

"LORD" AS TOTEM & TABOO IN CURRENT SACRED WORD-LISTS  
THE MAINLINE CHURCHES' INNOVATION/RESTORATION DEBATE

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As I was wrinkling my brow over the concern appearing in this Thinksheet's subtitle, what sprang to mind (in computerese, got retrieved) was Freud's TOTEM AND TABOO (1913), his first essay into social theory. Reviewing that book set my analogical imagination going.

**Occasion:** A liberal Protestant organization is in the process of producing a "Lord"-free, ie "Lord"-less, hymnal, "Lord" being one of the words prohibited in the guidelines--ie, one of the words on the taboo word-list. (On the totem word-list are "Creator," "Liberator," "oppression," "the poor," et al--but this word-list is, unlike the other word-list, not specifically spelled out.)

1 For some years I preached an annual sermon in a church whose hymnal was "God"-free, ie "God"-less. (Yes, a Unitarian-Universalist church.) As I was expected to preach a God-sermon, even a Lord-sermon, I brought sufficient copies of the God-&-Lord hymns I wanted the congregation to sing with me. My thing was appreciated at least for its variation from the liturgical norm, especially by the some third who were ex-Southern-Baptists.

Would I preach in a church opting for the Lord-less hymnal? Of course! I'd preach anywhere anytime. But only if the authorities agreed to let me bring, & have the congregation sing, Lord-hymns: "Lord" is on my totem list.

2 What fun it was, in reading WWII-**censored** letters, to try to figure out what the words had been where the holes were! I've no such problem when reading de-Lord-ed scriptures & hymns: where the holes would be, the substitute word "God" normally appears, boring the reader-singer with an awkward, over-God-ed text, bowdlerized to (the censors intend) make Christian written materials **user-friendly**, without regard for the fact that this butchering makes the stuff unfriendly to me & millions more Christians. Atop this barbarism are two obscurations: (1) The authors' intent in using "Lord" is obscured. This is especially jarring to those who like me feel the force of the original Hebrew & Greek, plastered over by any English translation, now given an additional coat of plaster covering "Lord" as though it were an obscene graffito! (2) For those who normally use the bowdlerized texts, God forbid, the original English texts, when come upon, will seem strange & even wrong.

3 "Strange & even wrong" is how most English-speaking Christians who encounter the bowdlerized texts experience them &, behind them, the bowdlerizers & their dupes. The hymnal bowdlerizers counter thus: Today's minority will be tomorrow's majority, for whom we're producing the hymnal, which accordingly is called "The New-Century Hymnal." I reply: If that minority doesn't buy enough copies today, your hymnal won't be around to sell tomorrow. Some higher-education chapels will buy it when it's published, but few churches.

4 Since "Lord" is the only designation for Jesus in the **core** of all Christian creeds (Κύριος Ἰησοῦς *Kurios Iesous*), anti-"Lord" is inherently **anti-ecumenical**. The rejoinder to this charge is predictable: Christianity will go anti-"Lord" or cease to exist. My reply: The anti-"Lord" movement will drift away from Christianity, as the anti-"God" movement (the UUs) did. I pray that drifting away will not occur: may the drifters, or at least their children, return to "Lord."

5 The anti-"Lord" revisionists seem not to have considered how central the word is not only in Christian creedal formation but in ECL (early Christian literature, including the NT). Eg, note the order of "Lord" & "God" in §6 of Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians: "We stand [in judgment] before the eyes of the Lord and of God." The Lord Jesus is King-Judge. And in Paul's "new creation-creature-being" chapter (2Cor.5), so frequently & rightly cited by liberal Christians, "all of us must appear before Christ, to be judged by him....We know what it means to fear the Lord [Jesus], and so we try to persuade others, we ourselves being well-known to God" (vs.10 NRSV, "the judgment seat of Christ").

Jesus as Lord-Judge, then as Redeemer (vs.14f NRSV): "the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all...and was raised for them." The tight weave of the argument is stretched on the Story of the Lord-Judge-Victim-Atoner-Renewer(vs.17)-Reconciler(vs.18-10)-Substitute(vs.21). Take Lord out, & what becomes of Judge? Take Judge out, then what need of the atonement escape? Take out the atonement, & what "new creation" is there to talk about? Jesus is reduced to fellow-suffering liberator with a preferential option for the poor-oppressed, & "solidarity" with him = solidarity with the underdog = authentic religion. Victims of this impoverished theology would be well advised to read Cadbury's THE PERIL OF MODERNIZING JESUS (1937).

6 Hormonally (not necessarily personally, vis-a-vis individuals), men's work is vertical (comporting well with "Lord," "Judge," "King," "Savior"), women's is horizontal (comfortable with "love," "equality," "partnership," "participation," "nurture," "pastor"). This generalization is not sexist, though it would be were it not for the parenthetical caution following its first word. The feminist movement has been mainly gain for humanity & the Church. But in some quarters, it's hubris **hatred** of the vertical (as "patriarchal," "hierarchical," "androcentric") has made a leaning tower of Pisa of classical theology ("God," "King," "Lord," "Judge," "Son of God," if not also "Savior" & "Christ"): radical feminism is **antitheistic** & will not quit at knocking out "Lord." The feminization of the church is not all bad, as the church was too masculine; but the feminization of theology is a disaster for the Faith. And not even evangelicals are well defended against it (see "secular evangelicalism," p.79 of David F. Wells' NO PLACE FOR TRUTH, OR WHATEVER HAPPENED TO EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY? [Eerdmans/93]).

7 To the feministic anti-vertical mentality, the Christmas Story is a horror show. The Annunciation: A masculine angel (there being no Jewish feminine angels) comes **down** to bring divine news to a woman looking **up**. The Conception: The masculine divine (there being no Jewish feminine divine) takes the sexual initiative, coming **down** without permission (ie nonconsensual union, ie rape) into the feminine human, the woman's freedom being limited to the choice of attitude toward what has happened to her.

In short, the Virgin Birth is sheer verticality (accurately representing the essence of religion, which is reaction-response) & radical masculinity (the androgens as active, the estrogens as receptive).

Parallel with that narrative way of presenting the central Christian claim is the philosophical way, viz the Incarnation: the transsexual God becomes transsexual-generic "man." Combine the two ways & you get the transsexual God becoming a sexual male. Either way, the whole thing is preposterous to the non-Christian mind. The narrative way carries the heaviest burden, being doubly sexist: the combined way is only singly sexist.

The liberal-reductionist ploy has been to get rid of the fullness of the Christmas Story (demythologizing to make Joseph Jesus' father) while retaining the philosophical doctrine of the Incarnation. It's a rationalistic slippery-slope. The frame of mind that disbelieves somebody was virgin-born can't really believe that anybody died & didn't stay dead: the Resurrection is next to suffer revisionism. I am long familiar with all the twists & turnings on the boundary between the classical Christian mind & the modern mind & have all three mentalities within me. The ecumenical church is & will be of the classical Christian mind, Lord & Virgin Birth & all.

8 "You cannot retrieve [call up] what you have not retained [programmed in, entered]," said I to a computer expert who'd denied the Virgin Birth. He was having trouble with the pleroma attitudinal (#2597.12.[1]), viz that the devotional mind (= the romantic mind in vertical mode) goes for max. Because love is blind (ie, in at least temporary disconnect from the critical mind), I can with full heart in analogical imagination enter into the full Christmas Story, see Gabriel, feel Mary's awe-elation, inwardly know the "foolish" wisdom of God coming **down** to become man in Jesus Christ our Lord (which for Christians is not an optional word). For the classical-ecumenical Christian mind, "Lord" is totemic, not taboo.