

THE GENDER FACTOR in "the concept of God"

THEOMACHY as battling over the God-idea is a timeless celestial parallel to terrestrial politics as battling over rival leaders: the one's as normal, in the sense of to-be-expected, as the other. Romantics such as Roger Rosenblatt cluck-cluck over the former, with their secularistic ain't-it-awful-that-people-fight-over-religion complaint against the variously pious. In TIME's first issue this year/century (1.1.00), Rosenblatt's long essay asks, among other questions, Can't we "deal with the concept of God without turning faith into a weapon?" Answer, NO with qualifications: (1) The weapon may be words in preference to swords*; & (2) All human beings should actively participate in realizing, making real, the humanum (the human thing, our commonness)....*"In preference to," not instead of (as pacifists would put it, convinced that the sword should never be turned around & used as a sword even in Christian self-defense [reading literally, & as an omniapplicable principle, Jesus' "Put your sword away"--Mt.26.52; in Jn.18.11, immediately followed by "I must drink from the cup [of death] that the Father has given me"])).

ANGLE: This Thinksheet's angle on theomachy (as construed in the previous ¶) is the gender factor. The lower-stage (i.e., terrestrial) traditionally called "battle of the sexes" has its upper-stage (i.e., celestial) counterpart (whether or not one agrees with Feuerbach that the latter is merely a transcendentalized projection of the former): in our country (& in some areas abroad), God & the Goddess are battling it out again.

1 "Again": a small historical run & mythological rundown on God/Goddess may help highlight the seriousness of this present round of theo-pugilism & in the process clarify, for ministry in/through the liberal churches today, "God" (i.e., theology proper). I'm especially concerned about liberal theology's inauthentic resolutions of the divine-gender question, viz., the *dissolution* of the biblical deity by androgynization (as in "Father-Mother God") or by depersonalization (through "process," or other, philosophical theology).

2 GENDER FACTS about the Bible's deity: (1) In gender titles & in pronouns, he's consistently, unexceptionally, masculine; (2) He heads a single-parent family, viz. Israel/Church: he's wifeless, consortless, mistressless (all in contrast to his ancient Near Eastern male-deity rivals); (3) He is most fully, finally, portrayed as a masculine tri-unity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit [biblical gender-references to the last being masculine, never feminine]); (4) In "the man Christ Jesus" resurrected, he models for us our spiritual formation (& thus the Colloquy theme this summer); (5) Jesus Resurrectus will return (as in the liturgical formula "Christ died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again"); (5) God's masculinity is so solid that the use (rare) of feminine metaphors is no threat to it; (6) Biblical monotheism excludes the possibility of feminine personal emergents as associates (though metaphorically in the wisdom tradition) or rivals. (In Catholic Christianity, the multi-stage elevation of the Virgin levels off before deification.)

3 As religions go, the gender factor in biblical religion is small. (1) No sex in answering Why is there something instead of nothing? (2) No sex in **cosmogony** (how the universe came to be). (3) No sex in **theogony** (God's coming to be: he didn't come to be, he just was/is/will be). (4) No sex in **anthropogony** (how we human beings came to be: no navels on Adam & Eve). But unless one's ontology allows for the inexplicable emergence of novelty, one assumes (as I do explicitly & the Bible does implicitly) that though God is sexless (& not male!), within his being was the potentiality for sex before the creation of sex in nature.

Not all living things live on the gender divide, as we do. If, e.g., earthworms had language, they'd not have the gender question vis-a-vis deity. Not having that luxury, we have four ways to go in conceiving deity personally: (1) Feminine only (as modern radical wicca); (2) Feminine over masculine (the latter as the dying/rising horned deity in today's moderate wicca); (3) Masculine over feminine (in the biblical

world more common than the reverse); & (4) Masculine only (no wife/consort/mistress for the Bible's God; the Bible's language for God absolutely confirms this radical masculine position).

4 In teaching-preaching biblically in our culture today, should we exclude or obscure or obtrude this radical masculinity? **Obtrude** if we want to be faithful to the way the Bible speaks of God & have the same concern the Bible has to fight off the goddesses. **Obscure** if we're embarrassed by it in light of today's gender egalitarianism. **Exclude** if we're convinced that gender language for deity is now so great an impediment that surrendering the personal in God is not too great a price to pay (the position, as early as 1925, of my teacher H.N.Wieman).

Only the middle position has no future. In surrendering the Bible's (all masculine) pronouns for God, it moves toward the third position; & in trying to give, in speaking of God, equal voice to masculine & feminine it moves toward New Age, especially wicca (see the current issue of SCP JOURNAL: Spellbinding a Culture).

5 As the Colloquy treats of "Christian Formation in a Post-Christian Culture," we must face the fight within the phrase: the culture, which is radically egalitarian, has implicitly formed us against the Incarnation, which is God come among us as a man (& not a woman): radical feminism, which is the gender form of radical egalitarianism, has made (as in this Thinksheet's title) "the gender factor in 'the concept of God'" unavoidable. In the essay I referred to above, R.Rosenblatt says "The country has been polluted with an idea called political correctness, which is simply a fundamentalism of the left." What liberals this fundamentalism has not convinced it has terrorized into silence & such suppression as the elimination of the Bible's pronouns for God. While the contemporary outburst of feminism has moved from tragedy to outrage to farce, the cry of "Patriarchy!" has not abated, nor the denunciation of the deity as "Father." And the same fundamentalism, on the same radical egalitarian base, extends sexual politics to aggressive homosexuality, crying "Homophobe!" at all objectors.

When sex & gender are distinguished, the former is biological & the latter is linguistic. That is why this Thinksheet is not titled "THE SEX FACTOR in 'the concept of God'": biblically, there is no sex factor in God: God creates biology but is not biological: *God is not male* except in his coming as Jesus, & even that exception *is made nothing of* as sexual either in the Bible or in the Great Tradition of the faith. Against those who for ideological reasons obtrude sex into the **being** of deity, we orthodox believers should obtrude radical masculinity into **speaking** of God (as the Bible does & for the same reason, viz. to fight off transcendence-denying goddesses).

6 In the U.S.A. today, the gospel's main religious competitors are immanence-affirming, denying any distance (to say nothing of Kierkegaard's "infinite qualitative distinction") between divine & human: we're all part of Mother Nature say the old & new-fashioned pagans of New Age, most recently appearing as aggressive wicca, which worships the Goddess under the trinitarian aspects of maiden/mother/crone (a counter-trinity to Christianity's masculine [Father/Son/Spirit] God). As a woman convert to wicca emerges from the water (yes, of neopagan baptism), she's kissed on the lips with the greeting "thou art goddess; know thy power" (Helen A. Berger, A COMMUNITY OF WITCHES [U. of S.Carolina Press/99, 39]). Wiccan leaders do not leave us in doubt as to whether they are antitranscendence (rightly correlating transcendence with masculinity, the Father God, the heavenly Patriarch): "open new eyes and see that there is nothing to be saved *from*, no struggle of life against the universe, no God outside of the world to be feared and obeyed; only the Goddess, the Mother, the eternal spiral that whirls us in and out of existence, whose winking eye is the pulse of being" (Starhawk, THE SPIRAL DANCE [H&R/79/89], 29). "It is within ourselves that we will ultimately find what we seek....I worship the goddess....devotion to the Earth Mother....we're born of Mother Earth, nursed for our lives from her bosom, and return to her in death" (Judy Harrow, GNOSIS MAGA-AINE [sum./98], 2). Feminism in this mode is rising in influence through the media, including the internet. Pagan spiritual formation is an increasingly successful competitor to Christian spiritual formation, & we Christians had better use the Bible's gender factor in the fight.