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"BE OF SCRIPTURE A LITTLE MORE CAREFUL THAN ANYTHING"

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Yes, the e.e.cummings bromide has "love" where here I have "Scripture." He was right, &--in the context of the present intra-UCC debate as to whether "a new religion" (my claim) overlays the old religion in THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL--I believe that I am right in my claim that the control-thinkers in mainline Protestantism have fostered a **political corruption** of the Bible so that their eisegeses provide biblical warrant for mainline Protestant perspectives & programs.

My mind floods with recent instances of the **politicizing** of the gospel for use inside & beyond the church, **politicizing** of the church, & even **politicizing** of God (by reading gender-equality into him so it can be read right back out of him). I could categorize & detail these offenses.

Or I could illustrate this Thinksheet's thesis by proceeding in the opposite direction, viz. from Scripture to instances of abuse thereof--which is what I'm doing in this Thinksheet, choosing one text from each Testament: OT, **Gn.1.27** (+ vv. from chap.2); NT, **Gal.3.28.** In order to find gender-equality in these two scriptures currently being used, more than any other scriptures, to support the gender-equality dogma, the exegete-functioning-as-eisegete must first put it there.

Since I believe in "The Mutual Superiority of the Sexes" (chap.7 of FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT), I do not find it awkward that the Bible--unlike some holybooks of some other religions than Judaism & Christianity--cannot be used as a warrant-sanction-support for gender-equality, a notion whose roots are American-political ("created equal") rather than religious.

Ideas have consequences. If one begins with the gender-equality idea, the Bible must be translated & interpreted to "prove it," an exercize requiring the fancy footwork of shifting from singular to plural & the reverse, of transposing from 3rd person singular ("he") to 2ns person ("you"), of interpolations (e.g., adding "and Sarah" where the text has only "Abraham"), of omissions, of paraphrasic extrapolations, of insupportable inferences, & of category substitutions (in logic called "category errors"). Where all else fails, the desperate ideological hermeneut will squidlike squirt a dark cloud of mystery (mystification) over the scene, lamely overclaiming on the limited truth that "The Bible may be interpreted in many ways." But to the task:

Yes, ideas have consequences. Once people are brainwashed into believing that the Bible teaches gender-equality, they will buy (both senses) a **hymnal** (such as THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL) in which hymns both old & new are made to conform to the gender-equality dogma as applied to both humanity & deity. Since hymnals have more influence on what people believe than even Bibles, such a hymnal will regularly ratify the gender-equality dogma, as will all other materials from the church press (Christian education curricula, periodicals, occasional pieces, et al). Since Bible/hymnal/press all agree, it's not long before most parishioners take gender-equality as gospel truth, &consider naysayers as ignorant or worse (subversives).

Before looking at our two PC-abused scriptures, a relevant ASIDE: "What did you think of the sermon?" my host asked. "Propaganda," I said; "the preacher abused her text to make a political point." It was "Women's Gifts Sunday" in the Presbyterian calendar, & the preacher needed a story-text of a good woman making good use of her gifts. Instead, she'd chosen a story of a bad woman who'd made bad use of the only gift we know of that she had, viz. the power to get men to buzz around her: Jn.4.1-42. (She was garrulous about what'd happened to her: a gift?) The preacher had some good things to say about God's gifts to women, but none of them was derivable from this Jesus story despite her heavy-breathing contortions.... Not all "feminist exegesis" is that crude & pathetic. Not quite all.

I'll introduce my comments on our two texts by noting that only texts of unambiguous meaning can be adduced as loci classici (primary texts used as pillars supporting a vision or doctrine), for normative use. Ambiguous texts can be used with unambiguous force (the user selecting a particular meaning) to add epexegetic weight to a teaching (rhetorical use) or provide an example (illustrative use).

TWO FACTS jump out: (1) Gender egalitarians make **primary** use of both our texts; & (2) Neither of our texts provides **unambiguous** support for gender equality.

THE SITUATION: While neither of our texts can serve as a locus classicus support for gender equality, both are abused into doing so. So reread, please, the title of this Thinksheet.

Genesis 1.27

NRSV obscures the fact (& in a footnote admits it) that the first clause ends in "him," not (as NRSV) "them." The corruption is supported by translating "adam" by the collective word "humanity." Contrast the honest 1981 Jewish rendering (THE TORAH; TANAKH, JPS/85): "God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him." When the children asked how He did it, the answer is Gn.2.7.

Yes, "adam" can be either singular (as "Adam") or collective, but the context of 1.27a (the verse's 1st clause) excludes the latter. (Singular repeated in Gn.5.1.)

Now let's move to 1.27b: "male and female he created them" (NRSV; TANAKH capitalizes "He" both as honor to the deity & for double clarity [though masculine, God is not male; & the capitalization distinguishes God from any human males in any contexts]). When the children asked how He did it, the answer is Gn.2.7,21-22.

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Before creating the woman, God assigned the man-in-His-image to be gardener & (as namer of animals & birds) husbandman....NOTE that the Gn.2 telling does not include the 1.27 idea that man is or that wo/man are made in God's image, though Gn.2 implies that woman is made in man's image so as to be, as other creatures could not be, "one flesh" (v.24) with him....NOTE further that 1.27b (a being the lst 2 clauses) does not say that God created male & female in his image, though it seems at least to imply that woman is at least indirectly, under coloration from v.27a, made in God's image....No need to trace out in the Talmud the hermeneutical possibilities. But think about the God/Christ/husband/wife hierarchy in 1Cor.11.3-10 NRSV: man is "the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man": Paul has not misread Gn.1 or 1-2; but he immediately (vv.11-12) balances that viewpoint with an affirmation of gender mutuality, for "all things come from God."

In this exegesis, my single purpose is to show that Gn.1.27 does not unambiguously teach gender equality, for which accordingly it can't be used as a primary text. When it is so used, we should name this an abuse of Scripture & should warn the abusers to be (in this Thinksheet's title phrase) "a little more careful."

Galatians 3.28

The passage is about negativity, not equality, of distinctions. Lightfoot: "Every barrier is swept away. No special claims, no special disabilities exist in Him [Christ Jesus]." "Male *and* female" may allude to Gn.1.27: the creation difference is now, in Christian redemption, a nondifference.

The "one"ness is **in-house**, in-Christian-community, in-church, "in Christ Jesus." Those whose minds are set to deal honorably with Scripture will not blur the church/world divide. Richardson: "Race, social status, sex counted for nothing in the new order," though all counted in the old order of the general society in which the "one man" (masculine, belonging to Christ as the new Adam; cp. Eph.2.15 ["one new humanity," generic] & 4.13 ["a complete man," masculine]) does not exist. Even in-house, don't extrapolate from equally under Christ (vertically) to equal vis-a-vis one another (horizontally)--a text-unwarranted political extension.

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