

DOCUMENTARY INTEGRITY

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One of my readers threatens to read "no more Thinksheets on inclusive language." But I can't accomodate him: in religion, the issues clustering around this code-trigger expression are as huge & consequential as in morals are the issues the word "abortion" signals. Neither debate will abate in the foreseeable future.

*This Thinksheet's thesis is that **no social movement can justify revisionistic rewritings of historical documents: facticity has priority over utility.***

1 A soft-headed, sentimental language-inclusivist promoting not just the i.-l. lectionary but the i.-l. Bible asked me, "Don't you care that people are hurting?" My response: "Not really. Not in comparison with my caring that documents are hurting, suffering antihistorical bowdlerization. People come & go, & each new generation's right of access to the documentary past should be honored. No cause aiming at devictimization has the right to victimize truth."

2 Why am I so tough-minded on this? Because of my intellectual history of personal, even daily, involvement in the textual integrity of the Bible. Eg, this morning in the Greek-Latin NT I hit upon 2Cor.4.2, Paul's apologia that he was "not handling the word of God deceitfully" (KJV; NRSV, "falsify[ing] God's word"; NJB, "falsify the word of God"; NIV & REB, "distort the word of God"; the Gk. may also mean "cheapen"; Vulg., *adultera[te]*; Zink's Ger. has "falsify or contort-warp-pervert-misrepresent" [*verdrehen*]). Some were accusing him of tampering with Scripture, tendentiously twisting it to his own purposes. His rejoinder was that God had taught him to read Scripture with Christian eyes, without the veils that were on nonChristian Jews (3.14-15) & on pagans (4.3). But whoever "turns to the Lord" (3.16) becomes unveiled, able to see the word of God openly-clearly (cp. "Lord" in 4.5: for Paul, the precise word to express the dominance [lordship] of the Dominus, to whom Christians submit in obedience, as slave to [masculine] master; language-inclusivists' hatred of this title for Jesus displays a radical alienation from Paul's gospel & thus radically raises the question of the revelational status of Paul's gospel in general & of 2Cor. in particular [the integrity of 2Cor., as from Paul, not being questioned by critical scholarship]).

Earlier personal involvement: "Lower" (textual) criticism is the science of searching for *ipsissima verba*, the precise words of a document's autograph (original) or of a person's self-expression (the latter, the aim of the Jesus Seminar, viz. to come as close as possible to Jesus' actual words). I was involved in the earliest stage of the University of Chicago 10-vol. critical edition of the NT (involving a score of languages & 250 scholars around the world), a project expensive in hours & dollars justifiable only if it's very important to recover & preserve "the best text." To scholars so minded, the very idea of rewriting Scripture to make its ideas more palatable-communicable is a nightmare. (In the past 16 centuries, nobody has tried to sell a rewrite of the Greek NT: the problem today is with loose translations falsely claiming to deal honorably, with scholarly integrity, with the original, but in reality pandering to some ideology, the most serious such ideology being feminist egalitarianism.)

3 Let's look at the degrees of current feminist-egalitarian **violation** of the Bible's textual integrity. And let's use the metaphor of distance:

(1) The least violation, the least distance from the text itself, is to **throw in a woman** here & there, to lighten up "patriarchalism." Illustration: "the faith of Abraham [and Sarah]." It may sound-look good till you really think about it. The only thing we know about Sarah's personal faith is that she didn't have any: she laughed at a divine announcement (Gn.18.12). Abraham's faith is well-attested in both Testaments--but Sarah's? As far as we know, her faith was derivative from her husband's: she was in all ways, including spiritually, an obedient wife, & thus a feminist horror. How ironic that the language-inclusivists want to tag her along with her husband by adding mention of her here & there in the Bible!

Another instance of throwing in a woman is in Burton Throckmorton's

recent stab at i.-l. Gospels, Jn.15.1: The vinegrower is not Jesus' Father (as in the original) but his "Father and Mother." Ludicrously, anachronistically, Mother Mary is sent out into the vineyard (by Burt. T.!) to dress vines! Since the context shows the Father to be Father-Judge, Burt. T.--a theological anomaly!--makes Mary the Mother-Judge! It can't be too long before such efforts to produce an i.-l. Bible will be as laughed at as was Thos. Bowdler's expurgated Shakespeare almost two centuries ago. His single contribution was unintended: he contributed to our language the vb. "to bowdlerize," meaning to abuse historical literature in order to make it more palatable to a contemporary audience.

Less objectionable, from the viewpoint of textual integrity, is throwing in women--eg, "brothers [and sisters]"--to displace a Gk. generic, though sometimes it displaces the Gk. masculine (ie, in situations in which the presence of women in the address is impossible or at least improbable). "Sons [and daughters]" is usually even a greater stretch. The text's "Men (the masculine word *άνδρες*, *andres*, not the generic word *άνθρωποι* *anthropoi*), brothers" (eg, Ac.16. 2) is still harder to inclusivize, & there's always the need in trying to do so to ask oneself whether there were women in the audience.

Easiest is to eliminate, vis-a-vis earlier Eng. renditions, generics (esp. "he-his-him") not in the Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek: the Germanic languages use generics (masculine forms for inclusive [masc. & fem.] meanings) somewhat more extensively than do the Biblical languages. There can be no excuse for continuing this excessive Germanic/Eng. usage of the generic.

(2) A more serious distance from textual purity is throwing out a man or men or the masculine. Among the strategems are to move (a) from sing. ("he-his-him") to pl. ("they-their-them") or (b) from 3rd to 2nd person ("you-your-you" sing. & pl.). This is frequent even in the otherwise quite conservative NRSV (New Revised Standard Version). Translators working with this as a guideline will in some instances strain or even break the meaning of the original. Better than "people may..." as substitute for "a man may..." is "one may..." ("a person may..." usu. being too formal). A third strategem (c) is to move from the masculine to the impersonal, but this will usu. add an alien abstract-philosophical cast to the translation.

(3) More serious still is the transcendentalizing of inclusive language, moving it from horizontal (human & human-human) to vertical (divine & intra-divine). Some inclusivists heighten goddess-references (OT), & some even use ("she-hers-her") for the Spirit, which in the text is never feminine (though the main Heb. wd. is fem. & the main Gk. wd. is neuter). Some, parallel with adding women to men, add Mother (God) to Father (God). And all inclusivists I've encountered face-to-face & in print consider it no crime to convert, for the feminine, similes (God is "like" a mother bird, eg) to metaphors (eg, God is our Mother)--though the Biblical text never uses a feminine metaphor for God, so far & protected is it from goddess devotion. All of this is **positive** transcendentalizing, adding the feminine to the text or heightening the feminine in the text.

4) Most serious is the inclusivists' **negative** transcendentalizing, throwing out masculine terms--titles for God. In §2 I adduced the inclusivists' hatred for "Lord," the Bible's dominance-title for YHWH/Jesus. Feminism's ideological platform includes an anti-dominance (pro-partnership) plank, so all terms signaling dominance --"Lord," "King," "Father," especially these three--are taboo. The internal logic of the movement is that since men should not have dominion over women (& children), the gods or divine personages should not domineer over people (note the equivalency of "domineer," "have dominion," "dominate," all on the Lat. root for "Lord"). Women's "equality" redefines the bio-role of the androgens vis-a-vis the estrogens: the estrogens remain free to do their (pre)historic thing, but testosterone is no longer free to lead, though that freedom must be provided for if in the future all the hormones are to be free to be & to do, in mutual cooperation--yes, in partnership....Bruce Metzger's intro to NRSV does not even mention transcendentalized inclusive language but states the version's horizontal inclusive-language policy; since I agree on both, I consider the NRSV as "way to go." (The Eng. tr. of the new RCC catechism is more conservative: no inclusive language.)