

## FROM ACIDS TO VIRUSES:

THE BREAKDOWN OF THE IMMUNE SYSTEMS

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008

Noncommercial reproduction permitted

Because a metaphor is a semantic domain, a field of play for ideas, a rulebook for meanings, a metaphor **shift** puts one into a new game on a new field of play. The Hindu missionary I talked with in Guyana was using a drawing of a man standing beside a car: "The car is not he, it's only his body; as he will own a number of cars, so our souls go through a number of incarnations." A **mechanical** metaphor to preach an ancient, unmechanical religion....Before WWII, we in America were making lively use of a **chemical** metaphor, "the acids of modernity." After almost two centuries of enjoying the blessings of the Enlightenment, we had begun to experience its dark downside....Now cultural analysis has shifted to **biological** metaphors, microbial (pathogenic bacteria) & viral (RHD2: "a corrupting influence on morals or the intellect"). Personally, societally, philosophically-theologically, we are suffering from progressive diseases, especially those--eg AIDS & CFIDS--weakening our immune systems, our ability to keep our health-&life enemies at bay. As diagnosis is the first step on the journey to cure, this Thinksheet is a diagnostic endeavor, with the aim of encouraging the exploration & exploitation of the viral metaphor..... (A "computer virus" bends our metaphor-flow backward from biological to mechanical.)

1 Without listing our nonbiological immune systems, I'll be adverting to some as I develop (1) the virus metaphor & (2) the assertion that forces functioning to break down these immune systems can be advantageously viewed as viruses, in that bio-antiviral therapies can function as models for attacking spiritual diseases.

2 Ironically, therapeutization (the tendency to "see" nonbiological problems in health/wholeness/healing terms) is a hermeneutical virus. As it's a crosscultural fact that women more than men attend to this aspect of human life, this is more a feminine than a masculine virus. Eg, a feminine hymnal such as THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL, in contrast to previous Christian hymnals, which are masculine-feminine, will frequently slip in the therapy/wholeness theme with little concern with what was in the hole made to make room for wholeness. Eg, Phillips Brooks would be angered to see, in his "O little town of Bethlehem," the gospel invitation to "meek souls" to "receive...the dear Christ," transmogrified into a therapeutic cult, in which "yearning souls long to be whole." Eleven years earlier, in the hymnal GOD'S GLORY, Dosia Carlson turned the Passion Chorale ("O Sacred Head, now wounded") into "We yearn, O Lord, for wholeness"!

3 Feminization is a societal/epistemological virus. Instead of properly correcting for sexism (ie, masculine bias oppressing-constricting women & girls), feminization is sexism in reverse: it imposes, on society & the mind (by an ideologized "hermeneutics of suspicion"), a feminine bias (thereby inflating a properly compensating feminism into an overcorrecting feministicism). Theologically, it imposes on the masculine-feminine deity of Judaism & Christianity a gender-change operation into a feminine-masculine or even a feminine, deity. (One can observe the change, in process if not complete, in those who've completely stopped the consistent biblical practice of using masculine pronouns for God.)

4 Deculturization (the in/formal, un/conscious erosion of a society's primary culture-base) breaks down a social body's immunity to the viruses of rival cultures & of the nihilism of narcissistic individualism. America's primary (foundational & institutional) culture base is ASWM (Anglo-Saxon White Male), including our language (formed by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, & the King James Bible versioners), literature (including a few female authors), & laws. Pre-English literature (the Bible [Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek] & "the classics" [Greek & Latin]) is, almost without exception, male-authored, as is true of virtually the entire literature-base of "Western civilization," which the virus of militant multiculturalism is sickening.

Language-literature-laws: undermine these, & you have what America now has: cultural confusion & oncoming chaos. Sociologist Wm. McKinney says, correctly, that the white male in America no longer has "positional power," automatic authority simply by the virtues of being male & white. Susan Friedman (in a Susan Starr Sered

article (sum/95JAAR262): "A white man has the luxury of forgetting his skin color and sex. He [unlike others] can think of himself as an 'individual.'" (Less & less true: it's even true that in some situations, he can think of himself as victim, just as does everybody else.)

5 Debibicalization (the passive fading out, & the active suppression, of the Bible in public education, higher education, the media, & government) weakens public resistance to viruses the Bible-in-American-life kept in check. The utopian social ideal is the anarchy of internalized controls (an oxymoron: external controls [the -archy of laws & their enforcement] confess the citizens' failure to "be Torah" (in a signature phrase of Rabbi Chaim Stern), ie to live life according to "the law written on the heart." For most Americans, that Torah/law was the Bible. As it's no longer learned by most Americans, jurisprudence has not adequately compensated by increasing the vigor of external law/enforcement. The chief impediment to that increase is a cultural lag: society/law has not sufficiently decreased the estimate of the citizen as an independent moral agent, not sufficiently qualified the independence. (Eg, drug pushers, who are immoral agents, have more independence than is good for societal health.) The more anomic the populace, the more the need for conversion/repression of the anomic, ie those who live without inner law & against outer law.

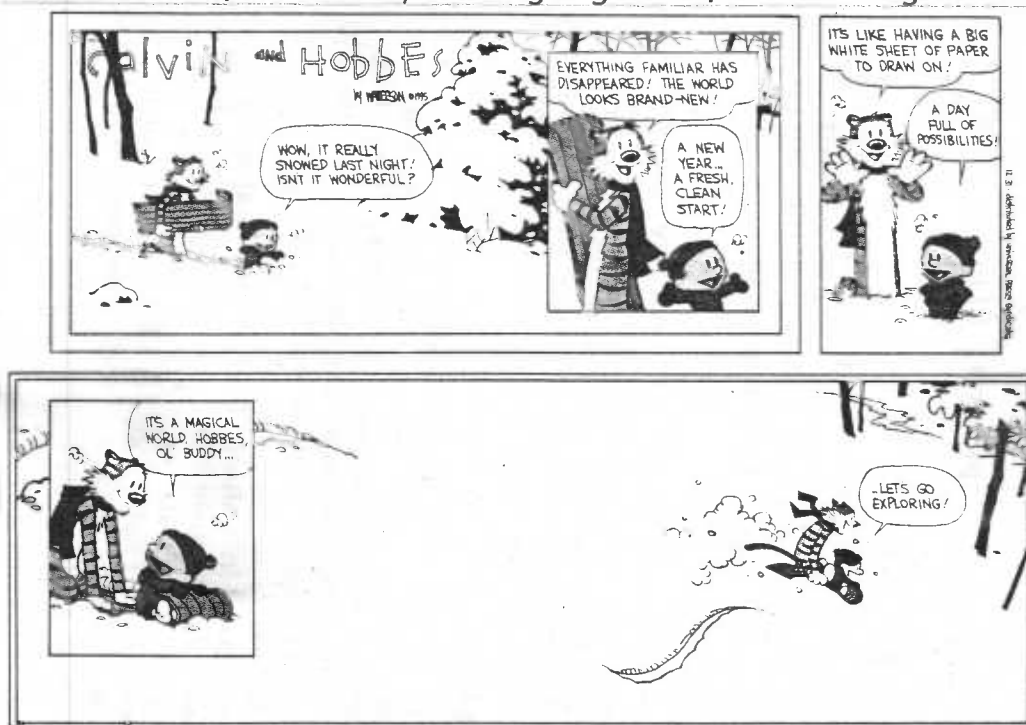
But the Bible has lost its social-control function in society for a reason in addition to its neglect/suppression: it itself has been debilitated by repression of its masculine qualities (power, command, demand, retribution [punishments/rewards], cosmic-historic-societal discipline/order). True story: Mother Ann Lee spoke of Christ as her "Lord and Head" and "lover" (83-103, JOURNAL OF FEMINIST STUDIES IN RELIGION, 8.1). When she died, her female followers remembered "lover," her male followers "Lord and Head." (In the feminist NEW CENTURY HYMNAL, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" [#546] did not need bowdlerizing demasculinization.) Another true story: In a letter criticizing me, the female president of a liberal seminary said Jesus wants us to call him "friend" (Jn.15.14-15); to which I replied that in the context, he's the commanding Lord: "friends" do not command: here the horizontal idea "friend" is qualified by the vertical idea "Lord." That woman (& liberal seminaries in general) has debilitated the Bible, robbing it of its divine-masculine vigor (on which see, again, §3)...Notice the beautiful-powerful masculine-feminine cooperation in the familiar Jn.3.16 (NRSV): "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Mother Ann Lee loved it--loved him, her Lover-Lord.

A loss from the fading out / suppression / debilitating of the Bible: it's no longer acting as a continuity/change stabilizer. Bibliolaters abuse it to fight off change with the weapon of literalism; but without it, the knowledge/influence of it, the masses are "carried about with every wind" (Eph.4.14) & "like a wave driven with the wind and tossed" (Jas.1.6): no anchor, no depth, no continuities amid the commerce-driven passions....Scenarios: (a) Biblical-spiritual revival of civic virtue; (b) Political ("Christian Coalition"?) imposition of civic virtue; (c) Nonbiblical-spiritual conquest, of now-indeterminate moral-ethical-legal content; (d) Deepening societal chaos, cultural confusion, political disintegration....The mainline-churches' feelings about the Bible are too ambiguous (especially because of the hermeneutic impact of radical feminism) to permit of pressing for (a).

6 Both power & impotence corrupt, but in different ways. Power tempts to arrogance & insensitivity (eg, the "sexist," "patriarchal" white male): impotence tempts to timidity & supersensitivity (eg, today's buffaloe white male). The over/under, or bipolar, syndrome. At his best, neither arrogant nor timid, the white male was, for America & "the West" generally, an immune system which has lost its vigor & thus its power to protect against social viruses. The arrogant lion has become a timid mouse, & there seems in church & society little will to diagnose the disease. Here are some elements in diagnosis: (1) The white male should be proud (though not arrogant): he is history's most contributive-of-good human being (with the exception of Jesus, a brown male); (2) The white male should be ashamed (though not timid) & repentant (though not groveling) for being the most contributive-of-evil human being (as power corrupts, & the most power--white power--corrupts most); (3) The white male should be assertive (not guilt-ridden timid) not of privil-

ege ("positional power") but of his powers/rights/responsibilities; (4) The white male should come to his own defense, especially when others won't, against false & distorted accusations of perfidious intent/effects of his history & present; (5) The white male should be generous in spirit toward those who scapegoat him (ie, use him as an excuse for their own failings) &/or are envious/jealous of him (for his superior management/manipulation of nature/humanity)....Why is the socalled middleclass, socalled liberal white male not behaving in this rational way? Pathological guilt/shame/ fear--the fear of being called a sexist, racist, classist, nationalist, capitalist, conservative, et al--have timidified him beyond the possibility of honest confrontation/dialog. Instead of "Let's talk," he says "Hit me again." And it is so in the case of his religion face-to-face with other religions, his culture face to face with other cultures. He is, in short, a failed immune system for himself, his religion, his culture, "the American way of life." He is poor marriage material & unfit for public life. But with honesty & courage, he's salvageable: "for God, all things are possible" (Mt.19.26, M.10.27).

Look at it this way: life is not for the timid. Asked what he's going to do after "Calvin and Hobbes," Watterson said he's going exploring--which, in the last C&H cartoon, Calvin says *he's* going to do, in the "magical world."



At the end of '95, we learned a new explanation for hyperactive Calvin: he was given the risk-taking, exploring gene--but let's not slip into pseudo-scientific genetic determinism: human beings, *all*, have "reach of spirit" toward a "magical world" God gives us to explore. The stadiums-filling "Promise Keepers" movement aims to stimulate, especially in white males, the spirit of adventurous responsibility--as did, for black

males, the Million Man March. God's call is to live by faith, not fear. Faith & courage, including the courage to fend off unfair, reality-distorting attacks on everything the white male has been an immune system for: whites, males, "the West," "the American way of life," the Christian religion. Careful! I'm claiming only that the white male has been *an* immune system. It's easy to point out how any segment of humanity is deeply flawed ("original sin" & all that): I'm not claiming that the white male is more virtuous, "better." Only that he's been more productive (eg, in that most globalizing activity, ship-building) & so more powerful & so more ethically (whether or not actually) more responsible. Power/responsibility are coeval, equivalent. PARADOX: Our white male is most responsible because occupying (in government, business, culture, religion, entertainment [including "sports"]) the positions of most power; & least responsible to the extent the job market is stacked against him.

7 The virus of power-thinking has invaded the body social, whose chief defense (immune system) against it is interpersonal satisfactions. In Bil Keane's "The Family Circle," this wisdom is in the heart (& here in the mouth) of the smallest child. This family scene can be given a complex triangular power-analysis: each person needs "liberation" from the other two. What that analysis would "indicate," ie recommend,

is a divorce + foster-home placement of the child. But this cartoon feature presents us with a family whose solidarity (immune system) is so sturdy that any emergence of power-struggle occasions not alienation but mirth, which as humor is itself an immune system. While we pray & work for **macro**-change (just short of "the things that cannot be changed"), we can achieve some "serenity" & persuasive force by attending to the **micro**-changes ("the things that can be changed") that are within our grasp & therefore within our responsibility. Most of the liberation talk I hear/read falls short of this Niebuhrian wisdom. I see it as, & name it, folly--eg, giving up the way the Bible speaks of God in hope that the sacrifice will benefit females & help better sell the gospel. The terra is not firma underneath utopian liberationisms.



8 The theological seminary, once the Church's intellectual immune system, has become a production- & distribution center for PC viruses incubated from the '60s. My reference is to the mainline ("liberal") seminaries, which have suffered a severe decline of white-male students...Deja vu: That was, roughly, the situation in 1900, when--to fight the viruses of Bible-deflation & "progress"-inflation--Wilbert Webster White began The Biblical Seminary of NY (now The NY Theological Seminary). The Bible was not a sideshow but the Big Tent--which was also the conviction of the Yale professor to whom he'd been assistant, viz Wm. Rainey Harper, who seven years earlier had left Yale to start the U. of Chicago. In animals (including us) as well as plants, health is the best defense against disease.

Sloganing (a virus) is easier than thinking (without which health of spirit is beyond reach). Seminaries infested with intolerance on the right (fundamentalism) or on the left (liberationism) are sick schools, & my experience is that neither has a better prospect of health than the other. (A half century ago now, my diary says, I was holding Open Forum almost every evening in the seminary in which I was teaching, my aim being to help whoever came--sometimes, more than half the student body--to *think*, the only deliverance from slogan-viruses.)

9 Its language is a culture's primary immune system. "When I hear the word 'culture,'" said the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, "I reach for my Luger [handgun]." The Nazis did indeed try to shoot, kill, the Christian past, which was an immune system against the virus of recrudescant "Aryan" paganism. It was as though the German people had walked into a trap & then found that the door they'd gone through had no handle on the inside of the trap. This same trick appears in the New Century Hymnal. If you'd like to know what the original, unbawdlerized form of the UCC Statement of Faith was, you're blocked (#885; untrue of the Nicene Creed, #883). Of if you wonder what the original of a grand old hymn was, you're blocked: eg, you can't get from "We Hail You God's Anointed" (#104) back to "Hail to the Lord's Anointed." If you knew the latter, the First Line Index would tell you where to find the former. Again: You can find out what an old hymn now *is*; but the editors don't want you to discover what a now bawdlerized hymn *was* (though there are two easy ways they could have done that). At the bottom of the p., we read that "this hymn has enjoyed wide popularity"--which gives the false impression that *this* hymn as here printed is meant (the "alt." [ered] not sufficient to indicate the radicality of the re-write, which doesn't mention the "Lord" or the "Son" or the dozen occurrences of masculine pronouns for deity). And oddly, this PC hymnal has dropped the stanza indicating the social-sensitivity reason for the Lord's anointing his Son: "He comes with succor speedy to those who suffer wrong; to help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong; to give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light, whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in his sight." (Doubtless, the social action had to be dumped in order to dump the missionary motivation!)....Also, the English language is suffering PC-caused barbarisms. Eg, "-self" is a pronominal suffix, an addition to a pronoun--eg, "the table *itself*." "Tableself" would be an intolerable barbarism, a nounpronoun mismatch. Yet I often see/hear the barbarism "Godself" in writers/speakers who should know-&-do better. One more evidence that feministicism is one more dismal formula for false pride & terroristic power.

LATER: More immune systems broken down by more viruses. Lift up your hearts!