

Buddhism, along with a number of other religions, is not. Particular forms/institutions--e.g., Lamaism, with the Dalai Lama on top--may be top-down, but the religion *in itself* (as in the sutras) is not. I chose to mention Buddhism, among the non-top-down religions, because it's the one Jews & Christians fleeing from top-down religion are most apt to seek refuge in, escaping from the burdens of monotheism (a single Deity up-over-above-atop nature/history/society/self).

1 Of late, some, viz. radical feminists, have thought to escape top-down religion while remaining in Judaism/Christianity (I'll limit my comments to the latter). The intellectual heart of this palace revolution is a redefining, revisioning, re-imaging, re-imagining the Monarch (a Gk. wd. meaning "only one Ruler," as monotheism means "only one God"). The one thing this reconstructed Deity is forbidden to be is the one essential thing in top-down religion, viz. topdownness! The message of this theological revisionism is this: "Christianity used to be a top-down religion, but isn't any longer one."

2 A man who's undergone a sex-change operation has a parallel message: "I used to be a male, but I'm not any longer." I choose this analogy because my feelings about his sex-change parallel my feelings about Christian radical feminists' religion-change. Both are pathetic, and sterile.

3 The Buddhist scriptures are not top-down, but the **Bible** is radically so: the god demands obedience, punishes disobedience, provides a way to return to obedience (submission, knuckling under): that's the central trajectory of the history of the cosmos, the world, "the people of God." Evil in the cosmos, sin in human society & the soul, is understood as insubordination to the divine will, the will of the god, the will of the only God.

4 This obedience-subordination is understood in the NT through the most radical such sociomodel, viz. **slavery**. "Slave" is the 2nd wd. of Ro., & 4 vv. later that "slave of Jesus Christ" speaks of "the obedience of faith" (ὕπακοή *hypakoe* Gk.'s strongest wd. for obed., slavish [absolute] obedience). It won't do to say "That was then, this is now." Take away Paul's top-down "light from heaven" (Ac.9,22,26) experience & (Jacob Neusner & other Jewish polemicists through the centuries have rightly claimed) you have left something less, something indeed other, than Christianity.

5 Barbara Brown Zikmund, pres. of one of our UCC seminaries & formerly pres. of another, takes the "That was then, this is now" untenable position--intellectually untenable as an argument for remaining in Christianity. Says she (letter to Frederick Herzog cited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, p.52 of THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST: STUDIES IN IDENTITY AND POLITY [Exploration Press/87]; ed/ D.C.Bass & K.Smith; cit. on p.8 of ON THE WAY [UCC Wis. Conf./94]): "...the church has shaped its theological stance in councils and commissions. Given the limitations of literacy and communication in past eras, this was understandable. As a church historian, I cherish the legacy it created. But I also know as a woman (and with new sensitivity to the pluralism of the Christian community in the UCC and world-wide) that I cannot support 'top-down' theological formulations in these times." (Underlining mine.)

6 Zikmund rightly identifies top-down as masculine. Currently, the UCC is being crucified upon a cross of gender: **M** Of course Ms. Zikmund is correct as to the topdownness of theological **FEMALE** formulations in the past: they were masculine-patriarchal, exactly as one **L** would expect in a top-down, masculine, patriarchal religion. The "problem" **E** disappears if one eliminates the masculine, patriarchal, top-down element in the religion (e.g., dropping Jesus' usual ref. to God, viz. as "Father"); but that "solution" has the unfortunate consequence of eliminating the religion.

7 Ms. Z.'s opposition to "'top-down' theological formulations," if taken

literally (as I doubt she does), would stand her against such top-down (Synod-approved) reformulations as were/are involved in the UCC Book of Worship, the New Century Hymnal, & revisions of our UCC Statement of Faith. ("The people" were no more involved in the approval process of the so-called Doxological Version of the Statement of Faith than they were in the Nicene Creed.) Even representative democracy, even when working at its best, has a top-down quality.

8 Your ultimate top-down, of course, is **revelation**: the god says something, you "mind" (hear-hearken-obey) or go to hell as it were. (Why is God up, on top, "high and lofty" [Is.6.1 NRSV]? Many reasons, I'll mention one: When we're learning to walk, we stand up & its heaven & we fall down & it's hell. And even when finally we manage to stay standing, we must look *up* to the Big Folks. As with outer developmental experience, so with invisible-inner.) Again, revelation is top-down as divine initiative: the *Bath Qol* (daughter [sic] of the Voice) speaks, we respond. In biblical religion, this divine initiative obtains in creation, redemption, & consummation. How natural, then, for the Numinous to have masculine names & pronominals: the androgens initiate relationships with the estrogens (e.g., spermata swim toward ova): the notion that the male initiative is only culture-specific is biologically & anthropologically incorrect (though ethnology finds a few exceptions, as biology finds minor exceptions [perhaps 1% of a population] to heterosexuality).

Well, isn't Buddhism--again--an exception? No Voice speaks to Gautama, no masculine God approaches to illumine him. He meditates himself into buddhahood ("Enlightenment"). Ah, but who does this? Is it Gautama's wife who leaves her family in pursuit of Enlightenment? No, it's an adult *male* who takes the initiative. Buddhism does not suffer the scandal of masculine particularity in the Numinous, but like Judaism & Christianity suffers that scandal at the human level. And in pop Buddhism, Buddha is a deity as much addressed as "**he**" as God is in Judaism & Christianity.

9 Radical feminist Jews & Christians have dropped the **natural, normal, normative** masculine forms of addressing God (Lord, King, Father, et al) & of speaking of God (he, his, him[self]). Carrying off this unnatural, abnormal project requires severe scrupulosity & the invention of some lexical monstrosities (e.g., Godself). A con artist may change his or her name with the intention of concealing identity: these theo-revisionists pathetically mislead themselves in imagining that changing how God is addressed & spoken of will--what, change God's identity? no--reveal (a) a dual-gendered God or (b) a genderless God. In 1951, if we'd not wanted to save the old church as a chapel, we'd have saved money by tearing everything down & starting new. Increasingly, radical feminists are concluding that the project of bowdlerizing the Bible & emasculating God has failed. Where they cannot take over churches & remake them in their image, they are forming new churches ("Womanchurch" or whatever), essentially a new religion (as Christians, moving out of the synagogues, formed a new religion). Failure to concede that the Bible's God is predominantly masculine inevitably results in exegetical-hermeneutical contortions that twist truth & require an abnormally high IQ to pull off. (For two years in my late teens I tried to pull off a parallel dishonest contortion: I tried to hold to the dogma of the errorless Book. Radical feminism is a reverse fundamentalism, with a similar fanatic mentality.)

10 What is culture-specific is our culture's antiauthority bias, the social fabric unraveling into autonomous threads. One consequence is genderlessness (usu. called "equality"), with the genderless God as a transcendentalized echo. But a degendered society is unstable, as will prove also radical feminism's degendered deity (& in the case of E.-S. Fiorenza's feminized deity [scored as "socio-pragmatic" hermeneutics, in Anthony Thiselton's NEW HORIZONS IN HERMENEUTICS]). After chaos, authority (which by definition is top-down) will return, I pray not in the hubris of tyranny.

11 Ms. Z.'s 2nd argument against top-down is pluralism: her "sensitivity" to diversity "in the UCC and world-wide" rules out "'top-down' theological formulations." We can't agree on the menu, so let's go for **cafeteria-style** theology. It would be equally logical to conclude that pluralism argues the need for theological clarity & unity over (yes, on top of!) the diversity. But such clarity & unity the UCC is at present incapable of, crippled as it is by antimasculinity.