IS A RELIGION'S TERMINOLOGY <u>MEDIUM MINUS MESSAGE</u>?

<u>YES</u>, reply the **metaphorists**. All nonmaterial expressions (e.g. Jesus' "I am the door") are metaphoric, their meanings "carried over" (Gk. "meta-phor") from physical-material bases (e.g. "This is a door"). And since the metaphor-medium is a <u>choice</u>, metaphors are fungible, interchangeable: e.g. another metaphor than "Father" could be chosen to serve the metaphoric function.

<u>NO</u>, reply we **sociolinguists**, students of the language/life relationship. One of us, Marshall McLuhan, put the matter at the dialectical extreme from the metaphorists: "The medium is the message." In his early studies, "the medium" was language; in his later, it was the particular technology carrying the language across (Lat., "trans-fer[ring]") to the hearers/readers.

1   Some of my teachers, esp. Henry Nelson Wieman, considered theism (belief-faith in "a personal God") as a **metaphor** for trust in the universe's "person-making process" (Wieman): the message is the process, belief in the biblical God is only one medium (one metaphor) for grasping the process--a medium which does not exist in, e.g., Buddhism (though pop Buddhism is polytheistic). This is <u>first-level</u> metaphorism: "God" is not necessarily personal. In <u>second-level</u> metaphorism, God is not necessarily (e.g.) "Father." This Thinksheet is about second-level metaphorism, but note that it is philosophically continuous with the first level. Metaphorists who want to claim that God as personal is a matter of revelation will have to explain why, then, the way the Bible speaks to & of the personal God (viz., mainly with masculine titles/names & only with masculine pronouns) is not also a matter of revelation, as I claim it is.

2   What most delighted me about Geo. Lindbeck's THE NATURE OF DOCTRINE was that he journeyed with words over territory I had covered in life. My earliest (late 1920s) critical-conscious experience of professional religious leaders was of "modernists" (or "liberals" or "empiricists" or [Lindbeck] "<u>expressivists</u>"). What mattered for them was not doctrine but what they called "life," i.e. personal experience (after the fashion of the Enlightenment, esp. Schleiermacher). Religious language was arbitrary symbolization of feelings resulting from experiences considered religious. Because religious terminology was arbitrary, it was in its particulars optional, fungible-interchangeable. Traditional religious language could be translated into today's coinage (so my minister in 1929 could consider himself religious & even Christian after having preached a series of sermons on the Apostles Creed, denying each article as he went)....This type of modernist still exists. Lindbeck calls them "expressivists," indicating their action-in-life. I call them **"metaphorists"** when I'm pointing to their action-on-language. Two who practice today this old-fashioned style are Sally McFague & Marcus Borg.

Lindbeck's antonymic model to expressivism is <u>propositionalism</u>, which in the early 1930s I adopted as my personal revulsion-reaction against linguistic modernism. We fundamentalists held that the authoritative-interpretive center was scripture, not personal experience; & that accordingly the terminology, the wording, of Christian doctrine was not optional-fungible but fixed-essential: the Spirit inspires (in experience), but the Word reveals (in words & ideas [later called "propositions"]; first-order truth-claims). Here is Lindbeck's cognitivist model. We fundamentalists (as we were called, then came to call ourselves) were *proscriptural-antiliberal*........ After a few years I became as revulsed by this extremism as I'd been by the extremism to which it was a reaction.

Lindbeck's third model of doctrine, viz. "<u>cultural-linguistic</u>," is postliberal in rejecting liberalism's life/language split (as well as fundamentalism's ontological claim for its propositions). A religion's integrity involves the integration of its life with the language of its narratives & rituals, its theology & ethics, by which its life is given shape-identify & its members are given guidance for worshiping-thinking-speaking-loving-hating-living. His comprehensive interpretive scheme reminds me that the subtitle of my ThD dissertation (1943) was "a comprehensive interpretive methodology." I am understandably revulsed by the current naive old-fashioned-liberal notion that a religion's language base can be messed with (e.g. by "inclusive-language guidelines") without messing up the religion, replacing it with a new religion.   +

3   The **life/language** debate across the theological spectrum is an instance of chicken-&-egg argumentation: no resolution is possible, thank God. But in their conversional-revivalist form of empiricist expressivism, the <u>evangelicals</u>, in spite of their being corrupted by American anti-intellectualism, have remained closer to language (e.g., their theological schools not having surrendered, as liberal seminaries did, the stress on the biblical languages) than have those other empiricists-expressivists, the <u>metaphorists</u> (or "modernists" or "liberals")....IRONY: I've not seen it remarked & must remark it here: both are, philosophically, forms of irrationalism, though their academic forms (such as propositionalism & process theology) are rationalistic.

4   In his NO PLACE FOR TRUTH, David Wells accuses evangelicalism of being of two minds, pingponging between (Lindbeck's terms) the cognitivist-propositional & the expressivist-empiricist (esp. the conversion-is-all syndrome). Some close associates of Billy Graham shared with me their worry that Wheaton College's Billy Graham Center is, in their view, captive to this ambivalence, the experience pole of the tension opening up to modernism-liberalism.

5   Both extremes are **language-distorting**. Evangelicalism's emphasis on conversion skews the biblical language toward individual religious experience, & current religious liberalism's emphasis on liberation doesn't blink at rewriting scripture, liturgy, hymnody, & devotional literature because (allegedly) "women are hurting." The former gets most excited about **sin** & its consequences; the latter, about **oppression** & its manifestations. I feel oppressed by the sins of "inclusivists" against biblical language for God, & I think it's sinful to put the emphasis on sin rather than on "grace that is greater than all our sin."

6   I'll finish out this 1-sheet Thinksheet by illustrating, with the case of **"Father,"** the silly & sad rupture of "cultural-linguistic" unity in the current gender-feminist suppression of the word "father" (as e.g. the dropping, in the two Synod-approved versions, these phrases of the original UCC Statement of Faith: "<u>Father</u> of our Lord Jesus Christ and our <u>Father</u>"). The scripture base of the Father/Father correlation is clear in the Father/fatherhood correlation of Eph.3.14f.

    (1)   In Eph.3.14f, "Every <u>fatherhood</u> in the universe, as well as on earth, takes its name from the <u>Father</u>, to whom I bow my knees" (my translation). NRSV has "family," with fn. "fatherhood": the usual Gk. for "family" ($\pi\alpha\tau\rho\iota\acute{\alpha}$ *patria*) is derived from the constant Gk. for "father," viz. $\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$ *pater* : "fatherhood" is cognate from "father." But the former means more than paternity (5 of Kittel's 77pp on Pater & cognates!): it's (5.1016) "concrete, not abstract," always indicating "derivation from the same father or ancestor no matter whether the ref. be to nation, tribe, caste, or family." In Ac.3.25, "all the families of the earth" = the nations. A few more quotes from Kittel, all these on this text (Eph.3.14f): The author's punning by use of the two wds. on the root *patr-* "is important to the author." All collectivites, from family through nation & universe, "are [by the root] referred back to the Father and forward to the goal" in Jesus Christ. "The revelation of the Father [in Eph., "always*the Father of Jesus Christ"] is there for all when the very name reminds us of Him": all groupings are "named after the Father." "The whole world of nations" "is viewed from the standpoint of the family and the father." Ultimately every group "finds the motive power for unity in this Father," beginning with the unity of Jews & Gentiles in the Church. All natural groupings "are created by Him who is Father in Christ, and they are ordained for this Father." *As in the **original** UCC Statement of Faith.

    All liberal & ecumenical Christian thought uses Ephesians as a primary mine & support. The father God-idea is this author's intellectual-spiritual spine. What do you think happens when (as in "feminist hermeneutics") his work's spine is surgically removed? You might imagine replacing it with another spine. But in that case, could you honestly claim that the result celebrated the same religion?

    (2)   Look again, please, at this Thinksheet's title. We can now put it more clearly: Can a religion's message be so <u>disengaged</u> from its foundational medium (its language-of-formation), & another medium (language, terminology) substituted, that no essential loss of the message ensues? Impossible! Yet this false assumption underlies the work of the metaphorists, the God-redesigners, who ignorantly imagine that "Creator" can be substituted for "Father" (in the trinitarian formula & in hymns) without irreparable loss. Revelation-inspiration is not just of sememes (meanings) but also of phonemes (sounds), requiring respect for morphemes (word-forms).