

## BAPTISM IN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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Looking toward the 14-19 Aug 88 CRAIGVILLE V THEOLOGICAL COLLOQUY on "Baptism in the United Church of Christ," I feel moved to develop a thesis that popped into my head five minutes ago. (Yesterday I finished reading a book whose author, modestly disclaiming authorship, claims the thing was "dictated by an Inner Voice." "Popped into my head" seems to me, while secular, a more spiritual way of describing the Athena-like birth of something I feel moved to commit to paper.) Well, as I was saying, for me at least a fresh thesis: While the WORDS (the ritual) of baptism are dominantly masculine (the formula "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"), the ACTION (the ceremonial) is dominantly feminine. Let's see if I can pull this one off. Anyway, give me credit for trying to androgynize baptism. (Oops! already I need to apologize. Athena's birth is an instance of reverse parthenogenesis. No virgin. Not even any woman. Just a man's head, as though she were no more than an idea popping into and out of Father Zeus' head! Which is even worse than out of Adam's rib, since that took two males, viz, Father YHWH and Adam....Oops! there I go again. But hang on, the worst is over.)

1. Since this Thinksheet is "in feminist perspective," I should give you some feel for what I mean by feminists, of whom I count myself one. A feminist believes (1) women are as bad as men. The point may seem so obvious to you, especially if you are a woman, as scarcely to need stating. Eliz. Janeway thinks it needs stating that male sexism (yes, there are two kinds), in pedestaling women (considering them better than men), feeds its other mode, viz, slutting women (considering them worse than men). (2) Women are inferior to men. This belief is solidly grounded in species-long female experience of being dominated by men, the reverse of the case of tigers, the female tiger being stronger and more aggressive. (3) Women are superior to men, a fact male sexism finds embarrassing, aggravating, and tries to obscure. But here, too, human experience argues the case for me. If you're unconvinced, read Ashley Montague's "The Natural Superiority of Women." If it scrambles your brain to try to sustain two superiorities within one system, think what it does to your mind to try to warp reality into the dogma that only one of the two sexes is superior! No, you better believe in the mutual superiority (implying also mutual inferiority) of the sexes. If you don't, you're either a male sexist or a female sexist. So we have arrived, in my feminist credo, at (4): God has made each sex superior to the other, in complementarity for each the other's limits and weaknesses. (5) For other reasons I don't know of, but at least for this, God, to fight off boredom (which is a worse danger the brighter you are, so worst in God), ladles into each human skinbag a unique mix of genes and hormones and does so chaotically (chaos being, as some claim to have discovered recently, another form of order), with the result that the action profile of some males is estrogenic-nurturing and the action profile of some females is androgenic-leading. Thus the principle: Societal sexual role assignments are of the devil, for they frustrate the will and pleasure of God, who (as I've already indirectly said) wants the variety of some women in leading roles (especially, I think, as pastors) and some men in nurturing roles.

2. No, I haven't forgotten that this Thinksheet is on baptism. One way to examine one's theology of a sacrament is to imagine various performance patterns. Here, the acting out of my thesis could be this: A woman does the baptizing as a man says the formula. Enriched semantics, notice: A couple (whether or not sexual partners) represent the transinsexual nature of God (I don't like "metasexual" or "transsexual"). (In DIVINE PRINCIPLE, which he says was dictated by God sort of, Sun Moon claims that neither sex can be the Messiah, as Messiah must represent on earth the bisexual nature of God. When I gave at his seminary,

the only lecture I was willing to give there, "Sun Moon Is Not a Christian," the Moons were bucking for a 12th child so they could recapitulate Jesus' disciple band, & didn't Ms. Moon soon thereafter get pregnant! Anyway, "Father"--they all call him that there--says the Messiah couldn't come as a woman, for that would be female sexism, or as a man, for that would be male sexism. The language is mine, the doctrine is his. His, too, is the implication that he & Ms. Moon are You-Know-Who. We must give him this, that Christianity is the only living religion in which the god appears only once and only as a male. The Roman Magisterium woodenheadedly imagines this excludes women from the priesthood, but that inference is drawn from the secondary and debatable doctrine that the priest is in loco domini, in place of the Lord (Jesus).)

3. Next to mother Ada & wife Loree, for understanding the female in the world & the feminine in me I'm most indebted to great women authors. In Flannery O'Connor this morning I came upon this (THE HABIT OF BEING, Vintage/79, pp.142-4, a letter to an editor, which I partly paraphrase & partly quote): I used to worry about being too inflammatory, that I was scandalizing people, but now I see the stuff I was then writing "wouldn't even have kept anybody awake." Besides, "people are every day being scandalized not only by what is scandalous of its nature but by what is not." Some are so scandalized by Abraham's lying about his wife that they miss the message of his life. "The fact is that in order not to be scandalized, one has to have a whole view of things, which not many of us have" (underlining mine). Be honest, conscience clear, and "leave the rest in God's hands. When the book leaves your hands, it belongs to God," who "may use it to save a few souls or to try a few others, but I think that for the writer to worry about this is to take over God's business" (underlining mine).

4. So I've arrived at my next point about baptism, the fictivity of it as a free/fixed action--fixed by dominical command, free to take the most appropriate shape in particular places & times. On its free side, baptismal praxis as well as doctrine can profit from FO's continuing comments on fiction, as analogous to, metaphor for, sacrament: "Fiction is supposed to represent life, and the fiction writer has to use as many aspects of life as are necessary to make his total picture convincing." (I didn't put "sic" after generic "his." The letter is dated 7 Mar 56; & besides, letting yourself get hung up on this would be an instance of not having "a whole view of things.") "The fiction writer doesn't state, he shows, renders." You don't have to worry about "bad taste with a competent writer, because he uses everything for a reason. The reader may not always see the reason." Sex, scurrility, sentiment, anything "used for their own sakes" is bad taste. "Fiction is the concrete expression of mystery--mystery that is lived. Catholics believe that all creation is good and that evil is the wrong use of good and that without Grace we use it wrong most of the time. It's almost impossible to write about supernatural Grace in fiction. We almost have to approach it negatively. As to natural Grace, we have to take that the way it comes--through nature. In any case, it operates surrounded by evil" (cf. the ancient baptismal question, "Do you renounce the devil...?"). Thus her defense of realistic fiction in the context of Grace. Can you see further crossovers to baptism?

5. It's women who give birth, and baptism is Mother Church giving new birth through a second bag of water. The (literal) ceremonial fountain of baptismal imagery is immersion (Romans 6:4 the locus classicus). We could deepen (both senses!) baptism in the UCC were we to use the Russian Orthodox practice: trine (for the Trinity) immersion of the infant. And of course believers' immersion, as was practiced by many of the Christian Connection churches, one strand of our denomination.