

MEN HAVE AUTHORITY, WOMEN HAVE POWER--II

As I write, First Citizen is appearing, for the first time in the history of the U.S. presidency, before a grand jury. Besides being many other things, it's a spectacular event in the history of American law (as the Lincoln-Douglas debates were in the history of American politics). A legal ferret, special prosecutor Ken Starr, has spent more than \$40,000,000 of the taxpayers' money to bring down this President by allegation of questionable financial behavior (a failed allegation) & then of questionable genitoverbal behavior (another failure no matter how this afternoon's prosecutor/President confrontation turns out). "Genitoverbal"? Talk involving genital behavior. Specifically, did the President lie about extramarital sex (the most common thing for human beings to lie about)? And, as cover, did he try to influence anyone else to lie about his genital behavior? (In legalese, "perjury," "suborning of witnesses," & "obstruction of justice.")

1 Unfortunately, at the present time the U.S. has an imperfect President. Gloomy forecast: The next President will be imperfect. Gloomy historical note: Every President of the U.S. has been imperfect, the imperfects more or less (1) important to his job-performance & (2) visible to the public. Having recently returned from Europe, where I read a few stacks of newspapers, I must note the Old Country's amazement at the current upsurge of what's variously called Puritanism (unfairly!) & Victorianism (inaccurately, for the Victorian compromise was to permit but not remark the sexual wanderings of socially & politically prominent males).

2 Well, if neither Puritanism nor Victorianism, what shall we call the American public's present intense interest in the Presidential genitals? I call it prurient entertainment, a huge chunk of the entertainment industry, which is a huge chunk of commercial advertising, which is a huge chunk of merchandizing, which by commodifying everything has fulfilled, in a fulsomeness that would have shocked him, Cal Coolidge's "The business of America is business."

3 Norman Lear, the (to me) noxious founder of "The American Way" (& producer of the sickening husband-&-father bashing tube series "All in the Family"), has been having some second thoughts lately. In a recent address to the Joint Faculty Seminar of the Harvard Divinity School & the Harvard Business School, he said that the salesman has replaced the truth-teller. The myths bombarding our culture today are commercial. "Market forces have become the new value system." "You are what you buy--you find your place in society by what you drink, by what you drive--you know if you are loved by what you wear, by how you anoint yourself--you will be appreciated by your peers for what you own."

Confirmation of this bottom-line world? It's raining today on Cape Cod (a no-beach day), & thousands of old timers, wash-ashores (later residents), & tourists are saying "There's nothing to do. Let's go to the mall." The mall, the modern metaphor & replacement of the cathedral. But the cathedral opens us to a Beyond calling & enabling us to become More Than we are: the mall thins our wallets & our souls, reducing us from having to being had (being had by merchandising spinners & by what they seduce us into purchasing [for your possessions possess you]).

Commenting on Lear's speech, the exec.dir. of the Mass. Bible Scoety, Donald A. Wells (p1 of that organization's COMMENT, Fall/97) adds that a resurgency of spirit is now a countervailing force against the consumerism religion. He quotes poet Kathleen Norris' (pxix, THE CLOISTER WALK [1996]) reminder of liturgical time, the rhythm of prayer, work, study, & play: "Liturgical time is essential poetic time, oriented toward process rather than productivity, willing to wait attentively in stillness rather than always pushing to 'get the job done'."....You want Lear's speech ("The Cathedral of Business: The Fountainhead of Values in America Today")? NEW OXFORD REVIEW, Apr/93.)

4 Violence, sex, & fame are journalism's trinity today, with power in the background moving to the foreground when intertwined with one or more members of the trinity. Our public feels helpless about violence at home & hopeless about violence abroad. That leaves sex & fame, for which the present Clinton-Lewinsky soapopera is a perfect fit. Soaps, as you know, are the crassest form of drama for

money--mere appendages to the ads that devour up to 1/3rd of airtime. Now, this soap of soaps entwines sex & fame with the most (politically) powerful human being alive on this planet. Remember, for money: the media--newspapers, weeklies, monthlies; radio; television; the small tube--strain, pant, gasp for the increasingly jaded public's attention. This competition in itself tempts would-be honest journalists to shift their attention from the President's head to his genitals--the universal tabloidization of the press. What gets our attention gets us: we Christians should monitor our own eyeballs & earholes, on pain of passively letting a captive press waste our time & debauch our values, a double Babylonian captivity.

5 Here's a true gender-generalization: women (Madison Av. can prove) spend more money than men do. And a safe assumption: Women are even more disproportionately Mad. Av. targets as they make gains in authority (& therefore \$) relative to men. And a clear-fact: women have vastly more interest in soaps than men do, because women are voracious consumers of details about people's lives (details that bore most men, who are less interested in personal minutiae & less inclined to the interpersonal use thereof, viz, gossip). (On evidence of the gossip differential, see an eminent woman authority, Deborah Tannen, *YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND* [Wm.Morrow/90].)

6 Probably something inappropriate went on between Bill & Monica. Certainly she blabbed whatever it was, if anything, to a mere acquaintance (not a friend), Linda Tripp, whose secondary urge to gossip included hours of bugging Lewinsky. A male nose, Ken Starr's, sniffed the baleful products of this female weakness for gossiping. The rest is wretched history revealing once again the power of women & the authority of men....Same day, evening: At the Craigville Tabernacle two buildings from my home, I heard (NYT editorial-board-member) discourse on the subject of her SCORPION TONGUES: Gossip, Celebrity, and American Politics (Wm.Morrow/98). (It was serendipitous to discover that gossip, roughly the subject of this Thinksheet, was also the subject of this evening's Cape Cod Writers' Conference lecture, to which I went out of habit.) Her gossipy talk was mainly about wandering Presidential penises. After, from the floor, I asked: "Dorothy Tannen's 1990 book says the reason women gossip more than men do is that they are more interested in the details of other people's lives. Does that explain why your book was not written by a man?" After the laughter died down, she granted my point (later commenting that men gossip more about sports figures) & added that (1) the sexes "are more different than sometimes we like to think" & (2) Aristotle says that men confine women to home from fear of the power of women's tongues if let loose in public....As for the moral level of the gossipy media against prominent personages, it used to be worse (including attacks on a person's religion, race, association, as well as sex: today is "a major improvement: it's only about sex"). But (268f, on Paula Jones & Monica Lewinsky) what's worse now is that gossip is world-wide instantaneous. Always "the moral impulses are the same." On the plus side, gossip is bonding & educational, & now is some compensation for the loss of closeness to neighbors.

7 Same day, 11pm, after Clinton's four-minute I-lied-about-Monica speech & almost an hour of talking-heads commentary. So far as I'm aware, nobody has risked the wrath of feminists by asking why a 21-year-old beauty fetchingly dressed was put in close proximity to a President with a wandering-genitals record. Such a creature so attired has enormous magnetic power vis-a-vis male genitals, esp. those of the high-androgen males who aspire & attain to positions of authority....A variety of comments on my first "Men have Authority, Women have Power" (#2850, 8.16.97). In this second Thinksheet of that title, I'm offering the Bill/Monica affair as a metaphor for the new nest of male/female difficulties from the increasing expansion of woman-energy from power to authority: the movement correlates with (1) a decreasing male sense of authority & responsibility & (2) boys' increasingly erratic (even violent) behavior, social alienation, & disinterest in achievement (which they leave to the girls, who naturally have power & are driven to add authority to it). I have no suggestion toward a new male/female homeostasis (now that the old one, viz gender role-assignments, is [as I think it should be] dead). But society, & even more the church, needs to address the urgent question *What, in consequence of feminism's successes, has been happening to boys?*