

MEN HAVE AUTHORITY, WOMEN HAVE POWER

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*Hold it! Give me a chance to explain myself! It won't be easy.*

1 First off, please try to settle your soul down into this great poem, written in Yiddish by a woman--Marie Syrkin--& trd. by her into Eng. (234, Mark Van Doren, AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE WORLD'S POETRY, Albert&Chas.Boni/28)

In the blossom land Japan / Somewhere thus an old song ran

Said a warrior to a smith / "Hammer me a sword forthwith. / Make the blade / Light as wind on water laid. / Make it long / As the wheat at harvest song. / Supple, swift, / As a snake, without rift, / Full of lightnings, thousand-eyed! / Smooth as silken cloth and thin / As the web that spiders spin, / And merciless as pain, and cold."

"On the hilt what shall be told?"

"On the sword's hilt, my good man, / Said the warrior of Japan,  
"Trace for me  
A running lake, / a flock of sheep  
And one who sings her child to sleep."

I have visually condensed all but the smithy's question & the closing, shocking tristich. The penultimate line is a pastoral scene in ironic contrast to the male singlemindedness, military & technological, preceding it. The engraving implies sheep-attendance, male or female unknown. In the ultimate line, the only actor is a woman exercising her power to continue the shaping of a child whose formation began within her--a child whom that sword may kill. (Here the child is not an actor, but clay being shaped.)

She is the poem's second woman. The first was the poet(ess), who in singing her song to us is shaping us. I'm suggesting that at another level, the poem invites us to meditate on the fact that **woman is the primary shaper of humanity**, & the further fact (grumble though radical feminists may against it) that **the mother-child relationship will always be woman's primary power**.

2 You will have noted that I have robbed men of "power" & reserved it for women. Woman's power is the power of life, men's power--as in the entire poem except the last three lines--is the power of death. But please note also that what the man wants in the hand-end of the sword is water, food, clothing, woman and child. That sword tells the tale of man's complexity as well as of woman's power.

3 You will have noted also that in assigning "power" to women & depriving men of it (ie, of real power), I have assigned "authority" to men & deprived women of it. Here comes the tough part of this Thinksheet: patience, please!

4 Your first complaint may be that my schema is too neat: I'm turning two common words, power & authority, into technical terms. I would rejoin that this is, in some situations, necessary to enable thought to flow, as electrons between two poles. After the intellectual lexical exercise, we may return to using the two words as in ordinary discourse, but with a weaned eye, a critical awareness of the games people play with these words, as well as of the downright linguistic misunderstandings the words commonly signal from both ignorance & malice.

5 I must deprive the girls of authority in order to leave something for the boys after, in this exercise, we empower (give "power" to) the girls. On the present American scene, the girls' end of the teeter-totter has become so heavy that the boys are up in the air with their feet dangling & want off: they want to be out of here, out of this game. Fatherless "families" have been on a steady increase. Of America's chn., 40% are in fatherless homes. Whether or not it takes a village to raise a child, it takes, for chn. of both sexes, the steady presence of both parents.

Whatever the causes of this present pathology, & whatever prejudices must be penetrated, & whatever pains must be endured--we must confront with wisdom & courage this central sickness of today's society. The massive impediments include "the new woman"....

6 ....so down with **the new woman's** claim on both power & authority! What I'm not saying needs careful spelling-out; what I am saying, careful nuancing.

7 I am not saying that society should make inflexible sexual role-assignments. Our greatest gain in the latest women's movement is the shattering not only of that past rigidity but of the propaganda (unsupported by "science") supporting it.

2850.2 I hope the next president of the U.S. is a woman. I hope that the low percentage of males in K-12 teaching will yield to an influx in a profession that should not be the province & preserve of either sex. By genes & other inclinations, chn. should be encouraged to move in the occupational directions they lean toward. But....

8 ....we should not let the current egalitarian dogma blind us to the realities of basic sexual **differentiation**. Equality (a political notion dragooning the Bible into shaky support) & difference (a biopsychosociospiritual reality) are different paths which I conflated in my longtime preachment of "The mutual superiority of the sexes" (chap.7 of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT). Two feminist phases:

(1) The equality phase: "Anything men can do we can do, anything men can have we should have."

(2) The difference phase: "Women & men are equal, but we are more equal than men, & we should get our acts together without them." (The leaders of this push were & are lesbians.)

9 Both social-scientific research, & pop articles & books derivative therefrom, currently are on the **difference** track--with titles like YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND .....and MEN ARE FROM MARS, WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS. My present project of genderizing "authority" & "power" is especially helped by recent research into male/female brain dissimilarities.

10 Fe/male relations are polluted & distorted by **politicization**; for politics drives toward legislation, & coercion is the endproduct of legislation; & coercion reduces fe/males relations to the destructive "battle of the sexes," of which divorce is the endproduct. Make yourself a list of political, & politics-tinged, words currently in the rad-fem (radical-feminist) lexicon: "empowerment," "power," "equality," "oppression," "liberation," "androcentrism," "patriarchy," "top-down," "vertical," "hierarchical,".... My point is not that none of these terms is useful to the project of improving fe/male relations. Rather it is that the paradigm in which they're natural is politics, which orients one's energies to win/lose, coercion/countercoercion, the separation (rather than creative interaction) of the sexes. What's come of all this is millions of men-lorn women, millions of women-lorn men, & millions of battleground marriages.

I'm hopeful: the present heterostatic fe/male mess is unstable. However you slice it, women & men are made for each other, to be *basar ehad* (Gn.2.24 NRSV Hap-pelCollins STUDY BIBLE: "*One flesh*, in mutual loyalty, in sexual union, and in their offspring."). (According to the invalid principle that the exception damns the rule, this biblical teaching is "insensitive" to gays/lesbians. Since sexual orientation is partly a social construct, it is necessary to keep this "insensitivity" alive & well, but without discrimination against gays/lesbians as persons.)

11 On the face of it, this Thinksheet's title is un/true (ie, both false & true). By "on the face of it," I mean if you think of "authority" & "power" with their usual meanings (both denotata & connotata). But I am asking you to think afresh, in light of Scripture & science & contemporary experience, about these two words--something I'm sad to say the liberal church is not doing: my own United Church of Christ, in its national decisions & pronouncements on fe/male relations, is indistinguishable from "the [secular] world."

12 Do you know what a "window" is? Yes, & that's too bad, say S.Chermayeff & C. Alexander in the classic COMMUNITY AND PRIVACY: Toward a New Architecture of Humanism. To shake you lose from your prejudices (pre-judgments) about "window," they ask you to use instead the connotationless term "fenestration," of which they give a dozen examples (151-2: "Only careful examination of obvious needs and disregard for the word 'window' makes it possible to recast the problem" [Doubleday/63/65]).

Do you not agree that in fe/male (& family) relations, we need now to **recast the problem**? We might begin by talking about this Thinksheet's title's underlined realities without using either of the underlined words. Again, we might use the two words but transpose them from (fe/male) horizontal to (divine/human) vertical. In the Bible, God has the authority (& is, pronominally, always masculine), but (till the end-time) does not exercise it as coercive power...EXERCISE: Work through the pp. of fine print under "power" (& "authority") in WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY OF SYNONYMS (G.&C.Merriam/42)...Do not imagine that the problem can be bypassed by preaching "partnership," "alongsidedness," etc. That's simpleminded democratic politics transposed into a complex relationship in which voting is inapplicable.

13 Something new! I've never ended a Thinksheet, then decided to continue it beyond one sheet. The advantage of ending with the 1st sheet (§12) is that it leaves you with the authority/power distribution **problem**: the disadvantage is that this Thinksheet's title leads you to believe that I'll be defending the **solution** the title boldly states as a fact. What worries me about the latter course is that you may grind your teeth on/at my solution (ie, suggestions) rather than wrestling with *our* problem, which is how to advance beyond both the old patriarchy & the new anarchy.

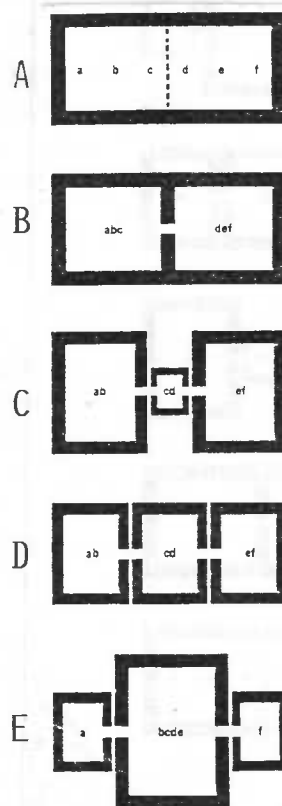
14 This multi-use visual may help. Loree & I used it in planning our present home. We began with A as the base: no privacy on any of the three floors. But human beings need both COMUNITY AND PRIVACY (the title of the architecture classic of S.Chermayeff & C.Alexander [Doubleday/63/65]--the science/art designing of optimal human spaces in buildings [private & public] & communities). Under increasing population-pressure, privacy (& therefore "humanity") is reduced. B has the opposite problem: community, what is shared in common, is reduced to nothing but a passageway (as, eg, streets in busy cities). C-E show increasing common space, decreasing but not disappearing privacy. Because our home is E-style, on the inside it looks huge (though it is not). As you enter the front door, you see a 25-foot ceiling in the greenhouse, with which the library is continuous (with five closable side-areas). On the 2nd floor, kitchen-dining-livingroom is one door-unimpeded flow (with four closable side-areas, including a lanai). The 3rd floor, a large bedroom, interrupts the cathedral ceiling of the 2nd floor. Design-AIM: maximum community with adequate privacy.

15 What's all that got to do with the authority/power problems of the wo/man relationship? Our 52-year marriage is on the same design as our house. When Loree & I met 53 years ago, each was an A, an "individual" with authority/power of self-rule (in the sense of not being in "lock," wedlock). ("Lock" is also an architectural term for the central developments of A-E.) Some --eg, Thornton Wilder--choose so to live throughout life. Brother Amos says that T. stopped dating when a sense of literary mission came upon T., a "paradoxical constraint which empowers" (A.N.W., THORNTON WILDER AND HIS PUBLIC [Fortress/80] 68). But, as A. says, there was a cost. And T.'s radical democratic philosophy (as in his speech in the book's "Supplement") shows him as only the individual writ large & womanless (with God [96] "not above. He is within and [!] over and under and around"). Esp. after WWII, T. ran 'round the world preaching a message the world wanted to hear, viz, the glories of American democracy. Jesus & Paul, both womanless like T., had a profounder message: a man doesn't have to be womaned to be whole (nor a woman manned)--though it can help; both need God.

16 I remember being in the home of eminent educators Douglas Horton & Mildred McAfee Horton. It looked just like E, their private offices at opposite ends of a great open space. If a couple ages well as a couple, what's **common** continues to grow, & the need for privacy--always necessary, a forever need--shrinks. (Loree & I have our offices one above the other: good communication by shouting through the floor.)

17 Now back again to that 1st sentence in §15. I who am sounding off to you on the wo/man relationship vis-a-vis authority & power am a profoundly-joyfully womaned man. "Democracy," "partnership," "alongsidedness," etc.--which I rejected at the end of §12--are inaccurate-inadequate descriptions of our marriage, which is not one of equals but of two superiors in mutual submission.

18 Sing together & give thanks together, "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph.5.21 KJV; RSV-NRSV: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"; Phillips: "'fit in with' one another"; TEV & NIV have "Submit").



This doctrine of **mutual submission** is the underside the overside of which is my doctrine of the mutual superiority of the sexes: each spouse is, betimes, inferior/superior to the other. But while the latter doctrine is nature-based, the former is grace-based: reverence for (or "fear of") Christ--the dominical sanction--is the motive for mutual spousal submission; being "under" Christ has priority over being "under" one another (cp., in 1Clement37.5--same Gk. stem--the mutual subjection of the members of the body). Arndt & Gingrich give this meaning for our Eph.5.21 + 3 other early-Christian-literature references: "voluntary yielding in love."

The next verse in Eph.5 speaks of a **third-level** submission, viz, of wife to husband "as you are to the Lord" (again the dominical sanction, here **first-level** submission (as in Hebrews 12.9, which includes the **fourth-level** submission, viz, of chn. to parents; **second-level** submission is mutual, as Eph.5.21). The governing Christian-ethics principle in all this is verticality (in the lexicon of gender feminism, "hierarchy"). This is true--in contrast to "partnership"--even of the second level.

19 Oh, that troublesome third level! At Eph.5.22-33, the HarperCollins Study Bible says "Nowhere do the undisputed Pauline Letters [Eph., Col., 1&2Tim., Tit., & Heb. being disputed as to authorship] call for the subjection of wives." But that's too facile a removal of the trouble, which exists in the canon (the 66-book Bible) whether or not all historical-critical scholars reduce the Pauline corpus down to "authentic Paul" (on which compare the scholars' elusive "historical Jesus").

Early Christianity greatly reduced & qualified the husband's **authority** over the wife, but did not eliminate it. Consider: (1) Mutual submission (v.21) governs wife submission (v.22ff) so severely as almost to contradict it; (2) The section's last v. (33) returns to the mutuality theme; (3) While the wife's duty-bound to "respect" her husband, he is duty-bound to "love" her with faithful storgic (duty-driven) devotion to her interests however wavering may be his affection for her (again, v.33); (4) According to the James-Lange theory of emotion, affection thrives where wife works at respecting her husband (as man & husband, no matter his personal qualities) & husband works at doing his (storgic-love) duties toward her as woman & wife no matter her personal qualities (still, v.33); (5) Christ's love for his bride the church is both the model & the warrant for Christian marriage; (6) The "mystery" (v.32) of "one flesh" (v.31) is engaged with & illumined by the mystery of "Christ and the church"; (7) Early Christianity was concerned about the rights of women & largely assumed their powers, but found it necessary to address both positively & negatively the rights, the duties, & the strictures of men vis-a-vis women, esp. of husbands vis-a-vis wives.

Today, male authority & female powers, in there interaction, remain a "mystery" & a puzzle not to be disposed of but to be lived with prayerfully, with respect for the canon of Scripture, & without redesigning the biblical deity to conform with the current gender feminist paradigm of fe/male relations. Empirically, a man who doesn't respect & honor his wife's woman-powers is a fool, a lonely fool; & a woman who doesn't respect & honor her husband's authority is a fool, a lonely fool. In our individualistic culture, lonely fools of both sexes, in & out of marriage, predominate. Christianity has something to say to both male & female fools, but the liberal church has so bought into the secular feminist paradigm as to shut its own mouth against a Christian witness.

20 It's far easier to describe women's **power** (as in Ashley Montagu's THE NATURAL SUPERIORITY OF WOMEN) than to define men's **authority**. The latter task should be easier for Christian thinkers who use the Bible as source & all else, including human experience, as resource (rather than the reverse, as when "women's experience" is front & center). For the Bible, in its preferential option for the masculine (as also, liberationists say, for the poor), (1) compensates for males' power-inferiority to females, (2) ladens men with heavy responsibilities for women & chn., (3) assigns women the task of working with men in the shaping of male authority, & (4) presents God as exclusively masculine in both titles & pronouns (though the false idea that God is male does not exist in canonical-classical Christian thought, though it appears occasionally on an ignorant fringe [as in Jos. Smith, 1830] & in antibiblical polemic [as, currently, in Mary Daly's "If God is male, then men are gods"])). (A very sophisticated television interviewer said to me on a recent program, "What a silly notion, that God is male! It's a stupid reification of a metaphor! I'll continue to talk to & about God the way the Bible tells us to!")