

SEX AND THE SINGLE SPIRIT:

A BIBLICAL WARNING AGAINST GENDERING THE HOLY SPIRIT

In our home a few days ago, Bill Webber--former president of N.Y. Theological Seminary, now dean of its Sing Sing extension--remarked that most of my Thinksheets are occasional, arising from "some experience you've just had." True enough, though the generating experience is not always in the outer world, as this one was: the last line last Sunday in the installation service for the new executive of the Cape Cod Council of Churches was this: "The blessing of the Holy Spirit who broods over us as a mother over her children, be with you all." Nothing else in the service exhibited **biblical distortion**. And the last line's abuse of Scripture has become so common in the nonevangelical churches that some would say it shouldn't disturb me--but its very commonness, the danger that a biblical distortion will come to be viewed as biblical (as an oft-repeated metaphor is reified, an oft-repeated analogy becomes pseudo-reality) is what deeply disturbed me, enough to write this cautionary Thinksheet.

1 The **lexical data** are well-known & indisputable: "spirit" is fem. in Hebrew, neuter in Greek, masc. in Latin. In all three languages, "wisdom" is fem.: in these & many other languages women are honored for the gestative, meditative, nurturant powers of knowledge (eg, Mother Mary "pondered," "thought deeply about" [L.2.19]). (Corollary: Men "know" more, naturally mastering the outer world as women naturally master the inner world, including interpersonal feelings & the ability to articulate them. What'll happen as more & more women more & more master the outer world? Will their wisdom atrophy, as the wings of Hans Christian Andersen's swan after long living with barnyard geese? Nobody knows, but I think there'll be little atrophy. The danger is that men, overwhelmed, won't want to live with wisdom--knowledge women. Some such women have husbands mature enough to rejoice in their wives, some keep their husbands by *custodia linguae* [watching their tongues].).....Since all societies, all institutions, need wisdom as much as knowledge, any society or institution honoring "knowledge" more than "wisdom," men more than women, is sick from malnutrition: ideally, equality of being heard. But external & internal threats to the stability of a group call forth the masculine powers & virtues. And since groups are seldom if ever threat-free, masculine leadership predominates (&, by hubris, often dominates). What do under the sinful conditions of history? All of this: (1) Reduce internal threats; (2) Reduce external threats; (3) Convert sinful male dominance into male predominance in situations where internal/external threats can't be sufficiently reduced; & (4) Fit folks genderlessly to job descriptions (which means that some high-androgen women will sit in the seats of the mighty, as now Margaret Thatcher; & some high-estrogen men will manage day schools.)

2 Every member of the Trinity is **sexually** single (having no divine consort, though historically emerging in a world where the divine couple was normative) & **socially** active (both within the Trinity & with humanity). Mythic suprahuman/human sexual activity is once mentioned (Gn.6.2), & only one divine/human sex act occurs (by the male Spirit, with Mother Mary, in the Birth Narratives; only the Spirit is mythically male--neither Father nor Son is!). So much for biblical sex above the human level.

3 Of the Trinity, only the Spirit is represented both **impersonally** (as wind & breath, in all the biblical languages + Latin) & **personally** (as in interactive continuity with humanity, indeed with the whole creation--note the physiological continuity, spirit/wind, the human gastrointestinal tract making wind at both ends & the lungs being a wind machine). It's solidly true to the analogical imagination that the two biblical notes of Spirit(God's)-spirit(ours) should be energy (creative, destructive, ecstatic-prophetic) & continuity (cf. the benedictory "& the communion of the Holy Spirit"; & see J.V.Taylor's book on the Spirit [1972], THE GO-BETWEEN GOD; & Jesus' sending the Paraclete-Companion for continuity [Jn.16.7-15], who won't speak "on his own authority" but rather only help us disciples make more sense of the Jesus Event). Energy + continuity = inspiration + both freedom & compulsion.

4 Since life's as pervaded by the feminine as by the masculine, we would expect some feminine pictures of the Bible's masculine deity--but why so few? Fear of corruption from divine-couple religion & goddess worship. The deficit should not be closed by **smuggling the feminine** into apparently unguarded passages such as Gn.1.2 ("a wind from God sweeping over the water" [Tanakh]; the vb. taken as "brood" in the sense of incubate, the incubating taken as by the female bird only [contrary to nature]--whereas the vb. equally well can mean "flutter" (as the male bird impregnating the female)....Stick with the Creator's mythic androgyny (Gn.1.27).