as reps of feminists in general (which they are not), & look upon objectors as sexists (i.e., men & women set against women!); (9) The ultrafeminist agenda penetrates the mind, programs, & publications of the church authorities; (10) Truth being the first & continuing victim of ideology, from the church authorities the membership gets only propaganda, with encouragement for "re-education" but not for dialog--e.g., no chance that UNITED CHURCH NEWS will publish my objection to our women's-center abuse of Scripture; (11) Also as in the case of all other ideologies, the authorities develop ways of blocking dissidents, who then can't get church jobs (pastorates, teaching posts, etc.). It's no exaggeration to say that in the UCC, the ultrafeminist cancer has metastasized this far.

15 The mainline churches, especially the UCC, have **internalized** the ultrafeminist takeover of America's schools (personnel & curricula), media, & high culture. The best secular documentation of the disease's spread that I know of is Christina Hoff Sommer's WHO STOLE FEMINISM? How Women Have Betrayed Women (S&S /94). We've been worrying that Big Brother may get us: "Big Sister" (269) has got us! Equality feminism (what I prefer to call equity feminism or justice feminism) the author is, as I am, vigorously for; but the movement has been stolen by what she calls **gender feminism** (what I call ultrafeminism), a misandric (man-hating) tribal (female self-segregating) affirmative action to replace alleged male domination with envisioned female domination. While both men & women have been silent as this cancer has developed in the body of feminism, we have lost the battle: "The price has been great--the ideologues have made off with the women's movement" (273). Shelby Steele calls those whose idea of consciousness-raising on race, gender, or class is the arousing of anger & resentment, "the grievance elite." The gender feminists have so rationalized their position as to accuse all opposition of (Marxist phrase, useful to all authoritarians-totalitarians) "false consciousness." (The only relief in the book is Ms. Sommers' (1) assertion that these extremists are chiefs with almost no Indians, & (2) prediction that, more & more attacking women who don't follow them, they will more & more lose even what little support they do have in the female populace (275: "The gender monitors" will decline in influence as the public becomes aware that they have only a minuscule constituency for their "militant gynocentrism and misandrisim")....What this "ideologically correct censorious revisionism" most hates, in the unenlightened female lumpen proletariat around the world, is their appetite for romance, including attraction to strong males. A test Ms. Sommers applies is to ask what happened after Rhett Butler carried Scarlett O'Hara up that grand staircase in GONE WITH THE WIND (still a world-popular read). If the respondent says "He raped her," Ms. S. has a gender feminist on her hands; & the next question gets an angry response: "Why, then, was she happy the next morning?" Margaret Mitchell's answer (& Ms. S.'s): "She was ravished, not raped. The raped wake up next morning feeling simply awful."

What we have, then, though Ms. S. doesn't put it this way, is a small but powerful lobby of radical femmes raping the whole populace with their propaganda. The



worst of the many society-sickening spinoffs is the heightening of the normal tension of the sexes into an ideological battle of the sexes, making marriage-&-family more problematic, honoring weak (female-submissive) males & punishing strong males, whose numbers among the "advantaged" classes are declining disastrously, much to the frustration of non-gender-feminist females.

But in spite of all the damage they do, "the gender warriors," who "speak in the name of but do not represent" the mainstream feminists (274), continue to incite to war, their weapons being atrocity stories & skewed statistics ("advocacy research" [178]). One final quote on these "cultural apparatchiks": "When women set themselves against men, they simultaneously set themselves against other women in a group antagonism that is untenable from the outset. In the end, the gender feminist is always forced to show her disappointment and annoyance with the women who are to be found in the camp of the enemy. Misandry moves on to misogyny." A complicating factor in all this is the shrill voice of some victim-feminists.

Ms. S. does not deal with the cancer's invasion of church & synagogue. That's an advantage for us who must deal with it inside our religious institutions. But she gives long attention to the captivity to gender feminism of women students in our colleges & universities; & they bring their skewed, antibiblical religion into our seminaries, thence into the churches. We are already in big trouble, with seminary & ecclesiarchs knuckling under, practicing what the author calls "defensive suppression" (271) of the urge to speak truth to this new, intrusive, false power. As defensive medicine is self-protection for medics against legal attack, so defensive management fears being accused of doing anything that could be construed as harassment, or creating a "hostile environment" or "chill." Result? Aggressive ultra-feminists are given more space, both intellectual & operational, than is good for them or anyone else. What nonsense & even tyranny some women are getting away with because of their employers' fears! Nor do male employees dare to stand up to their gender-card-playing female colleagues.

16 What most enrages me is not the condition of the poor & oppressed (though my life-story shows me not indifferent to that), but the "interested," self-aggrandizing (especially ideological) victimization of **truth**. In Geo. Orwell's 1984 (HBJ/49, 205), the torturer brainwashes Winston Smith into believing that "It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party." That's tunnel perspectivalism, what I remember as a child the delivery horses on our city street had: blinders, so they wouldn't be distracted by side realities. Me, I'm an unblinded theist: my perspective is the biblical God, who however demands that I *do* notice, take into account, all realities & perspectives I become aware of, with as little distortion as I with my finitude & sin can manage.

The truth-benders can distort in various ways:

(1) By excluding all options but one. Instance: The new UCC hymnal, instead of incorporating all Synod-approved forms of the Statement of Faith, include only the one most amenable to their ultrafeminist-ideological dogma.

(2) By trivializing. Instance: A current government-required video in Britain's public schools,  $\frac{1}{2}$  hr. on WWII, gives Churchill 14 seconds, the emphasis being on his defeat by Labor after the war. Other leftist themes in the film are the portraying of the nation at war as sexist & (bad sense) capitalist. Churchill was an oppressor of the masses, & deserved to be rejected. That thoroughly has British education of the young fallen into leftist control.

(3) By disproportionalizing. Instance: California law requires public schools to give, in treating each historical period, females equal time with males. Since virtually all the works of civilization have been male (women throughout history having been "kept in their place"), the 1:1 rule requires (a) leaving out much of human events & achievements (b) to make room, equal space & equal time, for "forgotten histories" of generally obscure, noncontributory females. (The giggle factor ought to knock out the liberal church's sub of "Abraham & Sarah" for the Bible's "Abraham," since Sarah is known for nothing except obeying her husband, not believing the messengers of God, & being pretty.)

(4) By demonizing. Instance: The virulent form of feminist hermeneutics goes beyond calling attention to the female/feminine in the Bible (a good thing) to missing no opportunity to condemn the Bible's alleged patriarchal androcentrism.

Patriarchal, yes, but a patriarchy more of responsibility than of domination, more of love than of power (though in this, as in all things, humans fall short of the ideal). Androcentric, yes, since families/clans/tribes/nations' survival was directly dependent on the males (while many values other than survival were directly dependent on the females). But higher & deeper, the Bible's life & vision was theopatriarchal (under God the Father) & theocentric (God-centered).

(5) By shaming. Instance: Secular gender-feminism, seeping into liberal churches-&-synagogues, has tried to shame women for subjecting themselves to ontological "hierarchy," the view that life should be lived "*under* God." The Bible couldn't be clearer that though God **beyond** our understanding is inapprehensible (whom we approach humbly by denying our competence to comprehend deity [technical term, apophysis]), **within** our understanding God is, by his self-revelation, masculine-feminine (the technical term for this affirmation being cataphasis)).

Liberal friends tell me, when I so teach the Bible, that "women are hurting" (read, gender feminists & their few recruits), & to teach the Bible straight on the masculine-feminine God is to "continue their oppression." The false assumption here is that language & life are in mechanical interface, like meshing gears. The truth, as psycho- & socio-linguists, esp. ethnologists specially in language, teach us is that (Martin 250) Hebrew's "consistent adoption of masculine verb forms, adjectives, pronouns, and the like....is not the unconscious expression of a male-dominated culture; language and social mores move at different levels. As Levi-Strauss expresses it: 'Social attitudes do not belong to the same level as linguistic structures, but to a different, more superficial level.'" But on the mechanistic view (251), "the most dominating societies would have the most masculinized, but this is simply not the case. Neither Turkish nor Hungarian, for instance, have grammatically gendered nouns, verbs, or pronouns, yet they are hardly models of liberated societies." Those who are linguistically naive imagine that giving up calling God "he" would be good for women--a notion that is only the obverse of the meshing-gears error. Further, Martin asks us (251-2) to consider the two **losses**: "Ignoring the mediating [nonmechanistic] function of images and replacing it with a form of [mechanistic] representationalism" (1) "projects onto the biblical tradition the distortion of masculinity and femininity experienced in our [Enlightenment & even post-Enlightenment] culture. Rather than try to change the revelation of God mediated in this tradition, we would do better to change the misinterpretation of that tradition by serious intellectual efforts to recover its true meaning. Also, and perhaps more profoundly, through the symbolic mediation of our own historical and physical activity, we should manifest the true nature of God's *agapē* [unselfregarding love] in Christ." (2) "Feminists seem intent on trying to obfuscate the otherness, the causality, and the authority of God because they are perceived as domination rather than the foundation for the generous activity of God by which he shares his being with us and calls us to an eternal and personal fruition of that sharing. As feminist thought progresses, there is a decreased sense expressed of the absolute uniqueness of God, not as the opaqueness of an impassive Transcendent, but as the inexpressible wonder of a Creator who loves us. When the very linguistic mediation of God's otherness is attacked and eliminated, the result is not a more balanced view of the deity, effected by our own [metaphorical] representations, but a distinct tendency to pantheism and a loss of the sense of the absolute freedom of God's creative and redemptive action." Ultrafeminism tends to collapse into a spiritualized ecology, "with a blurred understanding of how we know God, his freedom, and transcendent personal reality" (here Martin footnotes works of Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether, & Eliz. A. Johnson as cautionary examples of metaphorism).

17 The intellectual heart of Martin's attack on feminist false consciousness is on 164-6, a subsection named, & opposing, "Foundationalism [the notion that we can know only on the basis of foundations we construct, as e.g. we can know the gospel only as a subcategory of "religion"], Representationalism [language represents the objects or facts it refers to, or only expresses the speaker's attitudes or--Kant, Schleiermacher--the subject's mental constructs], and Individualism [the individual as prior to, and an independent component of, community--on the model of atomism & reductionism]." Feminism is self-defeating in trying to combat domination with "the Enlightenment identification of causality with domination": "the interpretation of the

biblical text becomes an act by which the subject utilizes the text in an effort at self-realization rather than as an instance of communication on the part of an author to be actively received by the reader." When the real subject is the reader's own experience rather than "what is experienced," the metaphor-model's "agnostic" mode takes over. "With the accent on consciousness and consciousness raising now deprived of any objective referent to measure it against, feminist analysis of the position of women combines a somewhat accurate estimation of the situation with an interpretation that is foreign to the prophetic interpretation of reality provided by revelation."

18 To gender feminists, the Bible's divine-gender (masculine-feminine) particularity is indeed a scandal, serious enough to make the Bible foreign (as "androcentric") literature to which one must continuously apply the "hermeneutic of suspicion." I think of Augustine's distinction between openminded affirmative reading (with *assensus*) & closedminded suspicious reading (with *suspicio*). I read the Bible with the will to believe & be guided by the Spirit; gender feminists want me to read it with the will to doubt. There can be no doubt which will prevail in the churches.

19 Martin, a Roman Catholic thinker of refined philosophical & historical competence, is a **canonical** Christian, thinking-praying within, before outside, the books of the Bible. Recent positional hermeneutics have worked on the interpreter's stance in front of & behind the text: Martin deals with the traditional **under** (i.e., in submission to), **over** (i.e., in judgment on, in light of some overarching principle), & **within** the texts in light of the norm of faith illumining the realities the texts talk about (so the interpreter is not restricted to what the text is specifically saying). (CAUTION, 51: "Our own prejudices and ignorance restrict what we can understand and distort what we do understand.") 414: "The Scriptures belong to the church, and they are submitted to by the church. The writings proposed by the church as capable of mediating the rule of faith cannot be treated merely as historical data....They are, because they form part of the church's preaching of the mystery of Christ, a privileged instrument of the Holy Spirit in making Christ present to every generation. While they must be interpreted, they must be respected and [my bf.] **cannot be trimmed to serve a present preoccupation.**" I add that trimming "he" from the Bible's standard vocabulary for God has, in spite of its tenderminded intention toward "hurting" women, baleful unintended consequences. 2: "The process of transmitting this faith interpretation of reality has continued in the church through the centuries, with the [canonical] Scriptures acting as the privileged means of transmission and the norm against which other expressions are judged." 19: The churches' selection of the canon was "a particular instance of the Spirit's teaching action." Enough evidence here (& there's more in other writing of his) that Martin is keenly canon-conscious, though not as specific-text-oriented as Brevard Childs.

20 I've a long list of loci where Martin clearly states his **viewpoint**. He's a classical Christian thinker solidly committed to the "good news" of God's grace in Jesus Christ, & would be happy with a bromide of Ezra Pound affirming that the classical is self-authenticating: "Literature is news that stays news." 415 in Epilogue: "I tried to show how a biblical understanding of revelation both as a source of knowledge and as a body of knowledge listens to the question being posed by feminist thought in the church and advances that question by freeing it from what is incompatible with revealed truth. This was accomplished by confronting it with the teaching of tradition and by looking at the philosophical presuppositions governing the way the question is posed. At this point, the question might be rephrased as follows: What is God's plan for humanity? What is he teaching us by the light he sheds on what he has revealed to the church as well as on the truth stirring within humanity today? How is our increased awareness of the dignity and rights of all human beings to be confirmed and integrated within our lives as the Christian community? More specifically, how can we live in a way that corresponds more perfectly to God's will for the place of women in the church? Finally, how can we articulate in words and deeds this deeper understanding in a way that will help all humanity advance toward the goal set for it by the Trinity?" Martin then offers Eph.1.9-10 as "the program," including "to recapitulate everything in Christ."