

THE ESSENCE OF

Christian witness among the world's religions

1 I just looked at a dead note: "Do you plan to rub out Christian particularity?" The note is twice dead: it was about last evening's Cape Cod "Multi-Faith Service of Thanksgiving: For Life, For the Harvest, For Unity & Peace in our Diversity"; & I wrote it to remind^{*} me to ask, days before the event, the rep of Christianity, who last night did indeed rub out Christian particularly, not even mentioning Jesus.^{*} The sad truth is that usually, in such gatherings, the name "Jesus," considered dispensable, perhaps even unmentionable, is not heard--not spoken. A person attending last evening wouldn't have gotten a clue as to the essence of Christianity.^{*} I forgot.

Not so most of the other religions whose reps spoke: Baha'i, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam. The Hindu said the essence not only of Hinduism but of all human life is that we are souls temporarily in bodies. Immediately, in memory, I saw the chart a Hindu missionary was pointing to in the foyer of Guyana's capitol in Georgetown, the national capital. Said the missionary to Loree & me, "Here is the most important truth." He pointed to the chart's 1st level, which had only a man ("the soul," he said). Level 2 was a man standing next to a car ("The soul is about to enter a body."). Level 3, the man in the car ("This is as we are now, before death."). Level 4, only the man ("The soul, which preceded the body, will survive the body."). My response, looking him in the eyes: "The most important truth is that God loved humanity so much that he came as Jesus & suffered with us & died for us, to save us from sin for life eternal."

I could have stated the essence of our Faith, in those words, while standing on one leg (a talmudic requirement of Jewish witness).

2 The twice-underlined phrase (above) is from a perfume ad in the current Nieman-Marcus catalog. Under the perfume bottle, the ad reads "The Essence of Love." And at full-page height, on the left, is a breathtakingly beautiful image of a model in an elegant striated ancient-Greek-style dress. She wouldn't need that perfume in order to have males buzzing around her, but the ad promises it would help. And presumably, despite feminism, "love" is itself life's essence.

Well, folks, the essence of Christianity is not a smell but a story, the story I told that Hindu missionary (the story familiarly in Jn.3.16).

3 In Homer's ILIAD/ODYSSEY, other than the Bible the West's most formative story, what the husband (O.) most wants is **adventure**, so he takes off the next morning after not having seen wife Penelope for a decade; & what she most wants is daily **relationship** with her husband. Man gets what he wants, woman doesn't get what she wants: a male culture. Reverse, in Thurber's Mitty family: wife gets what she wants (a trapped, homebody husband Walter), man doesn't get what he wants (adventure, which he fantasizes in its absence): a female culture.

4 The **Bible**, canonically read, *balances* masculine (all God's personal titles & pronouns) & feminine (salvation as the restoration & maintenance of relationships with God, neighbor, & nature). In the cosmic-historical adventure of redemption, Jesus is (masculine) **Savior**; in his present & future sovereignty, he is (masculine) **Lord**; & in his servanthood/friendship/relational attention, he is feminine. This Jesus balance appears, e.g., in Jn.15.14 NIV: "You are my friends [feminine] if [conditional] you do what I command [masculine]."

5 In most animals, including human beings, the male protects the female & the young. In its early stages, Christianity was highly vulnerable, so it developed a hierarchical masculine leadership which continues to this day in Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, & to a lesser extent in later churches (Protestant & Pentecostal). Facing some other challenges, the Faith has had an increasing tendency to feminize itself, accenting the feminine (relational) virtues & muting the masculine (e.g., banning the Bible's [masculine only] pronouns for God, &

*For the deletion in another context, #3132: "How Sweet the Name of [bleep] Sounds in a Believer's Ear."

Elliot  **Mindblossoms**

309 Lake Elizabeth Drive
Craigville, MA 02632
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008 \$20 per year
e-mail: wandell@elliotmindblossoms.com

Noncommercial
reproduction
permitted

10.1.02

3135

at least sidelining the Bible's [masculine only] personal titles for God [Lord, King, Father, Son]).

This denigration of the divine masculine **destroys** the biblical masculine-feminine balance, converting Christianity into a feminine religion. Gone are the almost-universal human myths of Sky Father (as in the Lord's Prayer address) / Mother Earth, & weakened are the derivative biblical metaphors of God-humanity marriage (OT, Israel as Yahweh's wife; NT, the church as Jesus' bride). Readers of the Bible itself are more aware of the potential loss, for many Hebrew & Greek passages assume the divine masculine untranslated into English.

6 The radical-**egalitarian** spirit of the '60s is now, with the aging of the babyboomers, in power: nobody's "superior," so all authority is challenged, & institutions are widely/deeply questioned: father is not hh (head of the household), priest is in no way over the people (so, say some, "Why ordination?"), the divine is not above the human (so down with "Lord"--on which see my #3133 ["LORD, Christianity's Master-Word"]). (As I was writing this, a man phoned to say that, against my witness to him, his psychiatrist, an atheist, had told him to be his own God: "Loving yourself is enough.")

7 Theologians, now, are insufficiently biblical to ~~serve as~~ true-prophet correctives ("Christ against culture") to "the Christ of culture" (conformist) false-prophets. Instead of thundering or at least pleading against the collapse of (masculine) transcendence into (feminine) immanence, they rationalize the loss of the vertical (which for them has lost its masculine lexical force, a loss promoted by conformist unisex translators [e.g., in 1Jn.5.1, NRSV changes "father" to "parent," a change messing up the relations among the three forms of the generative root in this one vs., teaching that faith is not the cause but rather an effect of the Father's rebirthing us: God the Father permeates the whole section]).

In the interest of maximizing freedom, the liberationisms preach that difference (of gender/race/class) is largely "socially constructed" & sanctioned by optional ("constructed") metaphors. I must counter that some metaphors are natural-empirical. In the latter category is immanence as feminine: the child is literally "immanent" in the mother, & long remains closer to mother than to father--so the distance term "transcendence" is masculine. (Another natural-metaphor semantic domain is "above" [from the child's learning to walk] / "down.")

8 Anthropology can illumine unnatural ("constructed") feminine religion. In matriarchal societies, the masculine is weak (as the reverse is true in patriarchal societies). Microfianciers have found that in matriarchal societies, seed money is wasted if given to men, invested if given to women. Black-African societies, including in the USA, have, as their most severe problem, adult-male family-irresponsibility, with weak male-modeling for boys. In the growing strength of female leadership & of feminist thinking in both female & male leadership, liberal Protestantism is observably becoming a feminine religion.

9 Explicitly feminist exegesis/eisegesis/theology is not as serious a threat to biblical religion as is its implicit parallel in mainline male theologians such as S.Mark Heim, whose repressing of the divine masculine **derives** not only from the general culture's egalitarianism (of which feminism is one dimension, & multiculturalism another) but also from his long involvement in Christian & multireligious ecumenism--Christian, rubbing off ecclesial particulars; multireligious, rubbing off Christian particulars. I'll illustrate his thinking by references to his THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends (Eerdmans/2001), without need to refer elsewhere in his oeuvre, he himself declaring that "the depths of the riches" are here:

(1) Cooperation being as feminine as competition is masculine, this Queen of Hearts theology proclaims that "All have won [each religion providing fulfilment within its own paradigm], and [therefore] all shall have prizes [each religion its own "end"]." We can hear a grandmotherly "Children, don't fight." (2) Though "Lord" is the distinctive Christian God-title (*Κύριος* *Kurios* for Yahweh/Jesus in the earliest full Christian Bible), it's too vertical/hierarchical/masculine for Heim's trinitarian (!) theology (nor does he use "Savior" as a God/Jesus title).