

"Feminist-inspired liturgy is not the extension but rather the extinction of liberal Judaism. It does not continue the tradition of reforming an old religion so much as set the stage for the creation of a **new one** [bf. mine]." --Matt. Berke, the Jew who's managing ed. of FIRST THINGS, in "God and Gender in Judaism," June-July/96, 37.

UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES OF THE DE- & RE-GENDERING of the biblical deity

In the two biblical religions, the current currents redesigning the deity, while driven by good will, are intellectually innocent, un-thought-through. This Thinksheet thinks about some of the disastrous consequences of the deity-redesign activities.

1 Deity-redesign is the cosmic dimension of today's **hypersensitivity**, a social disease needing cure, not religious encouragement. The rights movements promote being touchy for self (individual & collective): religion-driven "justice" teaches to be **touchy for others**. A journalist (Ted Gup, 10 Mar 96, Daytona Beach Sunday News Journal, which I happened upon there) bemoans the disease as granting "repressive power" to anyone who might be offended by anything--individuals, special-interest groups. "A new and rigid orthodoxy is taking shape, in which intellectual debate is anathema," everyone a censor, everyone politicized to some in-group & paradoxically insensitive to other in-groups & to the common civil realities. This "tyranny of the hurting" (as I call it) has reached its apex/nadir in the repressing of the biblical deity's gender, which is consistently masculine in both pronouns & personal titles.

2 **Patrimisia**, hatred of the father (right now the weakest family member), is intensified by the suppression of "Father" in the divine name (Mt.28.19). Three days ago in a college baccalaureate service, I noticed that the bulletin dropped all instances of "Father" from the hymns. Doubtless that made the nonChristian graduates happy (among them a number of Buddhists), but not as happy as if the committee had gone the whole way & dumped all personal-deity references (as the preacher did, probably out of "Christian love" for the nonChristians present). I am appalled that redesigners of the biblical deity believe that this move will *improve* evangelism!

3 All deity-redesign programs--emasculatation, degendering, & regendering (i.e., as feminine, either God or Goddess)--**weaken** trust in the truth of the Bible & therefore increase the people's alienation from scripture. Why? Because any of the three redesigns requires *thousands* of changes in the biblical text, a massive rewriting/respeaking. Of all the unforeseen consequences of deity-redesign, this should have been the easiest to see....Contrast NKJV (New King James Version [Nelson/82]), which warns "Do not associate with those given to change" (Hebrew of Prov.24.21b--TEV, NRSV, & CEV following instead the Greek, which prohibits rebellion against God or king). Preface: "unlocking for today's readers the spiritual treasures found especially in the Authorized Version...its majesty of style....the main-spring of the religious, linguistic, and legal foundations of our civilization....the intrinsic beauty of divine revelation....a graceful, often musical arrangement of language." Aim: "a majestic and reverent style." End: "May God teach us His life--giving truth as we submit to Him, that He alone may be glorified." (NKJV capitalizes all instances of the masculine pronouns for God, arguing both clarity [in distinguishing from human males in context] & reverence.)...Why do I mention NKJV here? Because it's as far away as one can get in Eng. from the "Inclusive Language Bible" & feminist liturgies, in respect for (1) the Heb.-Aram.-Gk. text & (2) the grand tradition of "the history of the Eng. Bible."

4 The **collapse** of transcendence (masculine) into immanence (feminine), in the interest of eliminating the vertical (dubbed "hierarchal"). This move would be sufficient to constitute the inception of a new religion on a new egalitarian paradigm. The biblical paradigm is PATRONAL (JBL, Spr./96, 91-116), a pyramid in which the capstone is the supreme Patron (patriarchy being the family form of the patron/client relationship), whose benefits to clients (below) elicit (1) gratitude upward & (2) benefits downward (to the next level of clients, to whom the clients above are patrons). The benefits/gratitude dynamism is the system's glue, "the dynamic morality that held society together" (J.D.Crossan, THE HISTORICAL JESUS, Harper-

Collins/85, 65). David A. deSilva, 93n: "Such considerations in the patron-client exchange have an obvious corollary in the Church's Christology and soteriology, wherein God, the patron, regards Christ's clients (i.e., the Christians) not as their lives merit but according to the merit of Christ." 92n: "Submission to a patron is commoner and more widespread in the Mediterranean than bureaucracy, or fascism, or communism, or any varieties of democracy: it can exist without any of them, and co-exists with all of them."....The Bible is especially hard on ingrates, for ingratitude dissolves the social pyramid's glue & is therefore the "cardinal social and political sin" (F.W.Danker, *BENEFACTOR*, Clayton/82, 436).....Six questions:

(1) Did Jesus honor this system? Yes, in both the divine-human vertical (perpetual thanksgiving to God) & the human-human vertical (as in Mt.18.23-35: "my heavenly Father" will "torture" ingrates "if you do not forgive" as God has forgiven you; L.16.8: "the Lord commended the unjust steward").

(2) Would Jesus' forgiveness-teaching collapse if we were to remove its patron/client double vertical (God above humanity, humans above humans)?

(3) What would happen to Christology & soteriology if its ecopolitical social structural framework were rejected as no part of divine revelation?

(4) Is the patron/client relationship inherently masculine? Without a doubt! It's a guy thing, not a gal thing. It's God behavior, not Goddess behavior.

(5) Could the patronal substructure of biblical religion survive the death of the divine masculine? Of course not.

(6) Could biblical religion itself survive the death of the divine masculine? I have no doubt: it could not. Please read again the quote before this Thinksheet's title.

No wonder feministicism's oxumisia (hatred of the vertical)! And no wonder that canonical-classical Christian thinking is masculine-vertical. And no wonder that though God "is the ground of both the masculine and the feminine, yet he chooses to relate to us in the form of the masculine--as Lord, Father, Son and so on. God is described in feminine imagery as well, but the masculine is always dominant, and God is never addressed as 'Mother.'....He is essentially above us and outside us, but he relates to us where we are" (D.G.Bloesch, *GOD THE ALMIGHTY*, InterVarsity/95, 26). "God will remain 'He' because he is personal, and the substitution of the noun 'God' invariably ends in an impersonal God. This 'He' assuredly does not mean that God is male but that God relates to us primarily in the masculine mode, as Father and Lord."

5 **Biology** is theological destiny. The God of the two biblical religions is both transcendent (above, away from, us & the rest of creation) & immanent ("with us"--Immanu[el]). An unforeseen consequence of every one of the anti-masculine moves is the loss of transcendence, the male being the transcendent generator (**outside** his body: the female generates **inside** her body, a continuity correlating with [religiously] nature worship & [philosophically] pantheism). I am not speculating: the history of religions bears me out. Too, "feminist theology regularly falls back upon the birth metaphor, and, not surprisingly, often lapses into a pantheistic worldview" (35, Berke, who quotes women rabbis as proposing the feministicization of the deity).

6 Lose the masculine from deity & you lose men from the religion. Berke, 35f: "The feminist argument that traditional God-language stresses power, fear, rules, hierarchy is essentially correct; but it misses the point that these things are required for the good of women as well as men. It is precisely His capacity as a warrior-judge that enables Him to be a God of justice who frees the captive and releases the oppressed, who answers the cries of the poor, the widows, the fatherless. 'King' and 'Lord' are the most convincing symbolizations for this aspect of divine action. ¶Reimaginings that magnify characteristically feminine traits undermine the plausibility of God's ultimate power to overcome evil."

7 Reform Judaism's current feminist revisioning of its liturgical texts on "a rather wooden understanding of the principle of sexual equality" (Berke, 37) sadly reminds me of the equally wooden & equally highhanded UCC Book of Worship & even moreso The New Century Hymnal. The ideology operates like "professional" wrestling, "the result fixed in advance." The trend is to (38) "eradicate ancient truths and images, thus enshrining female resentment and male guilt and abdication."

8 In language & religion, what are the **limits of plasticity**? Jesus rightly says that new wine should be put in new wineskins, for new wine would stretch old wineskins beyond their plasticity limits (Mt.9.17 ["both are preserved"] & parallels). Applying the metaphor to language & religion, we get different results:

In the case of **language**, the new when poured in may stretch the particular language but cannot break it: language is too strong, too conservative, for that: the indigestible new is ejected. Long have I favored degenericizing pro/nouns: where "he" is generic (he or she), render "one" or other trope; where "men," "men & women"; where "fathers," "parents" or "fathers & mothers"; where "sons," "sons & daughters"--but only where generic (as is not the case, e.g., in Ac.17.22, "Men [males], Athenians," to an assemblage of men [but NRSV's only "Athenians" is acceptable]). But Eng., I predict, will eject some instances of substitutes for the generic "man" (specifically, the dyads "nature & man" & "God & man"). More deeply, Eng. (along with the other germanic tongues) will preserve "-man" & eject such laughables as "postperson," as the second syllable of "postman" is pronounced with the genderless neutral vowel, not the masculine broad "a." Gender feminism, to be thorough, would have to find substitutes for all the boldface syllables in this sentence: "A **woman** is a **female human**." Can anybody believe Eng. will prove plastic enough to accept replacements for these three "sexisms"?

Almost a century ago, some folks thought to make a new wineskin for the languages of man (i.e., humanity), & they called it Esperanto. We don't know whether the languages would have burst it: they weren't poured in. Esperanto was a non-starter. It violated the Muttersprache rule (the reality that human beings cling to how mama taught them to speak). Actual languages are nightmares to logicians & ordinary everyday tools to the common man (i.e., person) & perpetual delights to poets &, for saints, windows on eternity. But language is culture's most conservative element, & schemes to make radical changes thereof are silly & sad.... One additional instance: Generic "sons" includes daughters (a structure I hope dies out), but "sons & daughters" is another structure (viz., the priority of the male, which languages of the West reverse--as "Ladies & gentlemen"--at the beginning of an address by a male speaker, as I in preaching usu. begin "Sisters & brothers"). But the reversal outside of the male-speaker-address situation is not an acceptable structure but only a violation of the male-priority structure & does not have survival value. (The same, for the same reason, with some speakers/writers' alternation of "he" & "she.")The next editions of Fowler & of Webster's ENGLISH USAGE will spell out in detail what I'm saying in this ¶. And it will appear that much of the attempted "politically correct" changes that were attempted (& failed) were craven: speakers/writers were afraid of being denounced by "minorities." A tragic parallel (21May96 WALL STREET JOURNAL essay, "The Navy's Enemies"): A navy officer was fired for not passing an incompetent woman; his successor passed her, & she soon died, crashing her copter. She'd be alive if the second officer hadn't been afraid of being called sexist, then fired....Shame, guilt, & anger are building up inside those who are, to get along, just going along with gender feminism's "inclusive language," which violates our language's limits of plasticity (whereas in my milder inclusive language, "both [the language & the gender-sensitivity] are preserved" [Mt.9.17].)

In the case of **religion**, the new when poured in may stretch the old till it breaks: historically, some religions have gone under, died, from failure to meet the challenges of a new day (though some, e.g. Amerind spirituality in the U.S. today, revive, come up from under). Radical language-revisionists, such as those behind The New Century Hymnal, fear that this will happen to the Christian religion if it underadapts to current sociopolitical sensitivities. But the commoner outcome is that the new challenges are critically assessed as to what's edible (assimilable), the inedible being rejected as "heresy." For reasons I've often adduced, the de- & re-gendering of the biblical deity will be found inedible to the Faith, which can't permit the collapse of transcendence into immanence. (See Wm. C. Placher's THE DOMESTICATION OF TRANSCENDENCE: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong [Westm./Jn.Knox].)

9 The error the potter made (Jer.18.4) was so serious as to occasion starting all over & reworking the clay "into another vessel": God threatens to destroy his people & shape up another "vessel" (people) to proclaim his Name (vv.5-10). But

if the error is caught soon enough, the potter may correct it & go on to finish the vessel: "Turn now" (v.11). The error compounds with time, resulting at some point in a new vessel, a new people, **a new religion**.

Another analogy: A few days ago I caught soon enough an error of a carpenter I employed--so he could repair it & continue with his construction, & not have to de- & then re-construct. The difference between repair & reconstruction was my intervention. What's so discouraging right now in liberal religion is that there's so little self-criticism, so few interveners crying "No!" & "Stop!" A theologian friend calls me a slippery-slope Barthian for my "Nein!"-crying. The Barmen Declaration of 1934 was a little late for crying "Nein!" against Nazism. Please look again at this Thinksheet's title. My carpenter is good, but would be great if he could foresee consequences....And amnesia is a third analogy ("forgotten me," same Jer. chap., v.15), + a fourth: wandering off onto "bypaths," not remaining on the "highway" (same v., NRSV).

10 The early Church, in being born & surviving childhood, faced formidable threats, which it countered with a vision of its deity's aggressive, protective **power**, conceived in masculine terms. First Clement, earlier than a few NT books, has a keen sense of the patronal structure of reality: "The Master, brethren, is in no need of anything; he wants nothing from anyone but to give thanks to him" (52.1 Goodspeed; "Master" is δεσπότης *despotes* patron, owner, master, lord; 12x in 1Cl.; in Mod Gk., bishop, priest; Byz. Gk., the emperor; because human absolute authority is, by original sin, tyrannical, Eng. "despot" has this negative connotation; 22x in NT).

The biblical God has absolute authority only self-limited: no force outside him can put bounds on his power. At the heart of Christian formation should be the learning of awe in the presence of, & gratitude to, this cosmic Patron-Despot. An unforeseen consequence of de-/re-gendering him is that worship ceases to have the primary biblical masculine resonances & becomes banal, sentimental, feministic.

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