

ILLUSTRATION OF CATEGORY #3:

GOD AS ORIENTAL POTENTATE TEXT: Psalm 93

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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

Phone 508.775.8008

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This Thinksheet assumes three categories of metaphor: (1) the **chosen** metaphor, as when Robt. Herrick (d.1674) says true Lent is "To starve thy sin, / Not bin." (2) The **social-construct** metaphor, as "the ship of state." (3) The **revealed** metaphor, as "Our Father in heaven."....The Thinksheet's occasion is a recent conversation with a liberal ecclesiarch who denied the existence of category #3 on the ground that it gives divine-sanctional privileged status to the Bible's masculine metaphors for God & is thus, in effect, a dirty trick the boys play on the girls. ...The Thinksheet's focus is on a single metaphor (God as Oriental Potentate) in a single locus (Ps.93).

1 One consequence of eliminating category #3 is to subject all metaphors to optionality & thus to user-responsibility. Category #1 is under the searching controls of literary criticism; category #2, of social criticism. The criteria of #1 are esthetic; of #2, humanistic (human "values"). Thrown into category #2, the biblical masculine images for God are under judgment as to whether the divine image so "**projected**" (Feuerbach, Marx, Freud) has a salubrious moral-influence "**role-model**" effect on humanity. Working in this anthropocentric paradigm, radical feminists conclude that the Bible's masculine images for God have an invidious effect, antisalubrious consequences, on males (by supporting patriarchy & sexism) & on females (by reinforcing internalized subservience to males).

My critique of this paradigm begins with what I've italicized in the ¶ immediately above. The earth-to-heaven projection notion metaphorically makes heaven a receptive screen replacing the active, ever-living God. Now, the Bible couldn't be more clear that God dislikes the role of slavey invisibly holding up a cosmic screen to reflect what we humans project on it; he substitutes a mirror, so what humanity gets reflected back is idolatrous images of itself. Revelation (category #3) reverses: God is the projector, we are the receiving screen & mirror ("I am holy, therefore...."). God heaven-to-earth projects himself as Father &--- the instance for this Thinksheet---Oriental Potentate.

As for the role-model notion the God-images should be (designed to be) good for us, here are two roots of it: (1) Bushnells' moral-influence theory of the atonement: if Jesus' behavior has a saving effect on us, shouldn't the metaphors we use for God? (2) Social psychology: "a person whose behavior, example, or success is or can be emulated by others, especially by younger people (1955-60) [RHD²]." On the tube yesterday I heard the chief marketer of Nike justify \$140 per set of sneakers on ghetto kids on the basis of the fact that the basketball hero whose name's on them serves as a role-model for them "whenever they have those Nikes on." That same now-powerful notion has produced the dogmas that "black kids need black teachers" & whites should not adopt black kids....While we may grind our teeth against such venality & cruel stupidity, the role-model motif has slipped into some otherwise sophisticated theology. I remember a walk, 54 years ago, with a fellow-student whose name I remember because he became a prominent theologian. He was laying on me the notion that the Trinity's perichoresis (circledance, internal communion of the three Persons) is a role-model for human community. I told him the idea seemed to me slightly blasphemous; would he complete the heaven-to-earth projection by claiming that the divine Unity is a role-model for the unity of humanity? And might not his Trinity-as-role-model be seen from below as earth-to-heaven wish-projection for human community? (Something quite else is the mystical co-inhabitation of Father, Son, & Jesus-believers in Jn.14-17, a mystical meditation, in which the Trinity & the believing community appear together in one vs. [16.15] & Father, Son, & believing community in another [17.21].)

When these two notions, projection & role-model, converge, as in radical feminism, God is **twice captive**: to the 1st, passively (receiving-reflecting); to the 2nd, actively (needing to correct certain past self-image flaws so as to model for us). Reading the book of Job would be one way to spring oneself loose from such blasphemous nonsense.

2 **Prostration** (full flat or on knees, to kiss feet or hem or ground) was the usual bodily posture in the presence of an ancient oriental potentate (lit., "power" person). The homage in this scene included the expressed or unexpressed recognition of servitude ("service," as in "worship"--the basic Heb. & Gk. wds. for worship meaning "service") & some expression of praise (often with reason[s] for praise). Without this picture in fore-, back-, or under-ground, praise would make no sense. Take Buddhism, eg: no potentate, no praise....A Knopf book I edited & submitted as closing with "Praise be to God!" got published with the nonsense sentence "Praise be!" But worse: in mainline churches, prostration-praise has been suppressed, vertical God-esteem yielding to horizontal self-esteem. *There can be no gospel-worthy renewal of the mainline church without a recovery of the reverential attitudes peculiar to the potentate/subject picture.*

3 Some BIBLICAL attestations: (1) Sometimes God requires groveling, more than the regular worship. In the first chapter (vs.20), Job "fell on the ground and worshiped." But in the last chapter (vs.6), he groveled "in dust and ashes." The All-Potentate ("Almighty," 40.2 NRSV; 38-41 is the Potentate's speech humiliating Job) refused to accept any offering less than groveling in the presence of the Providential Creator who--in speech's end--has made a subpotentate animal that's "king over all that are proud")....(2) By the 2nd vs. of the NT's 2nd chap. we are into prostration (προσκυν- *proskun-*; Vulg., *ador-*; in vs.7, Herod pretends to want to do the same). Prostration is your normal biblical response to all actions of God--here, the incarnation....(3) Prostration is what the devil is most envious of God for, & he schemes to get it--in Mt.4.9, from Jesus....(4) Jesus gets it: Mt.28.9,17....(5) And he's to get it from everybody "in heaven and on earth and under the earth": Phil.2.10....(6) In our first description of Christian worship, Rev.4-5, the centering piece of furniture is the throne of the Potentate ("the Almighty" [4.8], who in 1.8 is Jesus as Alpha & Omega; the same word--παντοκράτωρ *pantokrator* [lit., "holder of all power"] is used of God as "Lord God Almighty" in 11.17, 15.3, 16.7, & 21.22; Jews used it for God as Sabaoth & Shaddai, in LXX; & it's common in Christian papyri, once as "God, Despot Pantocrator, Father of the Lord [Jesus]," & once as "God, the Holy and True Pantocrator")....(7) As for the Psalms (in Heb., "Praises"), I've made a study of **who** is being praised (ie, the angle of incidence on God) & **why** (the reason[s] for the praising). Without the potentate image-metaphor-paradigm, the Book of Psalms would, could, not exist. We couldn't even have "The Lord is my Shepherd" (23.1), for Shepherd in Heb. symbolism means Shepherd-King, the one whose power over us is as complete as the shepherd's over his/her sheep.

Of course it's possible to brush off the heaven-Potentate as projection (Shailer Mathews' "transcendentalized politics"). But if you do, as radical feminism does, you so distance, alienate, yourself from the biblical world that the Bible is useful to you only where it supports your particular thing (in the case of radical feminism such as that of Schlüssler Fiorenza & Reuther, "women's experience")--such a **trivialization** of Scripture as to amount to a rejection of biblical religion in favor of a new religion or none....As you would guess, the fem. of "Pantocrator" never appears in the Bible (LXX-NT)....The Pantocrator is (Web.³) "the All-Ruler; esp. as applied to Christ" (the entire entry)....Debt-consolidation frees debtors from many to one creditor: biblical monotheism frees worshipers from many to one God, who has power-control without remainder (no power being left, eg, for the stars). This **omni-potence** (all-power [Gk. parallel, "panto-cratoria"]) wouldn't do us much good if God didn't know everything that's going on (Lat., "omni-science") or weren't around (Lat., "omni-presence"). But the truth is that he has all the bases covered, & even owns the teams & the ballpark. So praise him! And (the stricture against idolatry) praise nobody/nothing else!

4 **IRONY**: Radical feminists Rosemary Reuther & Sallie McFague have rejected the metaphor on which they wrote their PhD dissertations, viz "the Kingdom of God" (RR pub. as THE RADICAL KINGDOM [H&R/70], SM as LITERATURE AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE [Yale/66]).

5 Now please read Ps.93, on the reasons for praising the All-Ruler, who is "enthroned,...robed in grandeur" (GATES OF PRAISE translation, p.459).