

THE INTERREFLECTANCE OF THE HEAVEN/EARTH MIRRORS

In Washington DC politics, "smoke & mirrors" means deliberate concealment. In the imagery of religious revealing, the smoke is impenetrable ignorance (*deus absconditus*, God veiled, "hidden"--in contrast to God un"veil"ed, *deus re"vel"atus*); & the mirrors are heaven & earth as reflecting each other interdeterminately--ie, how each is seen determines how the other is seen.

Now let's use the "mirror image" for **gender**-thinking about the divine. ("Image" & "idea" have the same root.)....In atheism, there's no heavenmirror....In primitive religion, the heavenmirror merely reflects earth: look up, & there's a skyfather (god) & a skymother (goddess)....In biblical religion there's a skyfather ("Our Father, who art in heaven" [Mt.6.9]) but no skymother: earthmothers, & Mother Earth, do not appear in the skymirror....In neoprimitive (feminist) religion, both the earthmother & the earthfather appear in the skymirror....In lesbian religion, the earthmother (the Goddess) appears in the skymirror, the earthfather does not.

In biblical religion, the Skyfather (Dyaus pitra, the earliest form in the 1,000 I-E languages) appears not only in the earthmirror but personally on earth, as a man, "the man Christ Jesus," born by the impregnation of an earthmother (Mary) by the Skyfather (as "Holy Spirit," Mt.1.18, L.1.34).

1 The first question is not how much of the above one personally believes. Rather, it is whether the above is image-thinking **faithful** to Scripture. Answer: it is. To read the Bible intelligently, one must suspend disbelief so as to enter imaginatively into its imagery. Caird shows the importance of this by not titling his book simply THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE.

2 Another way to get at this point is to distinguish between experiencing a book & merely reading it. Observe a parent trying to get food down a finicky brat who's only picking at it: a poor image of the reader. Go to an all-you-can-eat restaurant & you see Americans pigging out: a poor image of the reader. When we eat, we should experience the food we have first thanked God for. One reviewer of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT said it was to be experienced, not only read; the tip-off that this is the author's intention is that its first chapter says, of life & reading, "Stop! SEE the beauty!" Why do moderns have so much trouble reading the Bible? Partly because it's head (its way of seeing & living in the world) is screwed on so differently from the modern head. But mainly because moderns haven't been taught to learn the skills & take the time to **experience** literature.

Page references below are to the Caird book.

3 "Who in the Bible is the speaker [59]?" The characters, the authors, & God; & "meaning is determined by the intention of the speaker." By "the intentional fallacy" (viz, supposing something's meant other than what's written), we wind up not with "a meaning more ultimate" but only with "our meaning, not theirs or God's." In Albert Schweitzer's figure (deriding those who imagine they can recreate "the historical Jesus"), what such false readers see in the well is not God but themselves. Earlier, Voltaire said it: if God made us in his own image, it didn't take us long to return the compliment. The "inclusive language" deity (including the censoring of the Bible's personal pronouns for God) is the latest instance.

How subtle is the temptation to make the Bible speak with our voice! Both the book's introducer, N.T.Wright (who's a faithful Bible-reader) & Marcus Borg (who's not) did their PhDs under Caird, a faithful Bible-reader....Caird (d.1984) was in a line of Bible-faithful Congregational principals of (Congregational) Mansfield College, Oxford University, where he took his theological training & (under Principal Nath. Micklem) his doctorate. Between these two principals was Jn. Marsh (A YEAR WITH THE BIBLE, the best Bible-reading guide; Loree, her mother, & I had a good talk with Principal Marsh in his office).

4 "To get the full flavour of the [Caird's] book, one should read it as one might watch a great cathedral being built" (Wright, xx). Here is everything, all disciplines, pertinent to enhancing Bible understanding & delighting in the Bible's "inexhaustible treasures" (C. qtd. by W., same p.).

5 A translator of the New English Bible, Caird says translators "aim to bring the reader to the original, not the original to the reader" (125). It's maddeningly difficult for Bible readers to communicate with Bible-translations readers about "the language of the Bible," but Caird comes as close as possible in his "text book of elementary semantics" (2), this "book about words" (217).

6 Language uses (with [8] a chart of the virtues & vices [abuses] of each): informative, cognitive, performative, expressive, cohesive. The first two uses are "referential," the next two "commissive." The poetic is at least as important as the prosaic. (Of Amos Wilder, under whom I wrote my PhD, Caird says [253n] he "had the advantage of being a poet as well as a scholar.")

7 Since Caird is talking as well as studying Bible language, he unhesitatingly uses **masculine pronouns** for God ("masculine" being linguistic [gender], not [as "male" [sex] ontological]). Under "taboo" (72), he warns against the "pedantic anxieties" of a "semi-sophistication" that, repelled by certain biblical words, "alters the permissible currency of the word-stock." If you slipped & pronounced the Holy Name, you got tossed out of Qumran (1 QS 6.27-7.2). Something like that happens to you today if, in certain semi-sophisticated circles, you slip & call God "he."....But (194) while God as king & father are metaphors, the titles may apply metaphysically to God as "archetypal king and father, from whom all kingship and fatherhood are derived."

8 My personal index of the book has 16 references illuminating the Bible's use of **masculine language** for God. In our Christian "speech community," language, which is "intractable," will not be changed by the anti-"he" inclusivists (my statement, on the basis of 38): "Each user has complete control over speech but very little control over language." F. deSaussure's speech/language distinction "marked the birth of the modern science of linguistics."....176: We cannot promote spirituality by "avoiding" anthropomorphism. To try it lands us not in spirituality but in abstraction. (I add: The anti-"he" ideology lands its pushers in God as "it.")

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