

IN THE MAKING, UNMAKING, & REMAKING OF MODELS OF GOD

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Radical feminism is the most radical challenge to Christianity in sixteen centuries (1633 years, to be exact: when Julian became the Roman emperor, he tried to overwhelm Christianity with paganism. He was postChristian, as are many of the radical feminists who are trying to overwhelm Christianity with neopaganism)....If Christianity had not set intellectual **limits** through the centuries, it would have ceased to exist--a truth common to all human communities. But when one's spirit is set, as mine is, to be INclusive, it's hard to be EXclusive--to set limits--to draw the line--to say "Thus far & no further."

This Thinksheet is--to use a Greek word-image--about the Christian ball-park: a "**hyperbole**" is a ball thrown out of bounds & thus, intentionally or not, out of play. As sin is a good thrown too far in a straight line, feminism is a good which radical feminists throw out of the Christian playing-field. As the boundary-lines are invisible & even somewhat flexible, umpires must not too quickly shout "OUT!" Little danger of that in the mainline churches, however, whose umpires favor silence, lest they be, & be seen as, "judgmental." I try to be a humble & cautious umpire, but I must not be silent about radical feminism's efforts to re-make the divine in its own image by unmaking central Christian models for God & making self-flattering substitutes.

1 **Model?** You knowing "working model," which is an idea visibilized toward construction. One was made of our house, a structure unusual enough so that the engineer (& we!) felt better to be able to see-feel it small (11" x 18" frame, 3 floors) before constructing it. A "live model" stands-sits-lies there while painters paint & sculptors sculpt. A "fashion model" is inelegantly called a clothes horse. A "life model" is somebody somebody emulates, would like to be like in some way or ways. Then there's pattern or mold, as "last year's [Ford] models." And there are models (ie, simplified representations) in math, science, economics, business, sports strategies.

In all these instances, models are things we humans make in the process of doing our thing. That tells you the trouble with the phrase "models of God." Whatever good it may mean, it just can't help meaning our specs (specifications) as to the deity we want ("the deity we want" being, as an oxymoron, a bad cosmic joke God-model-makers just don't get).

2 Think of overlapping circles, one labeled (outer) images & the other, (inner) ideas. The *MODEL* is the overlap, the mix of images (perceptions, metaphors, symbols, narratives) & ideas (concepts, theories, hypotheses, paradigms). Dynamically, a model is an emergent from the interplay of images/ideas (both words from the I-E root for **seeing** [*fr̥s̥ wid*], itself a metaphor for the mind's two ways of grasping invisibles). An image or metaphor bridges from the commonplace or known to the unfamiliar or unknown; then by abstraction & neuron-like connections the mind creates a conceptual (ie, ideational) interpretation of the image, & then returns from idea to image for vividness & enrichment....This process was analyzed first by literary critics (eg, Jn. Middleton Murray, 1931), then by linguistic philosophers, then by theologians (eg, Paul Ricoeur, David Tracy, Sallie McFague)--&, in varying degrees of precision, by Jewish & Christian biblical scholars through two millenia.

3 I am convinced that what Tillich said about symbols, viz that they appear (to use a hymn-phrase from a Ps.) "without our aid," applies to some models of God: some of them--eg, "Father, Son, & Holy Spirit"--are **unsubstitutable**. Aristotle treated metaphors as optional, as mere rhetorical devices translatable into concepts; but modern language-scholars--I think first of I.A.Richards--have shown that concepts inferred from images cannot substitute for them (eg, one cannot say that a moral derived from a parable of Jesus can communicate, without significant remainder, what the parable "means"). But atop that general linguistic point, I'm making the point that certain word-pictures are divine data (Lat., "givens"), God-

given models for which we cannot provide substitutes without destroying the fabric of biblical-canonical **revelation**. As this Thinksheet title implies, revelation privileges some images-metaphors-models, protecting them from theology's otherwise necessary making/unmaking/remaking of models of God. Canonical Christian theologians' list of these include "Father," "Lord" (including of Jesus), "Savior" (including of Jesus), "King" (including of Jesus), "Christ," & "Son of God."

4 While theology seeks to be faithful to revealed models, philosophy of religion views every religion's metaphorical store as humanly constructed. Rightly, history- & philosophy-of-religion treat all religions as on a level playing field, none of them being permitted the special pleading of divine data, all of them viewed as without divine aid. When a theologian treats all metaphors-models as substitutable human constructs (as eg does Sallie McFague), that theologian has abandoned theology & is operating as a philosopher of religion.

Eg, many radical feminists consider the incarnation model, viz divine becoming human, a metaphor needing reworking from the "androcentric," "oppressive" Christian version, viz God's self-enfleshing only once & that in male flesh. In order to distance themselves from the Incarnation ("the Word became flesh," Jn.1.14), they appeal to metaphorical expressions such as "Well, here comes So-&-so *in the flesh!*" Rightly observing that the metaphorical origin of words tends to be forgotten as the words become of common use, these thinkers generalize that fact vis-a-vis models-doctrines they want to be rid of, warning that we should "avoid collapsing the metaphor and its reference" (Sallie McFague, "Metaphor" in The Westminster DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY [W.P./83]). Here is the move: Jesus was experienced as godlike (the metaphor), Jesus is God come in the flesh (the collapse of the metaphor into the reference).

5 Radical feminism's other ploy for ridding itself of uncomfortable doctrines is also philosophical, not from the philosophy of language (as §4) but from the philosophy of being (metaphysics: ontology--Whitehead) & the philosophy of knowing (methodology: epistemology--Kant). Let's have a glimpse of each:

....BEING, with A.N.Whitehead as father of "process philosophy" (soon adapted by some of my teachers as "process theology"). The scientific model here is an organism, not (as was Newton's) a machine....Here you might profit from reviewing §1 & §2. We should always keep in mind that "models" (in the current sense in religion, as "models of God" & "models of the church") is first a science term, then is taken up by philosophy, then by religion: one should not forget the origin in the physical & biological sciences, which work on & within the premises of omniscient reason. A scientific model is more developed than an analogy & less developed than a paradigm. Eg, presently the only working model for understanding genes is on the analogy of "code" as used in language & communication: "the genetic code." Distinct from the realities or Reality, models are tentative description of same with heuristic power--ie, they help explore toward better descriptions & thus toward paradigms, which are wider-angle with deeper perspective. To be true to its rational commitment, science must be open to revising or even rejecting a particular model. This has special appeal for radical feminism, which wants to reject much of the biblical model & revise the rest....Now back to Whitehead, whose model's base is an organism's multipolar processes from which he projects a unipolar universe inclusive of God--thus, monism, against the biblical dualism of Creator/creation. Revelation is reduced to discovery, the Incarnation is reduced to myth, & the Bible's scandal of particularity (that the transcendent God chose a people for a specific mission & "sent his Son into the world") is removed (though the devout may continue to use analogy [eg, "spiritual journey"] & story [thus, "narrative theology"]). Since reality is one (ontological continuity), there is no God before-behind-above-below-within "all things," the fullness of the biblical God is reduced to the God within (the process; thus McFague's panentheism--in metaphor, the world as "God's body"). But prosaically, really, there is no such God as in the Bible; poetically one may continue to tell the old God/world stories *as if* they were, in the so-called objective-scientific sense, true (epistemological discontinuity). Which brings us to the philosophy of....

....KNOWING, with I.Kant (building on J.Locke & D.Hume) as father of "modern" epistemology. As with Whitehead the divine independence of creation collapses into "the creative process," so in Kant the knowledge of God (whom Kant calls unknowable) collapses into metaphysics, meaning slumps down into metaphor-- &, free from revelation, you are at liberty--here again, radical feminists rejoice-- to choose your own metaphors for the sublime & ultimate as well as your own experience given who you are in gender, race, class, nation. Gone (for Kantian radicals) is not only the one God but even common human experience.

The best answer to the whole of what I've been describing--critiquing in this § is NATURE, MAN AND GOD, the 1932-4 Gifford Lectures of Wm. Temple, archbishop of Canterbury (Mac/34/51). In its Index of Proper Names, the most referenced are Plato 26, **Whitehead** 18, **Kant** 16, Aristotle 13, Jesus 12, Jn. 10, Shakespeare 9, Bosanquet & Hume each 8, Augustine & Paul each 6. I was awed when I reviewed again, for this Thinksheet, this masterpiece which (among other things) anticipated the horrors of Hitler & Stalin as well as of the postChristian fruits of Western monism & agnosticism (yes, including the intellectual underpinnings of radical feminism, all of which [I wouldn't have noticed before feminism] are male, so I fear the radical feminists have read them with insufficient gender-suspicion---but I jest, since I think thinking is not gender-specific).

6 In §5¶2 I used the expression "on & within the premises of omniscient reason." "On" refers to the presupposition, assumption, postulate, proposition (intended to support a conclusion), ground[s] (of a complaint), basis (on which reasoning proceeds)--"pre-mise" or "-miss" meaning something put before (the Lat. means "sent before") something else. Take eg Kant's booktitle premising reason for thinking about religion: RELIGION WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF PURE REASON (1793), a tour de force to prove the omniscience (all-ability) of reason to process reality. Now for the analogy in my "within [the boundaries of] the premises." We are now into real estate, yes? "The premises" means either the grounds + building[s] or the building[s] + grounds, as the "grounds" for financial or jurisprudential action, the latter often for the determination of realty boundaries. That's a primary analogy or metaphor from "premises" as mental realities. Now let's move from the metaphorical-physical to another mental reality, viz the permissible **limits** which it's impermissible to exceed--eg, the biblical "canon," which classical Christians reject the very notion of additions to. Pastor Robinson, at the Mayflower's sailing, did not say "God hath more light and truth to break forth." He did say that, but his sentence ended "from his holy Word [the canonical Bible]." It's ignorant or wicked to misquote him for the purpose of supporting the notion, a favorite of radical feminists, that revelation continues beyond the Bible. (We orthodox Christians say inspiration continues, not revelation.)

Now, this here pig sharpens what I've just said. In early 1800s PA & KY, Thomas & son Alex. Campbell began a movement that resulted especially in what is now called the Disciples of Christ. A premise (yes!) of theirs was "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." The premise's first half had the virtue of emphasizing Bible study-&-preaching; the second half threatened the movement with the vices of ahistoricism (underrating postbiblical history), anti-ecumenism (neglect of fellowship with other Christians), & anti-intellectualism. (In another movement, Jn. Wesley--calling himself *homo unius libri* "a man of one book"--showed that these vices were avoidable--as did the leaders of the Christian-Connection Churches [a movement parallel with the Campbells'] who founded Craigville, the religious center where I live.) Me, I'm not at all silent when people who claim the biblical base speak, where the Bible has not spoken, antibiblical (Bible-undercutting) thoughts. I am progressive: much needs to be spoken where the Bible has not spoken. I am conservative: nothing should be spoken, by anyone claiming the Bible for support,



**CAMPBELLITE PIG BEING SILENT
WHERE THE BIBLE IS SILENT**

in violation of the biblical Story of creation-redemption-incarnation-atonement-consummation. Some "models of God" must be resisted as idol substitutes for the biblical God. At the end of the day, none of these idols will prove out to be as good for women (& men) as the biblical God....(The pig is in Jas. C. Taylor's unpaginated A NEW PORCINE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION [Abingdon/72/92].)

7 Because *language & life constantly shape each other*, words matter, some more than others. Scripture warns us against word-fights (Gk., "logomachies") for words that don't matter, aren't vital to community & mission (1Tim.6.4, "verbal quibbles" [J.N.D.Kelley], "morbidly keen on mere verbal questions and quibbles" [NEB], "a morbid craving for...disputes about words" [NRSV] & Tit.3.9--the only NT instances of the Gk. wd. transliterated into Eng. as "logomachy"; the Pastorals Christians were to avoid profitless, corrupting word-wars with **gnostics**; cp. 1Tim.1.6; 2Tim.2.16; Tit.1.10: don't be drawn off into controversies irrelevant to your preaching-living of the gospel)....."Gnostics" (translit. of the Gk. wd. for "knowledge"), then & now, claim access to a special knowledge which they demand to be used as the color-filter by which to appraise the knowledge-base of gospel, church, & mission. For radical feminists, that color-filter is what they call "women's [distinct, distinctive] experience." The Pastorals author warns (1Tim.6.21 NRSV) that "by professing it [the particular gnosis] some have missed the mark as regards the [Christian] faith." My main concern: Some Christian feminists, listening to radical secular feminists' siren songs & enticing words, have "lost their faith by believing this talk" (*ibid* CEV).

8 As the Black-Jesus divine model gave some blacks comfort from believing that God understands "the black experience," so the radical-feminist return of the Goddess (or God/ess) gives some women comfort from believing that "women's experience" is understood on high. These two ersatz deities are models indeed. And the current feminist movement is, by analogy, on the model of the black movement.