

Occasion: A statue worth looking at is worth walking around (1) to give the sculptor as many cracks at you as there are angles of vision, & (2) to give you the coign-of-vantage opportunity to decide which angle, for you at the moment, is the most advantageous. It's true also with an idea, a teaching (Lat., "doctrine"). At any cultural moment, a Christian doctrine will speak to what's amiss in the culture (what's distorted or what's missing). One task of the theologian-teacher-preacher is to discover & expound doctrines' coign-of-vantage, present pertinence, "relevance." For many of them at the moment, that angle on the Trinity is, as a corrective to our culture's current hyperindividualism, the Trinity's internal ("immanent") co-unity, co-inherence, com-unity, com(m)unity, circle-dance (Gk. metaphor, "perichoresis").

This Thinksheet views this doctrine, the Trinity, from that angle.

1 Anthropologists tell us that the circle-dance is one of the few noneconomic activities of cultures (with few exceptions). It's playful-joyful teamwork, nourishing the *nonindividual* dimension & hunger of human life, & thus is a natural metaphor for that dimension & hunger. The early Gk. Christian theologians were right in using this metaphor for the Trinity as the divine community, for the Dancers are both three in "persons" & one in "being" ("diversity & unity," I've called it in this Thinksheet's title)....In our house, the most startling visual of the divine circle-dance is a large painting (by one of my former students) of three women (!) joined at the waist (no legs!) each playing with her hair (!) in the same way--below, the church represented by a woman we see twice: on the right, looking up adoringly at this trinity, her arms at rest; on the left, her inside, inner life, is mimetically playing with her hair between hands held up in prayer. Behind the trinity is a cube representing the ultimate human community ("Revelation 21-22" is this 30"x48" oil painting's title) as background for the intimate divine community, the Trinity. (Also, Jn. Locke III was thus punning on my extensive use of a cube in teaching.)

How read this audacious art? Not literally! Not the substitution of the (Gk.) Three Graces for the (Christian) Trinity. Not the substitution of a feminine trinity for the (canonical-biblical Christian) masculine Trinity. Exactly 21 years ago, Jn. kenotically reified the circle-dance metaphor (i.e., he emptied the Trinity of what we Christians would expect in a Trinity visual, so he could then make perichoresis, the intraTrinitarian community, "real" by reifying the circle-dance metaphor). Why is the church here a woman? The biblical text Jn. was painting (his 30th & last in a fresh visualization of the Bible while working, as a professor of art, under me toward ordination) presents the new-Jerusalem church as feminine, "a bride." And that feminine Trinity: was Jn. a radical feminist? Not at all! Rather, an orthodox Christian who (1) denied that God is male & (2) affirmed that the masculine Trinity is "inclusive" of the feminine. Subliminal message: The Trinity is not only to be awe-fully adored & thought but also danced! I do not denigrate thinking, or unduly elevate it. Community, divine or human, cannot be reduced to, or adequately explicated by, philosophy/theology, which are to do their best as *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding"). "We need also to open ourselves to the other ways of knowing" (730, Sally S. Bailey, "Comprehensive Spiritual Care," in PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF SUPPORTIVE ONCOLOGY, ed. Ann Berger et al, Lippincott-Raven/98).

2 Trinity language has gender unity (it's masculine), not gender diversity (it's not masculine-feminine). To put it crudely, it's a men's club, a guy thing. (Don't get mad! I'm not saying God is male. I'm only saying that Bible & Church *without variation* (until, in the past few years, in a few liberal circles) refer to God by masculine pronouns & address God by masculine--never feminine--titles.)

3 What makes this offensive for some is that these obvious linguistic facts imply (1) divine masculine exclusiveness (more than "male superiority," which would only be that God is superior to goddesses [or the Goddess]), (2) divine patriarchy, &

(3) human patriarchy, sexism. These offended say "Sexism is intolerable; therefore, the Bible's patriarchal God is intolerable."

4 Responsive to this charge, Christian thinkers had these alternative moves:
 (1) The Bible's God is indeed patriarchal, but it's an excessive inference that this gives men a divine sanction to dominate women. Up with the heaven-Patriarch, down with sexism (which the divine Patriarch himself deplores).

(2) The Bible's God is not patriarchal! Masculine language for God is merely metaphorical & should now, to prevent misunderstanding & aid understanding, be (1) downplayed (&, in the case of pronouns, excluded) & (2) supplemented by "balancing" feminine language.

5 The 1st move is accurate & honest; the 2nd, wrong & disingenuous, with disastrous effects for theology (as visible in THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL) & for ecumenicity. The language contortions of the 2nd move remind me of some 6th-graders' sentences (as in NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER): "Evaporation [& "patriarchy" & "sexism"!] gets blamed for a lot of things people forget to put the top on." "Humidity is the experience of looking for air [truth] & finding water [illusion]."

6 The Bible's is a patriarchal **command ethic**. The community of Father, Son, & Holy Spirit command community. Command that we be holy, as God is. Even command love--first, for him (as the Ten Commandments [ratified by Jesus] begin). For Christians, love is not something we know & then check out God for (as did Darwin, who rejected God for not passing Darwin's love-test): "love" for us is, in content & tone, the Big One of the divine commandments, biblically defined (1) as commanded by the heaven-Patriarch ("Our Father in heaven") & (2) as reciprocal, in response to his creative-redemptive love, which paradoxically prescribes in the interest of order & limits in the interest of freedom. Nowhere in the world's pantheon is there a more patriarchal deity! Efforts to deny it are pitiful failures in spin-control, as well as betrayals of revelation, God's self-disclosure....It's false & anti-semitic to say that the OT's is a command ethic & the NT's a love ethic. The NT's 1st book ends with a reaffirmation of the command ethic (Mt.28.20): "obey everything I have commanded you." And at the end of the NT's last book, the commander says he'll come "soon" to check out whether his commands have been obeyed (Rev.22.12). What about the NT's "God is love" author (Jn., 1-3Jn.)? How much he has to say about obeying the commandments (old & new: 1Jn.2.7)!

7 The command idea is offensive in both senses. In the emotional sense, it's repulsive to the antiverticalists, who decry "hierarchy" & thus such biblical signals thereof as that God is "above" & King-Father-Lord. In THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL bowdlerized version of the UCC Statement of Faith, the high places of the original have been made plain: all these have been eliminated: the Jews favorite way of referring to God, viz. KING; Jesus' favorite way of referring to God, viz. FATHER; & the early Christians' favorite way of referring to Jesus, viz. LORD. This butchery is patent evidence of my claim that here in mole-work is a new religion...."Offensive," too, in the military sense: attacking antipatriarchalists.

8 Here we come to a sad **irony**: The antiverticalists preach alongsidedness, partnership; but object to it in the biblical trinitarian name of God, "Father, Son, & Holy Spirit," a revealed & therefore privileged family-metaphor. The father-mother-child family is humanity's primary laboratory for learning community (so the word "family" should be protected against semantic creep, as in "homosexual marriage/family"). None of the gender-feminists' substitutes for "Father" & "Son" preserve the divine community (& any one of them shatters the doctrine of the Trinity). But if we project onto the heavens our present fragmented family, the Trinity appears as a single-parent (motherless), single-child (sisterless) "family"; & since the son is not the offspring of intercourse between the father & a goddess, this "family" is entirely without "women's experience." Blasphemous, yes; but true to radical-feminist feelings. Christianity is a poor religion-choice for antipatriarchal antivertical gender-egalitarians, & we should tell them so, even those of them who claim Christianity as their religion. But instead, liberal religion has so accomodated them as to compromise--in my opinion, fatally--the Christian religion (& Judaism, in the case of Jewish radical-accomodationists). The pronouns for God are our first line of defense.