

THE CHRISTIAN STORY OF GOD

2928 11.21.98
ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 L. Ellz. Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008
Noncommercial reproduction permitted

1 For us finite-minded human beings, truth comes in the form of pictures, images, metaphors. When these pictures move, go through changes, we call them stories (moving-pictures!).

2 As the bright candle of the Enlightenment began to gutter out under the impact of World War II & the reason-corrosive philosophies preceding it, a new **modesty** came into "modernism" (the common 20th-century name for Enlightenment thinking). One of the forms this modesty took is the narrative paradigm, which views reality under the aspect of story. An early harbinger of this, preceding WWII, was Rainer Maria Rilke's STORIES OF GOD FOR BOYS AND GIRLS (which Loree & I read, early on, to our children).

3 **Science**, humiliated by its 20th-century horrors on top of its being flushed with early & continuing successes, is no exception to the post-modern (now being called "post-liberal") narratological consciousness. The science/religion confrontational history is full of ironies. When in AD 1600 the Roman Church burned Giordano Bruno at the stake for the way he told the story of the universe, he thought he was dying for science (in believing, eg, that the universe is infinite); but, you might say, the Church was killing him for science (as we now tell the story of the finite, big-bang-beginning universe). Present-day philosophers of science admit that science is in no position to give us "facts" about origins, but can only hope to tell stories closer to what are perceived as facts.

4 **Religion** has always been story-full and of late has been telling "the Story" within the tribe & "sharing Stories" among the religions. THE CHRISTIAN STORY is the baseline title of Gabriel Fackre's continuing multi-volume systematic theology. A virtue here is humility, with improved listening & lessened danger of misunderstandings with their attendant dangers in verbal, structural, & physical violence. On the down side, narratology is a ready-made escape from taking the risks of truth-claims (of epistemology). Despairing of truth, one may find oneself on the cynical slide into relativism, pluralistic egalitarianism (all religions & theological positions are equally "true," since none can be objectively so)--an intellectual social solipsism parallel to individual autism-&-schizophrenia.

5 Historical-cultural movements often result in a religion's telling its story in a fresh way (eg, the emergence of Pure Land Buddhism). And particular events can even result in a religion's telling its story so differently as to constitute a new religion (eg, Jesus Jews so telling their Judaism story that non-Jesus Jews recognized them as "heretics" & ejected-them-from-the-synagogues [the hyphens representing the fact that in the NT, the whole phrase is just one Greek word]).

6 This birth-of-a-new-religion phenomenon is occurring in the radical wing of contemporary Anglo-American feminism. Its first radical statement was Mary Daly's "If God is male, then men are gods." For a decade I have been noting the rise of this **new religion**, especially in linguistic changes (as, in linguistic matters, I'm as sensitive as a canary in a coalmine).

7 An arising heresy may throw a new light on the old religion, so that what was unobservedly true of it comes into consciousness. Feminist thinking has helped us see more clearly the Christian Story of God, which tells like this:

1 God, the Story's transcendent author, is ONE. The Christian Story of God is not that of a divine committee, a Jewish God ("Father") joined by two other objects of worship ("Son" & "Holy Spirit"), tritheism. It is the Jewish Story of God enriched ("polluted," Jews would say) by the Christian experience of Jesus Christ as Savior & Lord & of the Holy Spirit, tri-UNITY, One God in three "Persons." The earliest Christians, in including Son & Holy Spirit in God, did not break away from Jewish monotheism. "God" still meant, & means, the unique identity of the deity

worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, the Prophets, & Jesus. The Biblical* (Jewish & Christian) Story of God is of one who is One, *the* One, the Source & Destiny of "All Things," the universe. But where Jesus Jews saw monotheist continuity, non-Jesus Jews saw (& continue to see) polytheistic discontinuity.

*TECHNICAL NOTE: "Bible" (1st meaning in the big dictionaries) means the Christian (OT+NT) sacred scriptures, which include the Jewish "Bible" (the word expanded to designate the category "sacred scriptures"--eg, the Taoist Bible or the Hebrew Bible [the Jews' formal preference being the Hebrew Scriptures]). The earliest Christian Bibles (of which five are extant) had no Hebrew or Latin, only Greek; & their continuum (OT-into-NT) title for God was "kurios," for which the only correct translation is **Lord**--thus, (OT) "the LORD [capitalized in English Bibles to represent God's proper Hebrew name, "Yahweh"] God" & (NT) "the Lord Jesus." What "kurios" is in the Greek, "Lord" is in Eng.: **the bridge word** between the two Testaments making up the Bible....So **central** as the title tie between the Testaments is "Lord" (in the history of the Eng. Bible & of Eng.-language praying-preaching-teaching-theologizing) that no substitute was ever proposed till radical feminism's screech against masculine terms (nouns & pronouns) for God. The most startling & shameful victory of that screech: though "Lord" appears almost 900 times in the Psalms, it never appears in the Psalms in the UCC's (1995) THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL, which falsely assumes that the Christian Story of God can be told in Eng. without ever using the title "Lord." The excision of the tie-title is one sign that here we are observing the birthing of a new religion out of & away from the Bible's religion, the Bible's God.

2 Our Story continues: God tried variously to communicate himself to humanity, finally communicating HIMSELF (in the incarnation, the communication WAS himself as his Son, by whom he had "created the universe" [Heb.1.1-2]). In his GOD CRUCIFIED: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament (Eerdmans/98), Rich. Bauckham denies the Enlightenment notion that christological history (the development of the doctrine of the God/Jesus relationship) was from low (only a man) to the highest (fully God). Rather, he says, because the earliest Christians included Jesus within the unique identity of the One God, the highest christology was the earliest (& progressively lower christologies were degenerations from the highest). No need to look for semidivine intermediary early-Jewish figures. Jesus' identity was revealed in who God was Jewishly known to be, & (reciprocally) God's own identity is revealed in Jesus. Gender feminism's take on this? Transcendentalized androcentricity all the way, a merger of two males (Father & Son) with the female (Mother Mary) as the excluded middle (though in the normal, nonsexist pantheons of the world, Goddess-Mother Mary would be God's Consort). Other alleged insults to women: (1) God has a Son but no Daughter; (2) God comes incarnate in male but not in female flesh (so in the flesh he's had no "women's experience"); (3) Jesus the Son is a Virgin, having no Consort; (4) In the Bible's Story of God, Father & Son are (exclusively, in all titles & pronouns) masculine, but the Holy Spirit is explicitly male* (impregnating Mary, however "spiritual" the spin one may put on this obviously physical fact, & whether or not one now personally "believes" in the Virgin Birth). The Son comes from the Father, lives & dies to save humanity, goes to the Father, then sends the Holy Spirit: all the actors masculine (as all actors on the ancient Greek stage were male, including impersonators of women).

8 Two questions: (1) In the above telling of the Christian Story of God, is the divine masculinity (nouns & pronouns) a radical-feminist parody of the Bible's God, or (as I claim) radical-feminism's illumination (unavailable to pre-feminist exegetes) of the Bible's God (with only mild hyperbolic spinning)? (2) What shall we up-to-speed-in-contemporary-culture Christians do about our uncomfortable God-situation (uncomfortable chiefly because of gender-feminist pressures)?

9 OPTIONS on the second question: (1) We can (I think, should) **live with the uncomfortable fact** of masculine exclusivity in the Bible's titles & pronouns for God, relieving the discomfort (as well as promoting truth) by looking at all the positive facets of the fact; (2) We can remove the discomfort by **abandoning** the Bible's God in favor of an old religion (as some are escaping into philosophical Buddhism, which as atheist has no deity-gender problems) or segueing into a new religion; (3) We can **suppress** Christianity's pronouns (all of which are masculine) for God, a move appearing to satisfy many women & men who have one leg in church & one in feminism; (4) We can substitute **ungendered titles** (eg, Sovereign) for gendered (King); (5) We can expand our use of the Bible's few but precious **feminine** similes & metaphors for God; (6) We can **invent & promote** new titles for God, some feminine & some ungendered, with the goal (real but remote) of gender-balance....COST: The more stratagems 2-6 succeed, the more alienation from the Bible's God.

*IRONY: In a desperate, pitiful ploy to find a feminine member of the Trinity, some gender feminists choose the only Person who in the Story ever acts as a male! The ploy genderizes the (non-sexual) Trinity, & in effect makes deity twice as masculine as feminine (score, 2 to 1).