

The Common/Christian/Postkyriarchal Testaments

A REVIEW OF

JESUS: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology (Continuum/99c94)
REVIEW THESIS:

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Since the messianic reconceiving-"re-imagining" is as extensive from the NT (which S. calls the "Christian Testament") to her christology as was that from the OT (which S. calls the "Common Testament"), & that former paradigm-shift resulted in a new religion (viz., Christianity), S.'s paradigm-shift should be understood as innovative enough to qualify as foundational to a new religion (which I suggest calling Postkyri-archality). And as Mormons bind their three testaments (OT/NT/Book of Mormon) together, this Thinksheet's title suggests an inchoate single-bound trilogy as fitting S.'s mind (though she remains, outwardly, Roman Catholic).

1 S.'s life-PROJECT (not just this book-project) as a scholar is societal (the ideal society being the subject, with "G*d" [her idiosyncratic spelling] as predicate) rather than religious (as the Bible, with God as subject): "a feminist liberationist exploration of Christian Scriptures does not begin its work with the biblical text but with a critical articulation and analysis of the experiences of wo/men" (61 & often, "wo/men" excluding only dominant-"oppressing" males). Instead of being the **premise** of her thinking, G*d is its **product**: "what kind of God" (28) should liberationist-transgender-transculture-egalitarian devotees of "radical democracy" (24) construct, to meet the need (or do the trick or job)? It's the question of all idol-makers, & Feuerbach taught that it's the formative question in all deity-designing.

2 The project seems clear, straightforward. The product-deity can be constructed using materials old & new--the old materials being taken from previous deities. Objectively, the least likely deity to provide useable materials would be one who had had male but not female experience (i.e., who'd been a man but not a woman). S.'s socioreligious location as a native & practicing Roman Catholic finds her at maximum cognitive dissonance in her project, as she's a devotee of that very deity. To use a Sam.Johnson metaphor, her project is dancing, & she must teach a dog to do it.

More logical (as in the case of ex-RC Mary Daly) would be to get rid of the dog & teach a goddess to dance. S. uses her brilliance & religious-studies competence to do a spectacular spread-eagle, which makes her both more helpful to scholars & more dangerous to her fellow-Christians. Why more dangerous? Because she's a wolf (a devotee of a *new religion*) in the clothing of a Christian sheep.

3 For S., **authority** is not biblical-canonical but rather egalitarian-ideological, "the democratic logic of equality" (91). A golden-age future, similar to Norman Gottwald's golden-age past (in pre-monarchic Israel: "The socioeconomic relations of ["uplands agriculture"] Israelities were egalitarian...equal access to resources...extended families..." [285, THE HEBREW BIBLE: A Socio-Literary Introduction, Fortress/85]).

Citing M.10 & parallels, she extrapolates that "Structures of domination should not be tolerated in the discipleship of equals" (94); but her project requires that she get rid of Jesus as the Lord in the cosmic/personal/communal/futuric Dominus-domination system (as, in Jn.15, Jesus calls his disciples "friends" only "if you do what I command you" [vs.14.]).

Critiquing certain fellow-NT scholars, S. says Schweitzer (QUEST, 1906) was right that lives-of-Jesus are mirrors. Stephen Prothero (in AMERICAN JESUS: How the Son of God Became a National Icon) says the same--on which book Marty (1.5.04 "Personal Jesus," SIGHTINGS) has this: "Jesus is [now] the usually nice and moral person, teacher and friend, who is...plastic and malleable, refashioned to meet our tastes whoever we are. Icon? Try mirror."

I think without realizing this, S. "refashions" Jesus to her purpose in projecting onto the Evangelists her use of Jesus materials (95): "they utilized the Jesus traditions shaped by Jesus' first followers, women and men, for their own rhetorical interests and molded them in light of the political-theological debates of their own day."

4 S.'s "refashioning" of J. includes his **diminishing** as only one of the leaders of 1st-c. Jewish "emancipatory movements": "I propose that feminist theological reflection privilege theological over christological discourses and social-cultural over individual-anthropological theological frameworks." Her project demands that she marginalize

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what for feminism is Christianity's Achilles' heel, viz. Jesus' **maleness** (as the most embarrassing outcropping of the Bible's "androcentric" God-idea); & her move to this stance requires her minimizing of Jesus (& thus also the "Christian Testament"'s theologizing of him as Son of God / Savior / Lord).

5 Perhaps it isn't only *Jesus'* maleness that she finds offensive. I've known a number in her category (German females living under Hitler), all having some degree of misandry (man-hate). Hunkered-down earnest, humorless. A male criticizing something she's written gets written off as "not to have read anything I have written" (209, of the great NT scholar Luke Timothy Johnson; at a Society of Biblical Literature meeting, publicly she said the same thing of me [in rejecting my CHRISTIAN CENTURY reviewing of two of her books]). I'm hesitant to be too critical of her: what if I'd been a woman under Hitler?....

....& speaking of what I've read of her stuff, which is enough to be nauseated by her feminist monomania, I've found nowhere any theological dealing with the fact of male muscular superiority in our species (in balance with female mouth superiority) --the mutual superiority, rather than equality, of the sexes. She's big on calling a "construct" anything she wants to deprive of "natural" status; but the fact that the female tiger, having stronger muscles, rules the family--surely that fact is not a construct? Would she argue that our species is an exception? The tragic irony is that her Germanic-abstractive power (visible in her German-English sentences) is as much in the service of ideology as was that of Alfred Rosenberg (the Nazi philosopher), for whom ethnicity (instead of S.'s equality) served as the control-concept. Both, frighteningly thoroughgoing & humorless & destructive (though, unlike R., S. has made some scholarly contributions & is nonviolent).

6 S.'s mastery of the relevant German-language materials is helpful, & her audacious theoretical extensions & linguistic innovations are stimulating--e.g., she invents a Greek word & transliterates it as "kyriarchy" (36: the domination system behind--within "gender, race, class, and colonialist structures" ["socioreligious constructions"] of oppression)....The putatively inclusive oppressed are "wo/men" (which, she doesn't note, excludes power-males). Since male "theology" suppressed female "thealogy" & "sophialogy", literature (including Scripture) has been "malestream" & needs deconstructing (the dubious premise being that sex/gender in "the kyriarchal sex/gender system" are constructions & not "givens" in nature or by revelation). As masculine, "God" is not to be used, nor (because offensive to some Orthodox Jews, when used by others) is "G-d"--so she neologizes "G*d" & "G*ddess"!

Why no laughter at such an idiosyncratic display? Because she's the world's most influential feminist biblical-theological scholar, the first woman president of the Society of Biblical Literature, with three festschrifts honoring her academic work. Some oncoming scholars of her quality--e.g., Kathryn Greene-McCreight (FEMINIST RECONSTRUCTIONS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal [Oxford/00])--are beginning to counter her destructive radicality in hermeneutics. And a competent corrective to her misandry is Mary Steward Van Leeuwen's MY BROTHER'S KEEPER: What the Social Sciences Do (and Don't) Tell Us About Masculinity (InterVarsity/02).

7 "A critical feminist hermeneutics of [my emphasis] liberation" (234) begins always with "a feminist reflection on the particular experiences of women" (178) & sees salvation as egalification through (189) "the *basileia* [ex-"Kingdom" of God] movement". I skipped not one sentence in this difficult book of intricately integrated argument: I was determined both to be fair to it by close listening & to be critical of it at its level of expertise. Indeed, I'd hoped to be generous with it. But its treatment of materials from Bible & Tradition is so cavalier in the interest of de-/re-mythologizing deity (with the help of putatively recovered but mainly fantasized "G*ddess" materials) that I must see her deity as the vertical projection or her horizontal project of removing "androcentricity" & "kyriocentricity" from heaven as well as from earth.

As servants of their religion, theologians are to see to it that the religion continues to recommend itself to its devotees' *mind*. As a Christian theologian, S. not only fails this test but succeeds (1) in impeding (& eroding confidence in) Christian thinking & (2) in providing materials for the writing of a Third (let's call it "Postkyriarchal") Testament, to the delight of radical feminists who've long been in hope of a replacement religion complete with redesigned language for the redesigned deity.